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By RUTH MARIANO

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Top team Some of the members of Central's Team 131, "C.H.A.O.S.," from left, are Abbie Petersen, Jamison Couture, Logan Larocque, Ben Papp (in front with orange bandana), and Dan Coburn. Ruth Mariano Photo

It was a big weekend for the Central High School FIRST robotics team as they walked away with one of the organization's most prestigious awards – the Chairman's Award.

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Manchester It was a big weekend for the Central High School FIRST robotics team as they walked away with one of the organization's most prestigious awards – the Chairman's Award.

Teams from as far away as Canada, Vermont and Rhode Island participated in the annual BAE Regional FIRST Robotics event held at the Verizon Wireless Arena in Manchester March 1 to 3.

Reed Macey of the CHAOS team lines up the shot for the robot's autonomous portion of the competition. Alignment is critical for accurate shooting. Ruth Mariano Photo

Central High School's Team 131, CHAOS (Central High School and Our Supporters), participated in the event this year, as they have every year since FIRST's inception in 1992, and proved why they are known in the region to be among the elite robotics teams.

The regional Chairman's Award, according to FIRST's website, "honors the team that, in the judges' estimation, best represents the model for other teams to emulate, and which embodies the goals and purpose of FIRST."

West High School's Power Knights Team 501 was conspicuous in its absence as a registered team at the Verizon event.

"This was the only time West has missed the Granite State Regional," said adviser Isaac Onigman, who said there had been an issue with a waitlist that prevented them from attending.
The Power Knights are confirmed to attend the Boston regional coming up during the weekend of March 22 and 23 and are looking forward to the challenge.

In this year's "Ultimate Ascent" event, high school students were given a vast array of engineering, mechanical and technological challenges. In six short weeks, they had to design, build and program a robot to compete.

The competition, which took place on a 27-by-54-foot field, involved goals at each end of the field and one pyramid structure placed on each side of the field. The matches each began with a 15-second "autonomous period" when the robots – without any human assistance – would throw Frisbee-like flying disks into the end goals, which was followed by a 2-minute match where the robots were manually controlled by the students.

The robots' objective was to throw as many disks as possible into the end goals. The higher and smaller the goal, the more points were awarded. During the competition, teammates would feed additional disks into the robot at slots placed at their end of the field.

The robots' second objective was to climb the pyramid structure. The higher they climbed, the more points they received. During the last several seconds, human team members could also attempt to throw the disks into the far goals.

"We're running really well," said Hooksett's Ben Papp, CHAOS's lead programmer, noting that their robot was one of the fastest on the field.

With this challenge, speed is critical. The CHAOS robot could zip from one end of the field to shoot disks into the goal, then zip right back to the portal where the team member would reload the disks. Maneuverability was also critical as the opposing team would attempt to block their progress so they couldn't reload or get close enough to the goals.

Fast maneuverability, excellent handling, and great shooting all worked together to bring CHAOS into the quarter finals.

As the weekend-long event came to a close, FIRST founder Dean Kamen and Gov. Maggie Hassan spoke to those assembled, impressing upon them the importance of STEM education – science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Students in these areas are the ones "developing skills with real world applications that help our economy," said Hassan, "that make our lives better."