



## Wall. E Comes to 182nd Street

He's not the Wall.E of Disney fame, but rather our own Aquinas Wall.E created by the Robotics Club under the direction of Mr. Edward Burns. If you drop in on Room 5 on a Monday afternoon, you'll find the students running

him around the track, getting him to respond to audio commands, and taking great delight in their creation.

The goal of the current project is to build a robot that can solve Rubik's cube. Having built the robot, the students will compare and contrast the design of their model with similar robots using different designs.

How did the Robotics Club come into existence at Aquinas? It began with the desire of a teacher, Ed Burns, to give students a chance to engage in exciting activities. Mr. Burns says, "As a young person I sought out activities that would allow me to investigate concepts in electronics and satisfy my natural curiosity. These experiences influenced my decision to follow a prior career in telecommunications."

The next step was to find a funder for this project, and the Miles Hodsdon Vernon Foundation, enabler of many dreams-come-true at Aquinas, provided a grant. Now enter an Aquinas Alumna and former faculty member, Mary Ann Petrilli Morris '68. As a computer teacher, Mary Ann had the opportunity to attend a teacher workshop that introduced Lego robotics. This is how she described what happened next.

*To get help with my questions about the logistics of running a robotics class or club, I contacted Aquinas, where excellence-in-education is practiced daily, and the door is always open to alumnae. Sure enough, I found that Ed Burns, a math teacher, was running a robotics club after school. He graciously welcomed me to one of the meetings, where I watched in awe as*



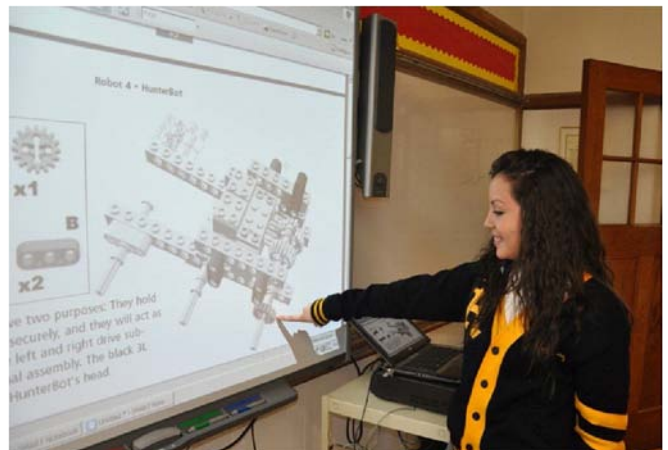
Mary Ann Petrilli Morris '68

*the girls analyzed the principles involved in making the wheels turn, and wrote programs that had the robots zipping about the room. The best part was seeing that, although the media tell us that girls are not very interested in math and science, Aquinites were embracing these subjects. By the time I got back to my car I had made up my mind to try to turn myself into a robotics teacher.*

Mary Ann bought a Lego robotics kit and the programming software, built a robot and learned to program it. To gain experience, she ran a robotics club for a small group of students for a few months. In September she began teaching robotics at St. John the Baptist School in Yonkers.

The Mindstorms NXT equipment that Mary Ann uses allows sophisticated programming, so when it came time to make her annual donation to the A.H.S. development fund, she thought she might offer to donate an NXT kit and software. When she mentioned this to her A.H.S. classmate, Lynn (Russell) Falcone, as they had lunch on Arthur Avenue, Lynn said she'd like to make a matching donation. Ed Burns welcomed the idea, and the result is a broadening of experience for the Aquinas Robotics Club.

Mary Ann said, "I was happy to be able to give back a bit to the school that gave me, not only the math and science skills to turn myself into a robotics teacher, but also the confidence to leave my comfort zone and follow my dream."



Zuleka Hernandez 2010 gives direction for robot construction.



Madeline Barrios 2013 works to assemble a robot.