Trinity Robotics Team Enters Food Safety Fight

By BOB BECKSTEAD
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MASSENA - Members of the Robotics Team at Trinity Catholic School have come up with a way to ensure food doesn't carry any bacteria.

Meet Bacteria Be Gone is an invention that uses ultraviolet light that will make sure bacteria is wiped out before food is prepared and eaten.

The students demonstrated their invention - and their skills in programming a robot - Wednesday afternoon at the school in preparation for Saturday's fifth annual FIRST Championship Tournament at Clarkson University.

The students, ages nine to 14, will compete Saturday in the FIRST Lego League challenge. This year's theme, "Food Factor," features food safety and examines the possible points of contamination our food encounters - from exposure to insects and creatures, to unsterile processing and transportation, to unsanitary preparation and storage - then finds ways to prevent or combat these.

In a five-minute skit used to highlight the problem, Megan Garcia portrays a mother whose son, played by Jacob Brothers, gets sick after eating cookie dough. Then they learn through a news broadcast about a recall of the product because of E.coli.

They then demonstrate Bacteria Be Gone, a lightbox-type invention that, with the flick of a switch, shines UV light under a flat surface, eliminating all the harmful bacteria elements in the food placed on top of the surface.

Students said their invention doesn't use a wooden cutting board because bacteria would go directly into the grain and cause more problems.

"The idea they have is similar to what's on the market," according to Ed Reyes, who coaches the team with Heather Doe.

He said a wand that he saw advertised in a magazine emits ultraviolet light. It's waved over food to kill the bacteria and will kill 99 percent of it, he said.

Trinity's Robotics team will perform that skit on Saturday, along with participating in two other presentations. One of those is a competition in which they've had to build and program their own robot which will carry out tasks on a playing field. Their goal is to score as many points as possible in two-and-a-half minutes.

The fifth annual FIRST Championship Tournament actually begins Friday when high school students participate in the FIRST Tech Challenge. Their game, "Bowled Over," requires students to design, build and program a robot that can place racquet balls into crates and then stack the crates.

Altogether, more than 400 students and their coaches, comprising 42 teams, are expected to participate in the two-day event. There are 24 teams from 11 local school districts and two private schools, as well as teams from western New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania.

Mr. Reyes said it will be a be a demanding schedule for the Trinity students, who will be at Walker Arena at 8:30 a.m. to set up and practice. The challenge rounds run from 1 to 4 p.m., and the three competitions are spaced approximately 40 minutes apart.

They'll want to make sure their robot is programmed correctly and ready to go before the afternoon rolls around, he said.

"There's about five to 10 minutes between one competition and the next. Going back and making changes is very difficult," Mr. Reyes said.

Trinity's team members are Jacob Brothers, Grace Furnace, Hayden Doe, Megan Garcia, Ruben Boyea, Erin McCarthy, Eric Miller, Samantha O'Keefe, Cooper Regan and Hannah Laneuville.

PHOTOS

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Trinity Catholic School students Cooper Regan and Erin McCarthy show what their robot can do during a Robotics demonstration at the school. The school's Robotics Team will be participating in a tournament Saturday at Clarkson University.

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Members of Trinity Catholic School's Robotics Team have come up with a way to rid food of bacteria - a lightbox-type invention called Bacteria Be Gone. Demonstrating the invention are Grace Furnace, Hayden Doe, Hannah Laneuville, Ruben Boyea and Cooper Regan.