

# FAU's Robot Wars event aims to boost engineering

By **DAVID A. SCHWARTZ**  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

One entry was a wok on wheels. Another resembled a small metal box. A third was shaped like a wedge of cheese. And then there was the crab-like "I Pinch," whose extended "claws" grabbed any object in its path.

The contestants were no taller than a foot and a half and weighed 10 pounds or less. They bumped, like tiny metal sumo wrestlers, or rolled over one other in an effort to knock a competitor out of a 10-foot by 10-foot area in a competition billed as "Robot Wars."

Teams of students recently cheered on their radio-controlled, battery-powered progeny as one high school's mechanical creation was pitted against another's in a three-team double elimination competition at Florida Atlantic University.

The Spanish River High School engineering club's Great White team – the school's mas-

cot is a shark – beat the Star Trek team from Forest Hills High School after defeating the Sigma Cats from Fort Lauderdale's

Dillard High School.

The competition provided an opportunity to "enhance the learning in class with math, physics and design to put [them] into practical use," said Spanish River physics teacher Miguel Nelson.

Oren Masory, professor and chair of FAU's mechanical engineering department, whose students organized the event, said it was designed "to generate excitement about engineering."

The high school students dedicate their time and work as a team, Masory said.

"It's a good experience and that's how engineering works." He said students have to be innovative and recognize problems, like difficulties with traction on the room's carpeted floor.

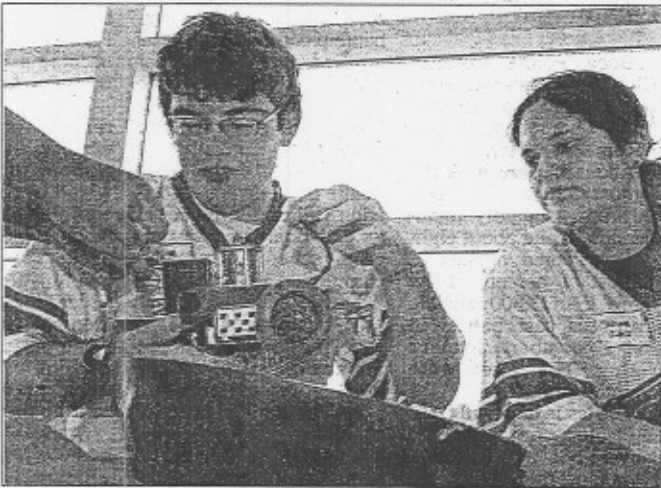
That was the problem Spanish River engineering club president Michael Homs was trying to solve after the club's box-shaped robot got stuck on the carpet. "I need to fix the front," Homs told the three other seniors in the group. "I'm lifting up the mounting holes so the front plate drags less."

For FAU engineering students like senior Nick Craven, vice president of the contest-sponsoring student chapter of the American Society of Mechanical Engineering, the event gave the college students a chance to get involved with high school students who might want to become engineers.

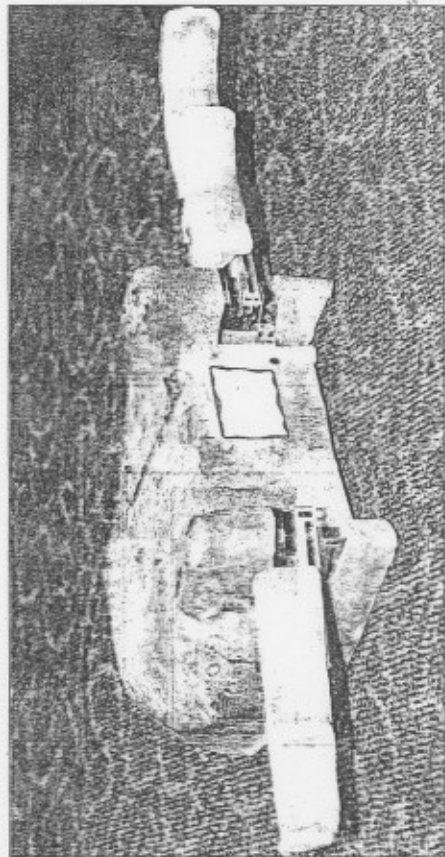
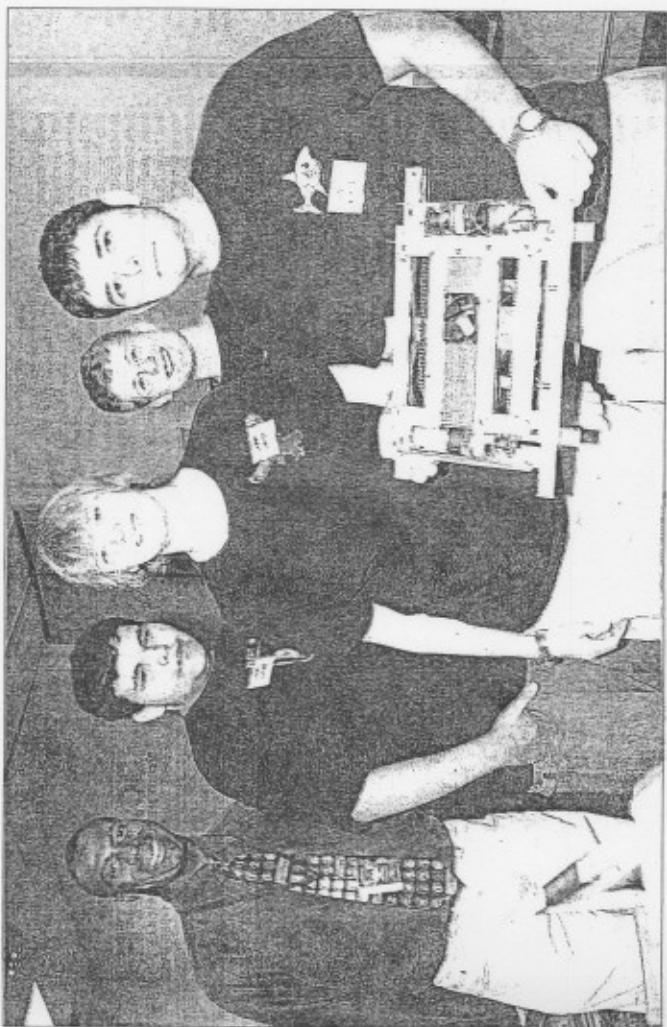
"We're trying to bring students first of all to engineering and second to Florida Atlantic University," Craven said.

The number of engineering students at FAU has not declined, but that has not been the case at other universities, said Tamsyn Carey, coordinator of academic programs in the Boca Raton university's College of Engineering and Computer Science. A nationwide engineer shortage is likely in a few years as practicing engineers reach retirement age, Carey said.

Evan Kassof, the Dillard High School senior who designed wok-on-wheels robot Wok-o-Bot, said he's not interested in a career in engineering. "I'm planning to go into physics."



**WOK-O-BOT:** Florida Atlantic University's American Society of Mechanical Engineers Club recently hosted a high school "Robot Wars" competition. Above, students from Dillard High's Sigma Cats Group Evan Kassof, 18, and Victoria Burg, 17, fix their robot called Wok-o-Bot. Photo/Charlotte Southern



**ROBOT WARS:** Florida Atlantic University's American Society of Mechanical Engineers Club recently hosted the high school "Robot Wars" competition. Pictured above is the winning team: The Spanish River Great White. From left are Miguel Nelson, teacher sponsor of the Computer Engineering Club; Erik Klump, 17; Shane Kluger, 17; Robert Chynich, 16; and Mike Horns, 17. Top right, students compete with their robots in the "Robot Wars" competition. At left, Dillard High's Sigma Casts Group shows off their robot. At right, the team's robot, Wick-e-bot. At right is FAU robot, I Prich.

Photo/Chris Davidson