

ROBOT MOVES

PRESCHOOLERS TALK, DANCE, RACE C4'S COLLECTION OF AUTOMATONS

By **OLIVIA COVINGTON** | THE REPUBLIC
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FOR many kids, robots are intriguing but make-believe creatures that only live on television, where sometimes they seem a little scary.

But when preschool students from Busy Bees Academy visited C4 — Columbus Area Career Connection on Monday, they learned first-hand that robots can be real and, more importantly, can actually be a lot of fun.

During the visit, high school students showed the 4- and 5-year-olds the skills they use to operate robots they had programmed in class.

Sue Edwards, a Busy Bees teacher, said prior to Monday's visit, she had taken her preschool students to the L.S. Noblitt Planetarium at Columbus East High School to look at stars and learn about astronomy.

But this year, the students showed more interest in robots than in the stars. That led to the visit to the C4 wing of Columbus North High School, Edwards said.

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Busy Bees Academy student Samantha Rawlins shouts at a small, sound-activated car to get it to travel down the track Tuesday at Columbus North's C4 robotics lab.

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The field trip was a hands-on experience for the preschoolers, who were eager to soak up everything they could learn from the older students about the mysterious world of robots.

At one station, the youngsters set off a race between three robotic mice that were sound-activated — they only moved when the students clapped their hands and yelled at the top of their lungs.

The preschoolers guessed which of the three mice would win each race, made as much noise as possible to ensure their pick would take home the prize, then celebrated with even more cheering if their mouse of choice was named the winner. And if two of the robot mice crashed? The cheering only got louder.

At another station, the preschoolers were allowed to press a button in a computer program that commanded an industrial-looking robot to pick up and move a ball, an experience that preschooler

About C4 robotics

The C4 automation and robotics program was launched this school year as a way to meet the needs of the local manufacturing industry. Students who take automation and robotics classes learn about programming, gears, equipment and other techniques related to wiring and programming a robot.

For more information about the robotics program or about C4, call 812-376-4240.

Jayley Smiley said was pretty cool.

"They're awesome," said L.J. Manhart, who couldn't pick a favorite among the various robot stations.

But the distinct favorite machine among the preschool students was NAO, a French robot with the ability to talk, walk, sit, dance and complete other basic human functions, to the great delight of the young children.

NAO was originally designed to teach kids with autism, said Tazwell Long, a sophomore robotics student who was demonstrating NAO's abilities to the preschoolers. The robot is equipped with an English lexicon that enables it to communicate with people.

With a simple voice command, Long could make the robot dance, shake hands, speak and perform a myriad of other tasks. The preschoolers, in turn, would greet NAO in the hopes of getting a reaction out of the human-like machine.

"They would wave at it," Long said. "They love it."

Arohi Panchwagh, one of the visiting preschoolers, said she thought NAO's tricks were very funny, especially when it moved and danced like a real person.

The students had the opportunity to build some machines of their own when they used toothpicks and gumdrop candies to create various structures.

Arohi chose to build a house with her supplies, although she conceded that the small structure likely wouldn't be big enough for her to live in.

But when Jonathon Dettner set out to build his tower, he had lofty goals for the size of the structure. "Big — very big," he said.

Although he enjoyed building his toothpick and gumdrop structure, Aiden DeHaven said he wasn't sure if his skills were up to the level of building a real robot quite yet.

Despite that fact, Aiden said his visit to the C4 robotics class showed him just how fun robots can be when they're in the real world and not just on television. For he and his classmates, there was only one word that could describe the experience of getting to play with real-life robots at school.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Busy Bees Academy preschool students interact with a small robot named NAO during their visit Tuesday to the C4 robotics lab at Columbus North High School. Students watch as small, sound-activated cars race down a track. Cadan Hayden, left, and Ryan Stoddard watch as a robot works to create a part during. Trey Gross, left, and Christian Cordova watch as a robot picks up blocks. Columbus C4 student Jacob Broaddus, left, helps Gerron Harrison operate a robotic arm.

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