

Beacon students taking the spotlight in statewide, regional competitions

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WOONSOCKET – Students at Beacon Charter High School for the Arts have been singled out for recognition in music, playwriting, and even robotics during the past three months. Principal Bob Pilkington and his staff are celebrating the barrage of good news and say they couldn't be prouder of their students.

Nicholas Beaudoin, Michael Martins, and Jonathan Esteban

What started out as a class assignment turned into an award-winning play for three members of Beacon's junior class.

Nicholas Beaudoin of Woonsocket, Michael Martins of Johnston, and Jonathan Esteban of Woonsocket, were partnered to create an original play which would be submitted to the 11th Annual Rhode Island Youth Playwriting competition sponsored by All Children's Theatre.

ACT created the Youth Playwriting Competition and Festival to give teens in Rhode Island an opportunity to express their thoughts, develop creative playwriting skills, and work with a team of theatre professionals to develop and stage their script.

"Creation of a Superhero" is based on an idea of a play I saw in San Diego," said Martins.

Their play is about three friends who are locked in a hotel room that have to write a

script, an idea not too far from their experience.

"Ours is a basic slapstick about the test and power of friendship," said Martins. "It's very vaudevillian."

Beaudoin said the trio started out enthusiastically writing the script but had trouble finishing the last few pages.

"We were sick of it," said Beaudoin. "We thought it was going to be the worst script."

When they finally finished it, Martins said they "never wanted to see the thing again."

But they are seeing it again.

Chosen as one of four winning plays in the competition, the playwrights found themselves at ACT auditions several weeks ago choosing actors for their play which will be presented as part of the organization's playwriting festival.

Four original plays written, directed, and performed by area teens, were performed on April 20 and 21, in the Met School Theatre, 325 Public St., Providence.

Martins and Beaudoin said they plan on writing more.

"I've got screenwriting software," said Martins who is working on several movie ideas as well as two books.

Beaudoin is working on a show inspired by his grandfather who shared his love for theater.

"It's about a grandfather telling stories to his grandson," he said.

The story goes on.

Leo Cote, Cory Lowe, Matthew Mills, John Barber, Michael Piskunov

What do you get when you



Members of Beacon Charter's robotics club took 5th place out of 26 teams statewide in FIRST Robotics Competition for high school students. Pictured with Mr. Roboto are from left first row, Michael Piskunov, Cory Lowe, and Leo Cote. Second row from left are John Barber and Matthew Mills.

mix four culinary students, one visual arts student and two math teachers? A robotics team that places 5th out of 26 teams across the state during its first try at the FIRST Vex Challenge.

Not bad considering these students had never done anything like this and learned as part of an after-school club that meets only twice a week. Some of their competitors have been competing longer with big budgets and more class time.

The competition is sponsored by For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, FIRST, a non-profit organization that "aspires to transform culture, making science, math, engineering, and technology as cool for kids as sports are today."

Founded in 1989 by Dean Kamen, inventor of the Segway Human Transporter, FIRST



Valley Breeze photo by Louise Tetreault
Michael Martins, left, and Nicholas Beaudoin, along with Jonathan Esteban, not pictured, wrote an original play that garnered an award in the 11th Annual Rhode Island Youth Playwriting competition sponsored by All Children's Theatre. Their play was performed last week at the Met School in Providence.

is comprised of four programs including the: FIRST Robotics Competition for high school students, the FIRST LEGO League for ages 9-14, and

Challenge, also for high school students, the FIRST LEGO League for ages 9-14, and

Woonsocket

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Junior FIRST LEGO League for ages 6-9.

In the high school competition, students are given a robot kit and a set of criteria that their robot needs to perform. Points are awarded based on the number of times a robot performs certain skills including pushing a ball into a low goal and a high goal.

In keeping with this year's theme of Hanging Around, one skill that would garner a team the most points was to extend an arm and hang from a bar. It was a challenge that team members - freshmen culinary students Leo Cote of Woonsocket and Michael Piskunov of Woonsocket, sophomore culinary students, Cory Lowe and Matthew Mills, both of Cumberland; and visual arts sophomore, John Barber of Woonsocket - decided to take on.

"Only a couple schools took on that challenge and we were one of them," said John Butler, a math teacher who stepped in to attend the competition at the New England Institute of Technology in Warwick after club adviser Robert Vatcher became ill.

Vatcher said the team did all the work themselves trying different things through trial and error.

"I did not touch one nut or bolt," said Vatcher.

The team faced some daunting challenges preparing for the competition including a broken motor a couple of days before the competition and a broken part as they arrived at the competition.

"They were able to repair it right there," said Butler. "It was the part that allowed the arm to extend."

The team had to square off five times during the day-long competition. At one point, the scoreboard showed the team in second place.

"It was a pleasure watching all five students share duties and work as a team," said Butler.

Butler said that the school where he previously taught had a robotics lab and a budget.

"We just had some very eager and enthusiastic students," he added.

Cote, who didn't have any experience, said he was surprised the robot, named Mr. Roboto in a school naming contest, worked.

"We have a pretty gifted bunch of people," said Barber, whose only experience was dabbling with Legos as a kid.

All students said they intend to be back next year.

While this year's goal initially was to not come in last place, the team has already set next year's goal.

To win.