

SANDY POST

After a successful year at the world championships, Sandy High School's robotics club sets its sights high

BY LISA K. ANDERSON

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Step into classroom 63 at Sandy High School and it's likely you'll find members of the Robotics Club busy at work.

Perseverance is one of the most important traits club members can have during a yearlong process of fine-tuning, and it's not uncommon to see students working early in the morning, after school or during lunch.

After club members Justin Newberry and Alec Shields placed 16th overall out of more than 400 teams, and seventh place in their division out of 104 teams at the Vex Robotics World Championship in Florida last spring, Sandy's Robotics Club members have their eyes set on competing at world championships again — this year in Anaheim, Calif.



BOB TISCH / CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Jess Wittrig, a Sandy High freshman, makes a last-minute modification to his team's robot at a league tournament in Salem Dec. 10.

Helping the robotics club with its goal this year is an International Business Machines grant of \$1,000 that came through in early December, along with volunteer guidance from Gaizka Llona, a senior project manager with IBM, and Ivan Vegary, a retired civil engineer.

"I'm excited about the enthusiasm and participation by the kids," said Bob Tisch, a Sandy High School engineering teacher and robotics club adviser. "They seem really excited and come in to work a lot — some on a daily basis."

The club, in its third year, has expanded to include an eighth-grade team mentored by the high school students, and an all-girls team. As his senior project for the high school, Shields brought on the eighth-grade students this fall, a partnership that he hopes will continue in future years.

Olivia Kincaid, a junior and a new club member on the all-girls team, said an interest in technology and where it's going in the 21st century got her involved in the club.

Sophomore Cheyenne Holliday, who also joined the team this year, said a competitive spirit from cheerleading translates well to robotics.

When they talk about their robot, Guy, the girls personify "him."

"I talk to him and praise him," Kincaid said, laughing.

For Alicia Owens, one of the middle school club members, joining high school students was initially intimidating, but now she feels at ease working with them and expanding her skills.

Thinking back to the world championship, Shields remembered how hard his heart was pounding. How challenging and fun the experience was. He's eager to return and bring more of his teammates.