



NEWSDAY PHOTO / THOMAS A. FERRARA

Some members and mentors of the Hauppauge Eagles in their high school lab. The Eagles won the Chairman's Award at last year's Long Island regional.

For robot builders, test of mettle, metal

ROBOTS from G88

involved in the program for four years and will "drive" the robot in this year's competition.

"It's cool to see everyone's designs," he said.

Hauppauge had only one day to practice before its robot was shipped out to its first competition, in Hartford, and Sanders said it performed well, hitting 22 shots in a row from 25 feet.

The Baldwin team ran out of time to complete all the robot's shooting but is confident it will perform well in other required tasks, such as moving up a ramp, and all tasks are worth points.

An inventor's invention

The national competition is run by FIRST, the brainchild of Dean Kamen, an inventor and entrepreneur who believes sports principles can be applied to competitions in science and technology. This year more than 1,000 teams will participate in 33 regional competitions, culminating in next month's nationals in Atlanta.

"As an educator, I was overwhelmed," Baldwin science teacher and mentor Barbara Riess said of last year's national competition. "The entire process is incredible for the students because they get a real-world experience, they get to form friendships with like-minded people, and they also see their own community in a different light."

The regional competition at Hofstra is sponsored by the School-Business Partnerships of Long Island (SBPLI). In all, 38 high schools will compete for awards and vie for spots at the nationals.

SBPLI founder Fred Breithut said while students benefit from the experience, Long Island tech firms that donate mentors and money to the program get a good return as well.

"It stimulates an interest in science and technology that should have always been there," Breithut said. The competition is scouted by colleges and tech companies looking for talent. Many students have gone on to science and technology majors, Breithut said, and now are returning to entry-level tech jobs on Long Island.

The event is not cheap — the entry fee is \$6,000 and it costs another \$4,000



NEWSDAY PHOTO / KATHY KMONICK

Members of Baldwin's Team Chaos practice recently, using last year's robot.

for each additional competition. School districts rely on corporate sponsorships, district money, grants from educational foundations and fundraisers.

As students finalize preparations for this year's competition, Hauppauge team president Pat Cloke remembered that the school's 2004 robot had a lot of difficulties. But last year, the senior said, "Everything worked and fell into place."

The competition at Hofstra will take place 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. Admission is free.