The Tagliatela College of Engineering

Just like "The Jetsons," Brainy Engineers Build Robots of the Future

Robots are like people. They are skeletons linked by chains, which can be likened to bones. Although they literally lack flesh, blood and — perhaps most importantly — brains, those deficiencies are compensated fully by the University's Robotics Club. As any Robotics Club meeting will prove, there are plenty of brains in attendance.

This semester, the club is designing and building from scratch a robotic fuel-cell lawnmower equipped with GPS. The beauty of the mower, unlike robotic vacuum cleaners that zip erratically through living rooms like dogs trying to break through invisible fences, is that the GPS orders the robot to mow in straight lines. Waves are fine in the ocean, but lawns — or rather, their owners — demand straight lines.

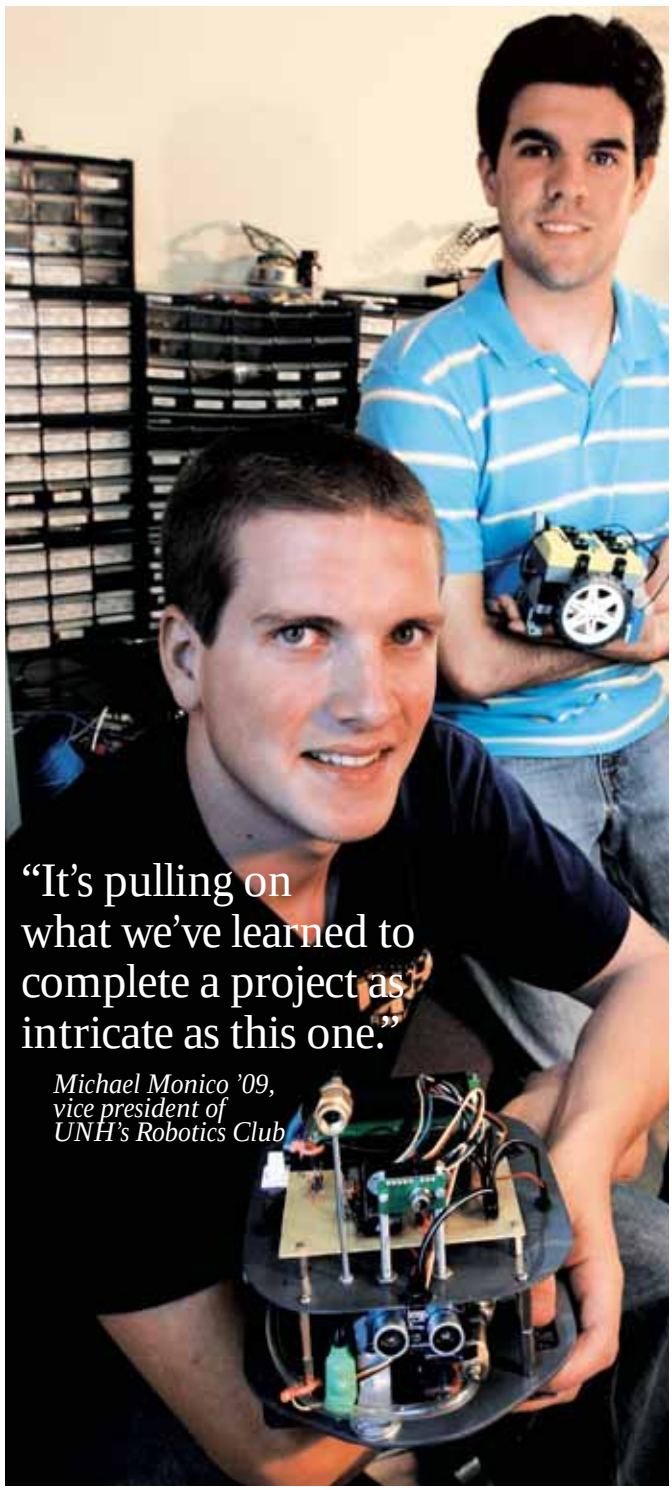
Such projects are the focus of research for robotics clubs at some of the nation's most prestigious universities. For Michael Folcik '09 Computer Engineering, who started UNH's club in 2005 after years of tinkering with Lego robots and electronics, the club's growing popularity is a testament to the talent on the University of New Haven campus.

"We are working on a project that only the most advanced and established robotics programs in the country would even consider," Folcik says. "I want this project to stand out in the realm of robotics."

He and Michael Monico '09 Mechanical Engineering, the club's vice president, have been working on robotics projects since the club's inception. Together they designed and built a firefighting robot for a 2006 robotics competition held at Trinity College. Applying theory to practice in Robotics Club, they believe, gives them a leg up.

"You can certainly sit in class and do calculations and solve problems, but when we're sitting down and working in Robotics Club, there's no information being given to us," Monico says. "It's pulling on what we've learned to complete a project as intricate as this one."

Folcik agrees. "We really do get to apply the things we've learned in class," he says, "and it has made everybody involved more well-rounded as an engineer."



Michael Folcik '09, left, president of the Robotics Club, with vice president Michael Monico '09