

Mecha Mules News

Quarterly Issue 4-July 2024

Mecha Mules Visit Washington DC

By Amanda Heston

If you were part of the email group receiving Evelyn Miller's daily updates, you were privy to a student's account of our daily activities. I wanted to highlight a few of my favorites and speak from a coach/chaperone's perspective. Josh Miller and I lead the four kids around DC to see sights including the Natural History Museum, Ford's Theater, the Holocaust Museum, the National Archives, and the National Portrait Gallery. We toured the National Mall to see the Jefferson and Lincoln Memorials, the beautiful WWII Memorial with its many fountains, and this year, we visited the FDR and Eleanor Roosevelt Memorials. This is my third year taking students to DC, and I've learned that the best time to see the memorials is at night. All the landmarks around the National Mall are lit up and add an element of grandeur to an already awe-inspiring display. Another reason I prefer seeing the monuments at night is because it is much cooler! There is quite a bit of ground to cover around the National Mall and strolling at



night is a nice reprieve after roaming around in the afternoon heat. Strangely enough, we felt very safe day and night around DC and on the metro. It was clean and I felt safer in that big city than even in our neighboring towns.



Pictures: Jefferson Memorial, Washington Monument, view down the National Mall

After three days of sightseeing, we left our home away from home: our Airbnb in Alexandria, Virginia. It was a long metro ride from Alexandria to our dorms at the University of Maryland. Earlier in the week, we received an invitation for a Capital Tour from Representative Marie Gluesenkamp Perez's office. If you recall, Rep. Perez is a big fan of the Mecha Mules and visited (and jumped) in our pool last Seaperch season. Here is the video link:

[▶ Congresswoman Pérez Makes a Splash for International Champions](#) I remembered that the Capital Tour was one of the highlights of our trip the first year so we jetted back to DC after checking into our dorms. We were thankful for Uber because it saved more than 2 hours of travel time on the metro! There were a couple of new highlights on this tour. First, we started in Rep. Perez's office and were escorted through the tunnels to the Capitol Building! There were a lot of security checkpoints, as you can imagine. We were also able to see the House Chambers. I looked around in the 3D version of what I saw on TV while watching the State of the Union! Additionally, we were escorted to the Speaker's Balcony for a great view straight down the National Mall.



Pictures: Touring in Capitol Building, View down National Mall from Speaker's Balcony, and the group outside the Capitol Building

We caught another Uber back to the dorms, essentially ending our time as tourists and starting the last leg of our trip; time at the university and the competition. The kids got to see what dorm life was like; not as cushy as the Airbnb, but hey, that's college! What made sleeping on hard mattresses surrounded by cinder block walls all worth it was the all-you-can-eat dining hall. This dining hall was massive with 11 service stations featuring pizza, salads, comfort foods, taco bar, Chinese food, desserts, and everything in between. Our four hungry teenagers were in heaven. To be honest, Josh and I enjoyed the huge selection, too! I enjoy taking kids on these trips, particularly to expose them to a college campus so they can get a little taste of what it may be like; both literally and figuratively.





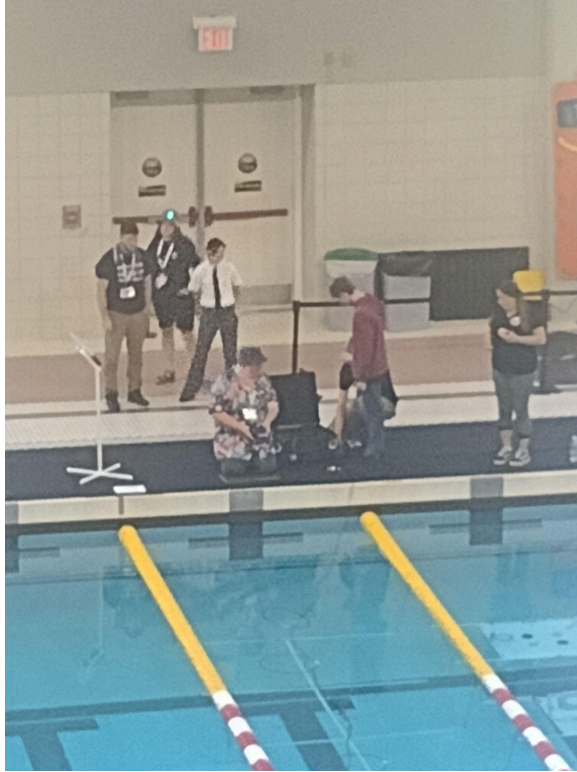
Pictures: Sage outside the dining hall, Gary in the dining hall happy with food, Sage and Dalton hanging out in the dorm halls)

Josh, as head coach of the Seaperch team this year, will give an update on the competition day itself. I'm very fortunate to be a part of these trips to the east coast. There is an unlimited amount of history to be learned in DC and taking these small-town kids to a big city full of culture is an amazing opportunity for them. The Seaperch competition itself is a great setting to meet people from all over the world. Competing at the International level is daunting and our kids kept their composure and handled the situation with grace. I am very proud of our Seaperch Bermuda Team!



Pictures: relaxing outside near the dorms, Lincoln Memorial

April-June



SeaPerch Competition

Josh Miller-Coach of Team Bermuda

Competition day has arrived and with that all the anxiety that comes with competing in an international competition, as defending world champions. Our morning began with checking in on our obstacle course driver Gary who, regardless of using sunscreen, received a substantial sun burn during our relaxing pool time the day prior. Gary was in good spirits and was mentally ready for the competition that we have all been preparing for.

Our team breakfast was a memorable event as one would suspect when bringing four teenagers to an all you can eat buffet. Even the weight of a massive competition could not bring down the spirits of our competitors when they came face to face with a variety of breakfast confectionaries. That bliss would be short lived, as we arrived to check in to receive our times for the competition.

With the stress of the competition rising and the uneasiness of the future set in we set up our booth in the competition room amongst our fellow competitors to wait for our moment to compete. In this fascinating room of fierce competitors we saw the scope of our competition, traveling from booth to booth we as a team took in the creativity, and ingenuity of this competition. Seeing the diverse ideas to circumvent certain obstacles in the course, helped center our terms attention to how we may utilize some of these ideas for future competitions. From fully 3D printed robots to truly creative hydrodynamic designs our team was definitely inspired for the future.



Go time! It was finally our time to compete we gathered for one last team meeting before the competition was on its way, our drivers Dalton Bruntmyer and Gary Burke were mentally ready to go, even their sense of humor was unaltered as Dalton placed a wooden horse he had bought earlier in the competition on our robots carrier as a tribute to the Wahkiakum Mules Mascot.

We traveled down to the pool as a team and sat in the bleachers in sight of all the spectators in the Olympic sized pool. Finally it was our time to compete. Nerves were high as our competitors placed the robot in the pool for the first stick of the competition, the

obstacle course. We had been competitive at home hitting 29 seconds runs in this race for time, 9 seconds faster than last year's fastest time. The judge asked if we were ready to go, our driver gave them a thumbs up, the timer began.

During the first run our robot suffered from a connection issue, a loose cable connection that allowed our robot to operate, this had happened a few times before so Gary Burke our obstacle course driver was ready to correct the issue, though it cost us valuable time. Now it was time for the mission course, and with that our lead driver Dalton Bruntmyer was ready to go. Dalton started unlatching the gate and opening it to put the items in the basket on the other side while the robot was submerged 5 feet under water, when the connection issue that had plagued Gary reared not just once but 3 times during his run. Amanda and I watched proudly as they calmly held themselves together in this stressful time correcting the issue to the best of their abilities. Though we did not win the competition we were truly blessed to have an amazing group of kids in our team.



Student's Perspective From Internationals

Evelynn Miller-Mecha Mules Teammate

The experience of going to Washington D.C for the International Seaperch competition was incredible. Here is an overview of the week and plans for the future.

The days leading up to the competition were very fun and helped with team bonding and settling in. Those days that were spent in an airbnb were filled with marvelous memories of visiting landmarks and museums as well as spending time with team members. Personally, I believe that seeing the history of America was so delightful and I would not trade it for anything. On another note, getting to be somewhere new also showed us how to be somewhat independent from parents, in a way.

Competing was so nerve-racking and stressful but also a wonderful learning experience. The results we had were not as high as other years. However, that was somewhat to be expected due to the fact that the team was composed of entirely new kids. The following were the scores, Obstacle Course: 24th Mission course: 12th Technical Design Report: 11th Overall: 16th. So the previous year's scores were higher but this year the team took many risks and learned so many things about engineering.

Next year we may try a new competition called Roboboat. RoboBoat is a different international student competition that is more advanced than Seaperch. In this competition the goal is to design autonomous, robotic boats to navigate through a specific challenge course. (Roboboat) It seems likely that roboboat will be pursued, although discussions are still ongoing. If this does happen, Seaperch will also still be done next year however the focus may be on slightly younger students. None of this is confirmed but this is all a possibility.

Ham Radio Update

Ron Wright

As we say goodbye to our lead member Peter who graduated, we are welcoming a new member to our group: Theo. Cor continues on as one of our officers. The ARRL website was hacked and they don't know when they will be able to publish the results of the official February School Club Roundup results. We know we did well, we just don't know how well compared to other schools. We are waiting to hear if the district is going to a four-day-a-week schedule before we know when we are going to meet next year.

On a related note, the school board voted unanimously to continue on to Phase II of the project to convert the upstairs in the concession stand into a ham radio clubhouse (and keep space for football coach activities). The N7WAH club is moving forward with radios and antennas, and we are working on the plan to add a covered stairs to the outside. The school also earned a \$2,200 grant from ARRL to purchase an HF radio and tuner and cables, and \$600 more in educational materials, maps, and study guides.

Finally, the county sheriff in coordination with the fire halls, the town, and county are moving forward on their grant-funded project to rebuild our county emergency communications system. Many of the components are already purchased. When completed emergency services personnel will have a much more capable system.

Robotics and Engineering Update

Ron Wright

We are waiting to hear if we are on a four-day school week to finalize plans, but here are some plans we do know. Mr. Hurley and Ms. Kincaid will be working with 4-H to help make high school mentors available for K-5 staff. Mr. Hansen will

be doing middle school robotics/engineering the last period of the day. There will be an advanced middle school group in the class in addition to the new robotics students. Mr. Hurley, with Mr. Miller's assistance, will be offering a high school robotics/engineering class 6th period that will focus on student-designed projects.





Fundraising in The Rain

Julie Burke, Fundraising Chairperson

A not so long time ago, In a galaxy close, close to home the Mecha Mules Robotics Club held a very successful, wet fundraiser. May the fourth, 2024 the club held a car wash, bake sale and silent auction that raised funds for the club. It was an excessively rainy and cold day which we were not certain would bring many folks out of their warm, dry homes to support the club but Wahkiakum did not let the students down! This year we decided to combine multiple fundraisers into one, allowing supporters the opportunity to purchase delicious baked goods made by the families of Mecha Mules students and to bid on baskets donated by community businesses and community Members. We greatly appreciate River Mile 38 Brewing Company, Skyline Golf Course, Mr. Robert Stowe, Puget Island Gardens and all the individuals who contributed baskets for the auction. It was impressive to see the students out in the torrential downpour giving their all washing every car, truck, ambulance and firetruck to earn donations for the club. This was the first combined fundraising activity that was incredibly successful in not only raising

funds but also bringing the teammates closer together. I was very impressed with not only the club but also this dynamic community for your unwavering support and generosity.



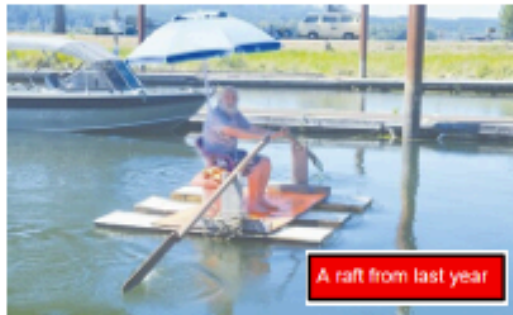
If you missed the event and would like to donate to the Mecha Mules there is another new way to help. We are taking sponsors that will gain recognition on the shirts the team wears, banners the club puts up at events as well as the tri-fold informative sheet that explains where the club will be participating as well as competitions. If you or your business would like to sponsor the Mecha Mules Robotics Club, please contact Julie Burke at (253) 988-5751. Also look for the Club at Bald Eagle Days where we

will be selling baked goods and look for the students during the parade. Thank you for your continued support and generosity!



2024 Wahkiakum Raft Challenge (Testing the Waters)

Summary: build a raft and bring it to the Elochoman Marina by noon Saturday August 10th. Then later Saturday afternoon, move the raft to the beach on the south end of the island across from the marina for the start of the race. The rafts will start from the beach, move out around a marker, then return back to the starting line. There are two classes: "Flotsam" and "Open", with entries in both classes being built by the crew. The main difference is that the Flotsam class requires that the raft be built from items scrounged from the banks of the Columbia River, whereas the Open class may use other items. See the complete rules for details. Practice a Sea Shanty to share during the parade.



Wooden and Classic Boat Festival Cathlamet WA August 10-11, 2024 Elochoman Marina

Build a raft and bring a worthy crew to race at the Third Annual Raft Race. Or, recruit a jolly local crew from one of the area establishments. Or, come to cheer on the hardy mariners, and help decide which crews sing the best sea shanties with the most gusto as they parade to the races.

This is only part of the action at the Wooden and Classic Boat Festival where you can see boats on display all weekend.

This first year we are testing to see if there is much interest in doing this.

Rules for the Raft Challenge:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Yxg_JVvCPITNXPuO0nuiQ2BWc4NgSanH?usp=sharing

Links for more info about all of the weekend's activities, food, and lodging:

<https://wahkiakum.us/>

<https://wahkiakum.us/events/wooden-boat-festival/>

<https://www.facebook.com/wahkiakumchamber/>

<https://www.cathlametmarina.org/>

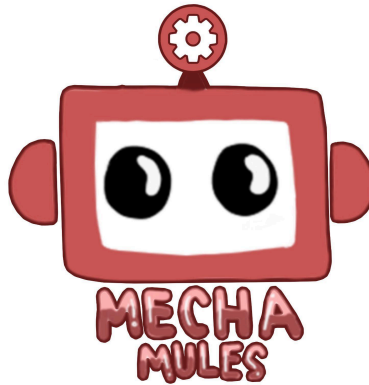
<https://www.waheagle.com/story/2023/08/17/news/love-for-wooden-boats-keeps-show-afloat/22673.html>

<https://www.waheagle.com/story/2023/08/17/news/puget-island-resident-has-a-raft-adventure/22674.html>

Do you want to sponsor an award? Do you have any questions? Contact us at rwright@wahksd.k12.wa.us



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Donations can be made to: "Wahkiakum ASB" Memo: Mecha Mules
Wahkiakum School District
500 S 3rd St./P.O. Box 398
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