

# Made by Hand, Built by Heart



## JFK Students Displaying Manufacturing Excellence

On Friday night, long after the halls had cleared, they remained in the shop. They measured and cut, once or twice they measured and cut again, they sanded and assembled.

The shop was a world apart, lit by the bright buzz of machines and the steady murmur of collaboration. They were opponents on paper, yet I watched them bend toward one another, offering materials, advice, a hand when one faltered.

This weekend, six students from the MaD program set out for the second annual SVMA Manufacturing Challenge. Adrian Disantis, Simon Fletcher, Ryan Ford, Chance Johnson, Katrine Li, and Rachel Synpieski carried with them not just their projects, but the weight of their ambitions.

The challenge was simple in its telling but vast in its execution. They were asked to design, manufacture, and tell the story of a unique tic-tac-toe board and its game pieces. Yet what unfolded was much more than a contest. It was a testament to craft, to patience, to pride in the work of one's own hands.

They stood among 112 students from 16 different schools. They were six of the seven who represented SCUSD. The skies hung low and heavy, but beneath that gray dome, our students burned as bright as their polished aluminum.



They understood something that can never be taught. They understood that real excellence rises when you lift those beside you.

Saturday morning. Nine o'clock. The doors opened and the judges came. Professionals whose hands had shaped real industries, whose eyes had seen thousands of projects. They moved from student to student, searching for process, for love hidden in detail, for a spark that no rubric could measure.

Our students stood steady beneath that gaze and told the stories of their boards, the stories of their labor.

The hours stretched long. Hope frayed and was rewoven. At last the awards ceremony began.

The first award was for innovation — not simply for making, but for dreaming past the bounds of the assignment. They spoke of a student who had changed the rules, who had met setbacks with stubborn grace. And then they said her name. Katrine Li.



Katrine's board was a reflection on her love for golf, a game that demands patience, vision, quiet precision. She made nine tiles that could be shuffled and reset for every match. Each turn was not just a claim of space but a small act of play, a miniature trial of aim and control. For her brilliance, Katrine, a current Junior, received a scholarship check for five hundred dollars. The sponsor, seeing the value in her work, purchased the board for two hundred dollars more.

Then came the award for Most Intricate Process. It was Junior, Adrian Disantis who rose to meet it. Adrian, who had made a board that seemed to defy the limits of a high school shop. His creation, cut and shaped entirely from aluminum, held a precision that drew nods from seasoned machinists. Every piece demanded multiple operations, each fit crafted to tolerances so tight the judges could scarcely believe it had been done by a student's hand. For his work, Adrian too received a five hundred dollar scholarship.

In the end, it was never just about boards or game pieces. It was about the quiet excellence found in late nights, in small moments of coopertition, in the fierce pride of seeing an idea made real. Our students left that gray morning brighter than when they arrived. They did not simply compete. They built, they gave, they grew.

**And they made us proud.**

