

# One man's trash, another man's robot

By Shin Park

It all started as a personal project during the summer of his junior year—after all, the crate of unusable electronics was just sitting there, and the box of leftover cardboard was just too abundant to overlook. With a little research and a lot of duct tape, senior and valedictorian Michael Lu, more commonly known as Litty Ling by his peers, started the assembly of his well known and loved homemade robot: a knee-tall, controllable vehicle he named Toby.

The end of the warm August evenings met with Lu taking a stroll around the stores of Great Neck Plaza with his new invention. Families and their dogs stopped amidst their walks to admire the little vehicle that sped past store windows, its cardboard head peeking through to the customers inside. Although Toby was made to just drive through the streets on its recycled two wheels, the robot was a magnet for children in particular who were enthralled by Toby's giant pupils and corgi sticker on its chest. To them, it looked as if a whole personality—one of an innocent, kind friend—was hiding beneath its cardboard box body.

Toby and Lu's other projects had all stemmed from the robotics team members' tenacious zeal for all things robots and robotics. Lu's interest had begun at the end of the eighth grade when his curious nature sparked his interests in inventing and building. His enthusiasm escalated when he joined the high school Robotics Team and found it to be a creative outlet to escape from the stresses of school. "I did robotics because it is just something young kids are interested in," Lu said. "And now, building robots has just become something I look towards to have fun."

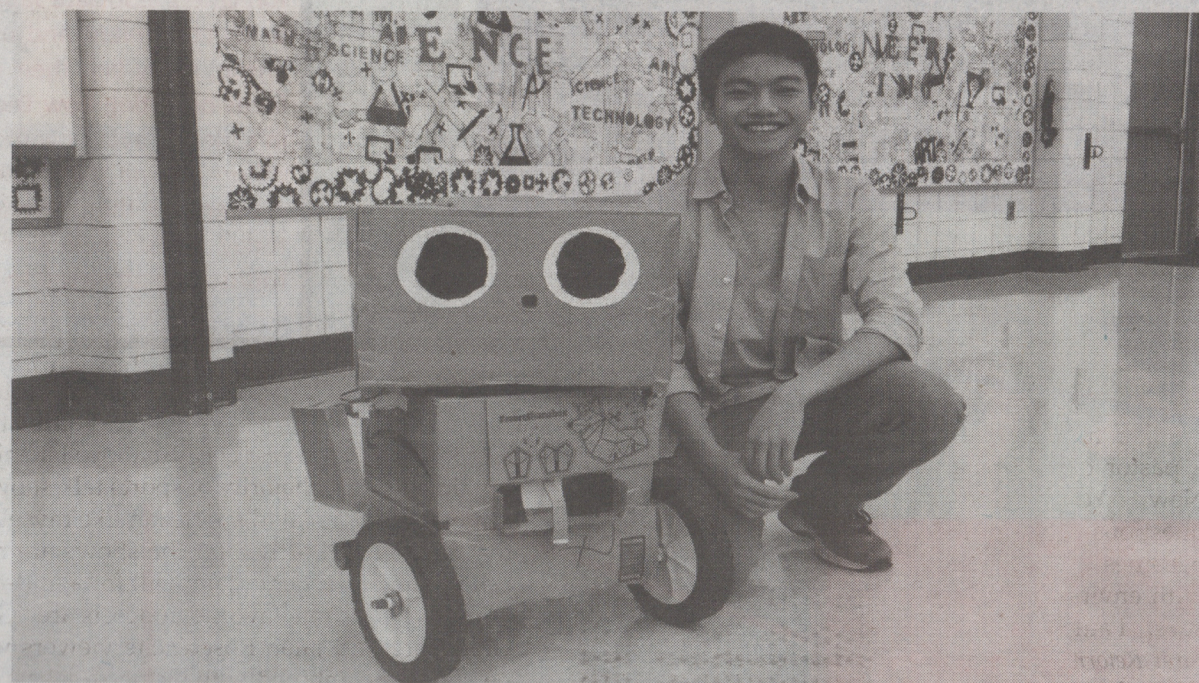
Lu's interests expand far beyond the robotics team. When he is not at home hacking an Alexa

to play trivia with him, he can be seen at the History Club and with Science Olympiad. When time allows, Lu can be seen at the different Great Neck elementary schools giving presentations and demonstrations to the students who look at the young builder and his inventions with awe.

He visits Lakeville, Saddle Rock, EM Baker, and JFK elementary schools in order to encourage students to make use of recycled materials and to construct something out of nothing. "My intention was not to impress the kids with what I do," Lu said. "Truth is, I make all kinds of things using stuff lying around... lunch trays, legos, or card-

board boxes. I just want the kids to break down the financial stigma that they need tons of money to make something cool like a robot."

Lu will never forget the curious faces and the bewildered looks from all the students each time he put Toby on the floor and took it for a test drive around the classroom. His fondest moments of the experience are the questions the kids would ask after the demonstrations: "Little kids are seriously so funny. After I showed them Toby, they would ask me things like, 'Does Toby have a girlfriend?' or 'Does Toby play Fortnite?'"



**They see me rollin'** – Michael Lu poses with his trusty sidekick, Toby. The two have toured across Great Neck to various primary schools, educating them about Toby's inner workings.

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