

# Woodland Hills students build robots to save the planet

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With surgeon-like precision, a robot glides across a table. It stops directly in front of a light switch and with one motion, turns off the light with its arm. The brains who built and programmed the robot let out a yell of excitement.

This isn't some high-tech facility with doctors in lab coats, rather fifth-grade students at Woodland Hills Elementary School. Julianne Castillo, Madison Berry, Christopher Enriquez and Austin Greer make up The Green Team.

All three teams of four have built and programmed their



Photo by MATTHEW HUISMAN/The Observer

**Julianne Castillo, Christopher Enriquez and Madison Berry adjust the robot before a test run.**

own robots to compete in the All-Earth Ecobot Challenge. The competition, April 25, at the George R. Brown Convention Center, puts teams head-to-head to see if their robot can

perform a number of green activities without the aid of humans.

To get the robots to maneuver in the desired fashion, students program the LEGO Mindstorm using computer software. The students designate how far the robot must go before it turns, how many degrees to turn, etc.

"We program it all on the computer," Enriquez said. "Then we download it to the robot and it does the rest."

Easier said than done, it's a constant battle of trial and error. Eventually they get it right and when they do, success.

The second part of the project involves a PowerPoint pre-

sentation where the students demonstrate a new technique for the robots to do.

Fifth-grade science teacher Meshelle Smith acquired a grant from the Harris County Office of Education to purchase the robots. She said the project has taught the students a lot about teamwork and helped them learn in a fun environment.

"They had to work together as a team," Smith said.

Smith has written grants for four more robots and plans to send two to middle school with the kids.

"This has been a tremendous learning experience for the kids," Smith said.