[ **THE SCOOP** ] JAMES BERNSTEIN

# Building interest to fill a job gap

### ENGINEERING

About a decade ago, **Scott Schuler** was on his third day of work at Hauppauge-based Festo Corp., a subsidiary of a German maker of factory and process automation products, when his boss, **Hans Zobel,** asked if he would like to help students at Hauppauge High School with some engineering projects.

"I was excited," Schuler, now 41 and in his own business, said last week. But "I didn't realize what it would become."

The boss' request turned into what has become a major part of Schuler's life: helping run an organization that exposes high school students to the engineering industry through internships and mentoring programs.

Last week, Schuler, of Ronkonkoma, was named acting president of the organization, School-Business Partnerships of Long Island Inc. He replaces **Janet Anderson,** who had also been interim president. Her term expired in April. Anderson assumed the post upon the death in 2010 of **Fred Breithut,** 84, who founded the organization in 1984. Breithut was a Nassau school district administrator.

SBPLI is known in school districts across Long Island for hosting robotics competitions each year at Hofstra University. The competitions began in 1999 with eight districts. Today students from 43 Long Island school districts construct robots — of just about any size and shape — out of materials donated to them by technology companies. The ro-

bots compete in games at Hofstra over a weekend. This year the competition was in March.

Schuler, who last July started his own business, Industrial Products Reports, a takeoff on Consumer Reports but for industrial components, said SBPLI is aimed at giving students a familiarity with engineering in hopes of lessening the shortage of such professionals on the Island and nationwide.

"The need [for engineers] is greater than ever," Schuler said.

**Yacov Shamash,** vice president for economic development and dean of the College of Engineering at Stony Brook University, said Long Island colleges graduate, on average, 550 to 600 engineers a year, about half what the city of Seattle does.

**Frank Otto,** president of the



High school robotics in competition at Hofstra this spring

Long Island Forum for Technology, had served on SBPLI's board. Otto said he found colleges were not graduating enough engineers to fill the needs of indus-

try. "We had to reach down into the high schools" to spark students' interest, Otto said. "The only program I found" to do that "was SBPLI."