

Piedmont Makers' youth robotics program grows to over 100 teams

Submitted by Alya Hameed



The FIRST LEGO League Explore team "Happy Robots" kicks off their season



A FLL Challenge team assembles the mission models at their first practice

Nearly 700 K-12 students from Piedmont and the East Bay, including Lamorinda, are participating in youth robotics programs organized by Piedmont Makers this fall. Robotics has become the largest non-sports activity in Piedmont, after Scouting, as Piedmont Makers continue to use robotics to inspire youth to be innovators and creative problem solvers in S.T.E.A.M. Participants hail from 20 other cities across the East Bay, including Oakland, Berkeley, Alameda, Moraga, Orinda, and Lafayette, with Lamorinda students accounting for nearly 10% of participants.

Over 200 parent coaches and student mentors from across the community have volunteered to lead teams. Piedmont Makers has also hired Moraga resident Alya Hameed as a FIRST LEGO League Program Manager. Over the summer, Hameed worked tirelessly to coordinate with families and coaches to form over 100 teams (including 10 new teams in Lamorinda) and secured the equipment for the season, which kicked off

in August. This December, Piedmont Makers will host its largest-ever robotics tournament at Piedmont Middle School, transforming it into "Piedmont Makersville" for two days of innovation projects, robotics competitions, and Maker fun. FLL Challenge teams (grades 4-8) will compete for the Champion's Award, given to the team excelling in robot performance, robot design, innovation project, and core values. The weekend will also feature the FLL Explore Expo, a showcase of projects from the youngest roboticists and will be open to the community to attend.

Teams have already kicked off their seasons, inspired by this year's theme of ocean exploration. For the youngest students (grades K-3) in the FIRST LEGO League Explore division, practices have combined ocean activities with LEGO building and programming. Their season will culminate in December's Explore Expo, where all the teams will present their final ocean-themed LEGO models and poster projects to each other and the community.

FLL Challenge teams (grades 4-8) build autonomous robots with LEGO Spike kits to solve 15 different LEGO missions on a tabletop field. They also need to re-search a problem tied to this season's ocean theme and propose a solution that they present to a panel of adult judges as part of the Innovation Project. "It's a great way to practice your creativity!" says Ryan Morrison, PMS 7th grader. A record 37 teams are competing at the Challenge level this season, which represents 50% year-over-year growth. Their season kicked off at the beginning of August and teams are now building and brainstorming the best strategies to solve the season's challenges. Teams will next meet in a robot scrimmage in October and project scrimmage in November before the Community Tournament in December.

Coached by parents and mentored by FIRST Robotics Challenge team members, each team will design and build a driver-controlled robot 18 inches in each dimension that competes on a 12 foot square field. The teams will face off in a Piedmont scrimmage in October, and then compete against other Bay Area teams in regional tournaments. Piedmont Makers is hosting a regional FTC tournament in January 2025. At the end of September, Highlander Robotics Team 8033 will compete in the prestigious Chezy Champs event at Bellarmine Prep in San Jose. This competition attracts top teams from across the country and around the world including many from the Bay Area. For example, one of the teams from last season's world championship winning alliance -- Orbit from Israel -- will be competing at the event. 8033 also is very much in the conversation securing a division finalist finish at 2024 Worlds making it a Top 50 team in the world. If you want to experience high school robotics at a truly elite level, please attend September 27-29!

This past Saturday morning, FIRST Tech Challenge teams (grades 7-12) gathered in the Ross Engineering Lab at Piedmont High to watch the grand reveal of this season's "Into the Deep" challenge. Piedmont's FTC division has grown to eight teams this year

For more information on Piedmont Makers Robotics, please visit www.piedmontmakers.org/robotics or email robotics@piedmontmakers.org.

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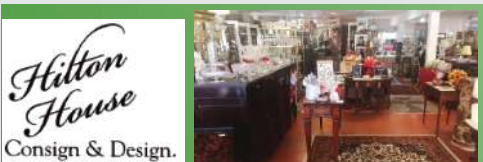
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