



St Pete Times article by Julie Church

Make your Legos sort your Skittles

That goal pays off for two fifth-graders taking their robot to the Robofest competition.

BY JULIE CHURCH
Times Correspondent

When Chris Curtis and Kristopher Scheuren met at a robotics class in January, it was clear they had a lot in common.

Both boys are homeschooled and in the fifth grade. They share the same first name, although it is spelled slightly differently. They both love Legos and robots.

And they were both looking for a partner for a local Robofest competition.

So Chris, 11, of Palm Harbor, and Kristopher, 10, of St. Pete Beach, decided to form Team CKRIS and build a robot for the Clearwater competition, which was held in March.

That robot, which sorts candy by color, won the competition and is traveling with Team CKRIS to Southfield, Mich., to

compete in the World Robofest 2010 Championships on Saturday.

"I'm very excited about it," Chris said. "I've never been to Michigan or the World Robotics Championships before."

The idea to build a color sorting robot from Legos came after lots of brainstorming by the boys and their robotics teacher, Emma Alaba, who owns the Computer Learning Center in Clearwater and teaches computer and robotics classes and camps.

"We wanted to build something that could help in the future, and we know there are people who are allergic to red dye," Chris said.

The robot moves objects along a conveyor belt through a color sensor. The red candy is separated from the other candy and deposited into a bin.

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...rmed from the other candy and deposited into a bin.

After trying several different brands, the boys determined that Skittles was the candy of choice for their device.

"Peanut M & M's were too big and plain M & M's were too small, but Skittles were the perfect choice," Kristopher said.

Chris' mom, Terri Curtis, 42, said Chris and his brother, Nathan, 8, have loved playing with Legos for as long as she can remember.

"Their room is like a Lego city," she said. "I can't run my vacuum without picking up a Lego."

In addition to being able to work with Legos, Kristopher said, building their robot offered another significant benefit: They got to sample the product.

"We ate lots and lots and lots

of Skittles," he said.

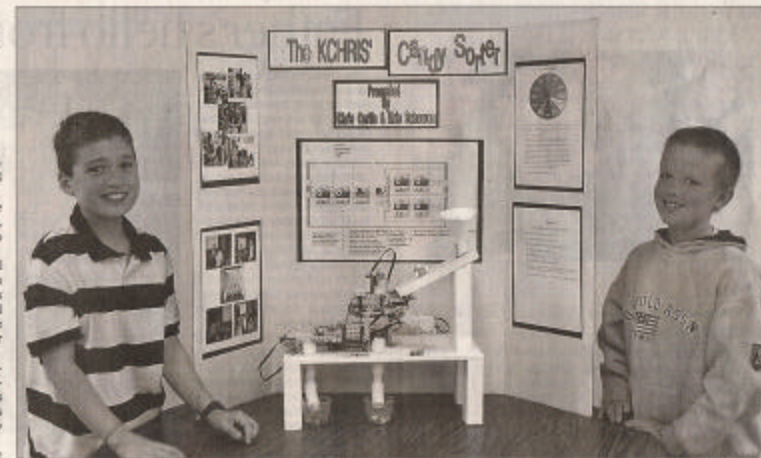
Chris said that the competition has taught Team CKRIS some important lessons.

"I've learned not to give up," he said. "If you put your mind to it, you can get a lot accomplished in a short time."

While the families have had to pay for the robot, the team's fees to enter the competitions and travel expenses, several local civic groups and businesses have donated money to defray their costs.

If the two boys win their division in Saturday's competition, they will receive the parts to build another robot. Chris already has a plan for a new device.

"I'm looking to do something with security," he said.



Chris Curtis, left, and Kristopher Scheuren have designed a robot of Legos that sorts out red Skittles.

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