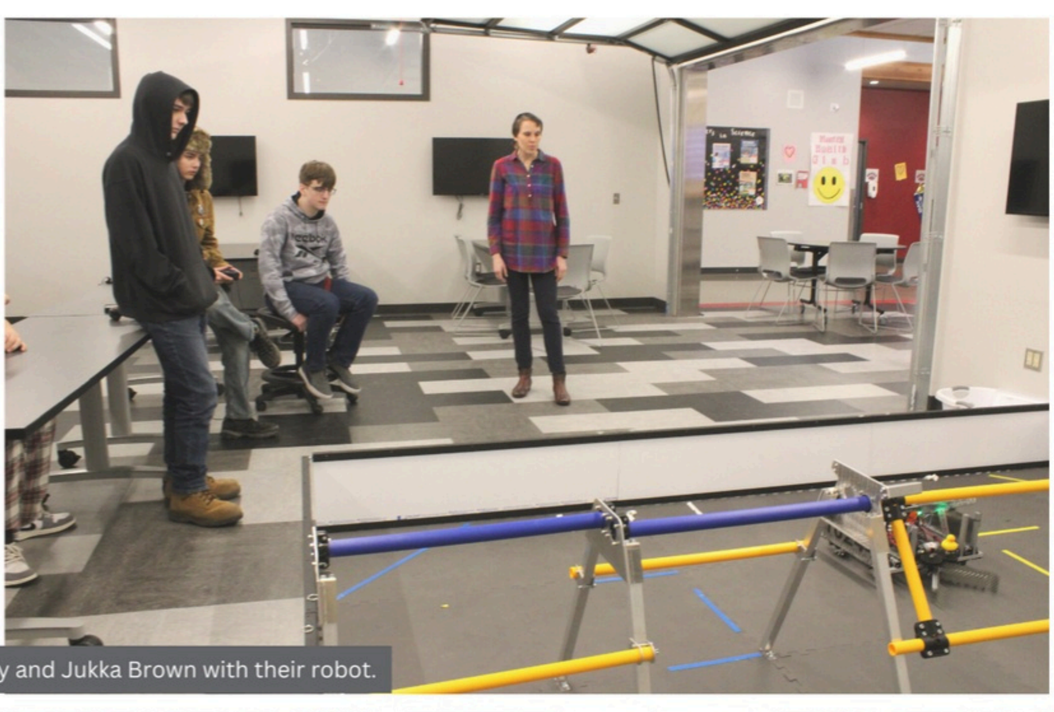
CHEHALIS SCHOOL DISTRICT

Robotics Team Aims High in 2024

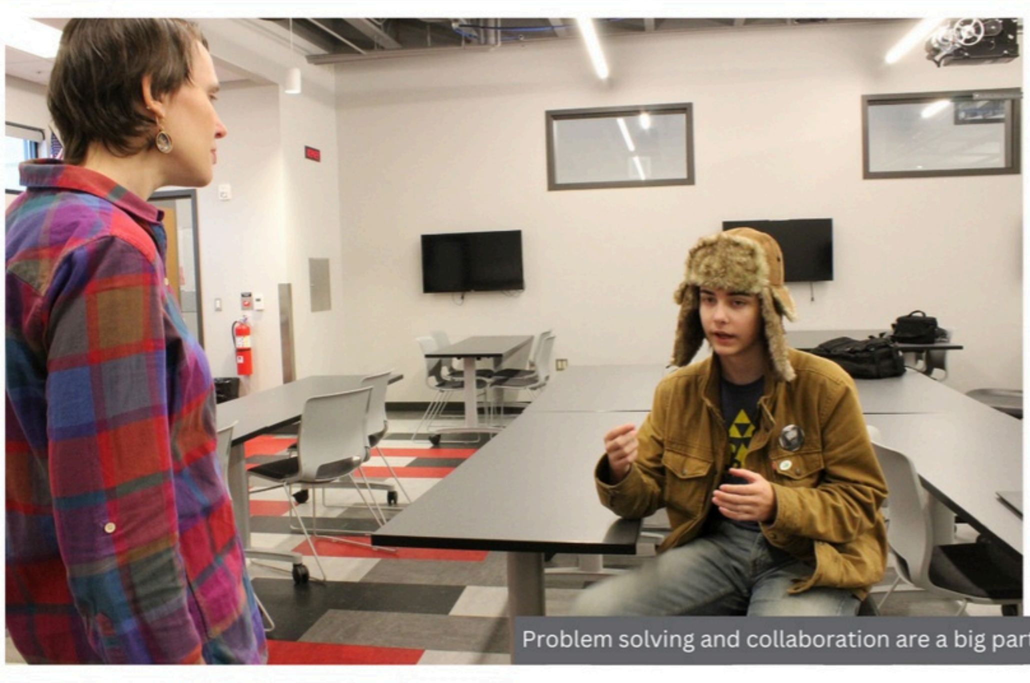
In just a few seasons, the W.F. West Robotics team has already picked up quite a few awards for its work. This year, they plan to keep those successes going.

The team was started by W.F. West teachers Cliff White and Randy Smith seven years ago. Smith still works with the team along with Emily Jordan. The next competition for the team is the FIRST Robotics Centerstage competition, taking place this Sunday in Olympia. The team received the objectives of the game on Sept. 8 and had until the date of the competition to create a robot that could complete as many assigned tasks as possible.

"I just really like that it really does test students' engineering skills. This is a real-world, 'does it work or not?' situation," Jordan said of the competition. "And I like that it's a different challenge every year. When we get a new challenge, there's something new to figure out every year."

Team members Elijah Gilmon, Hayden Scott, Andyn McGinty and Jukka Brown with their robot.



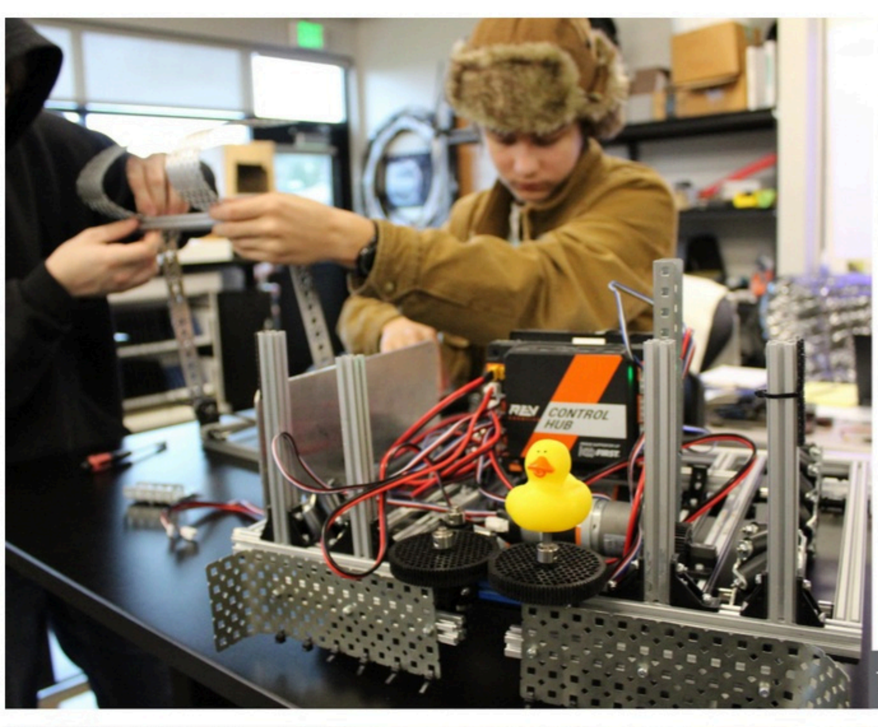
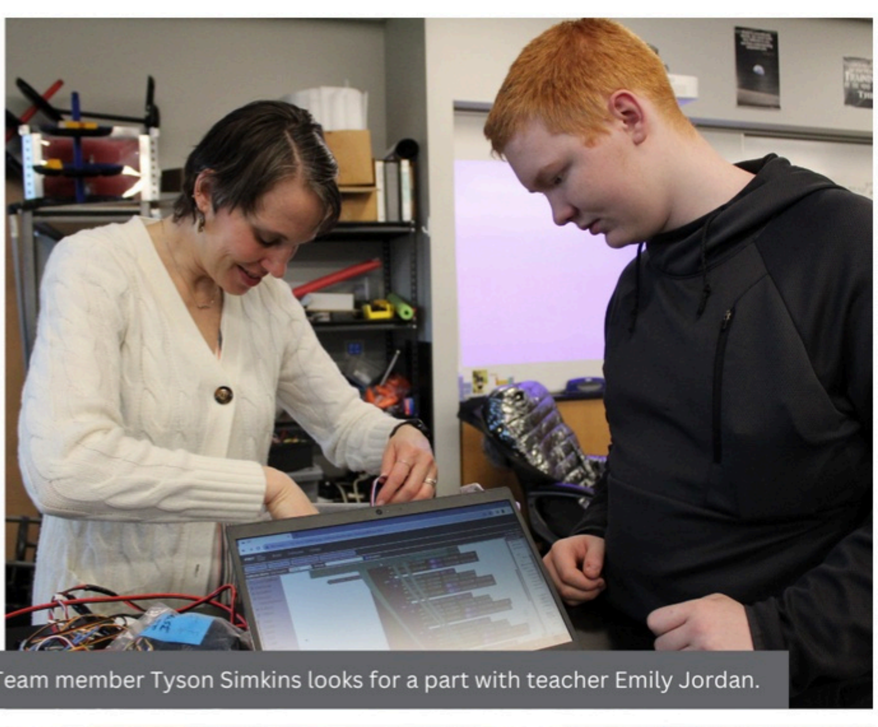

Problem solving and collaboration are a big part of the robotics team's process.

Learning Career & Life Skills

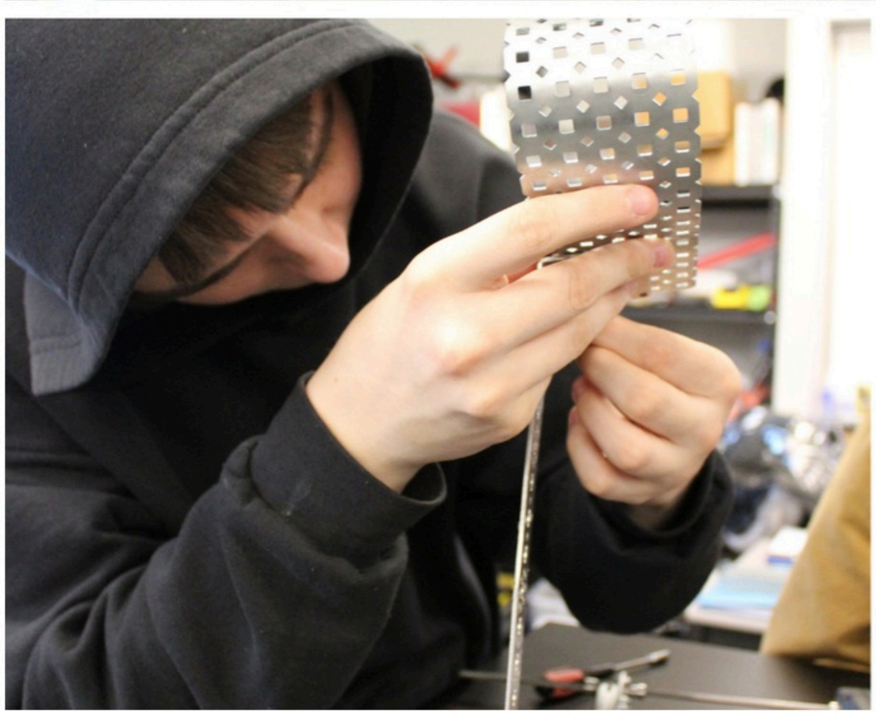
During Sunday's competition, the W.F. West team will be competing against more than 30 teams from throughout the state. The team can get points for their robot completing certain tasks including: moving, placing and stacking hexagonal blocks called pixels in certain areas and in certain patterns and ways; creating a way for their robot to hang suspended truss that is across the playing field; creating a way for their robot to launch a paper airplane and have the airplane land in a certain zone of the arena; and parking their robot in certain areas before the competition time is up. The competition time is broken into a 30-second autonomous period using pre-programmed instructions and sensor inputs followed by a 2-minute driver period where students can manually maneuver the robot.

"We're trying to do as much as possible in the time we have so it's something like a race," explained team member Jukka Brown, a sophomore.

Each round of competition includes four teams which are randomly paired into alliances. There are additional points alliances can score by working together toward certain tasks. The competition takes place in a 12-foot square playing field. The W.F. West Robotics team actually built a replica of the arena, including using the same flooring material, so they could practice with their robot in a real-world scenario.

Team member Tyson Simkins looks for a part with teacher Emily Jordan.




W.F. West Tradition

Sunday's robotics competition is essentially the culmination of the fall season for robotics. Team members received instructions last week for the spring season, which is the larger robot build for the year and culminates at a large competition in March.

Jordan said they have 10 students signed up to be part of that team, though they are always looking for more students who want to be part of the team. Because it is so much larger of a project, the spring robotics team meets after school instead of in a class like the fall group. The larger robot is built from scratch from the ground up, including building models using Computer Aided Drawing and then fabricating those parts.

"So, it truly is interdisciplinary," Jordan said.

Jordan said they have had a few W.F. West Robotics team members go on to study engineering, such as senior team member Andyn McGinty, who hopes to be admitted to an engineering program in college. However, future career goals in the engineering field are certainly not a requirement to be part of the team. Collaboration, problem solving and creativity are all highly valued on the team. Awards in the robotics trophy cabinet in the W.F. West STEM wing prove that the robotics team is about more than teaching robotics. In addition to placing in competitions, past W.F. West Robotics teams have won awards including "Engineering Inspiration", "Excellence in Engineering", "Gracious Professionalism" and "Creativity".

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