



Team Phoenix of the Greater Nashua FIRST Robotics Club helped celebrate the debut of Homewood Suites Gateway Hills in South Nashua by delivering ceremonial scissors via robot to Mayor Donalee Lozeau to cut the ribbon.

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Nashua students, robot on welcoming committee for new south Nashua hotel

By TINA FORBES
Staff Writer

Team Phoenix of the Greater Nashua FIRST Robotics Club helped celebrate the debut of a new hotel in south Nashua by delivering ceremonial scissors via robot to Mayor Donalee Lozeau to cut the ribbon.

The new Homewood Suites Hotel at 15 Tara Boulevard sits in the heart of the 440-acre Gateway Hills campus, a growing technology park near Exit 1 on the Everett Turnpike. John Flatley, owner of the John Flatley Co. which in turn owns Gateway Hills, attended the ribbon-cutting and praised the hotel for complementing the nearby tech businesses.

"A technology park without attractive lodging is a drawback for companies looking to relocate," he said.

He said the technology park attracts many young employees, who then make Nashua their home. "We also hope to make Nashua a better city, and we look forward to being part of the community," Flatley said.

Attendees included technology businesses from the Gateway Hills Neighborhood. The theme for the event was "a tradition of innovation," hence the student-run robot operated by Team Phoenix.

The team is made up of students from the Academy for Science and Design, home school groups, private schools and Nashua district high schools.

Georges Mourant, systems lead for the team, said working with the group teaches a lot of life skills. "You learn a lot of technical things, and as a leader, I learned a lot of leadership skills."

Liam Gousios, business co-lead for the team, said they do different public events, such as SPARK Day demonstrations at ASD.

Students said the robot is reliable, although they worried about the rain Thursday evening. "It's a good robot; I'm hoping she'll work well," said team member Sabra George.

"Her name is 'Recyclone,' " Mourant added.

In the end, the robot did a fine job. Students operated it remotely from a computer inside the hotel, driving the robot through the hotel foyer to the entrance to deliver scissors to Mayor Lozeau.

The robot and team received a donation of \$200 from the hotel for their help, which goes toward expenses throughout the year. "It costs the team \$14,000 every year; registering for the two major tournaments are \$5,000 each, and building the robot is \$4,000," said Amy Bewley, spokeswoman for the Academy for Science and Design.

Last year the team made it to the World Competition in St. Louis, so they spent more than they anticipated needing for travel costs, said Gousios. The donation helps refill funds, but the event also gets the team some publicity, said Bewley.

The Thursday evening celebration included live music by the Joan Watson-Jones Jazz Ensemble and a food drive on behalf of End 68 Hours of Hunger.

End 68 Hours of Hunger is a Nashua-based nonprofit group that provides food for children to last the 68 hours of food insecurity some children experience between the free lunch they receive in school on Friday and the free school breakfast Monday morning.

The program currently provides food to about 155 Nashua students, but the group is looking to collect more items as the long holiday weekend approaches.

The hotel plans to donate one food item to the organization for every Facebook "like" received before the grand opening - about 260.

Team Phoenix members also include Nick Zumbo, Will Gebhardt, Aasha Krishnan, John Williams, and head team adult mentor Bruce George.

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