

## TROPICAL LIFE

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ALEJANDRO PEREZ

**GETTING THE HANG OF IT:** Gulliver Prep students Victor Naziazeni and Caroline Herald help teacher Scott Dorfman fine tune the O.P.EN device. Below, a close-up of its business end.

# WITHIN THEIR GRASP



CHARLES TRAINOR JR./MIAMI HERALD STAFF

A door-opening device for workers in wheelchairs could win Gulliver Prep students a top national prize

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Confined to a wheelchair by cerebral palsy, Scott Dorfman depended on others at the nonprofit where he teaches to open and close doors for him.

"I had to ask anybody around me for help, so it can be pretty limiting," says Dorfman, 28.

Then a team of engineering students from Gulliver Preparatory School designed the Operational Portable Entry Device, which uses a telescopic mechanical arm with a clamp at the end to open doors. When attached to a wheelchair, it pivots horizontally and is adjustable vertically.

The device, dubbed O.P.EN, won the students Dorfman's gratitude and admiration. It also earned the Pinecrest school one of five finalist spots in the National Engineering Design Challenge, in which 250 high school teams vied to design the best technology to assist a dis-



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living: See the  
device in action**

abled person in the workplace. The finals, before a panel of judges, are Thursday in Washington, D.C.

It won't be Gulliver's first shot at the \$3,000 top prize. The school has been a finalist four of the six times it has entered the national competition, and has won twice — in 2003 for Time Traveler, a suitcase with see-through compartments to make airport inspections easier, and in 2006 for the Simple Electronic Ergonomic Box Opener for people with arthritis or carpal tunnel syndrome.

"The competition is an application of what they learn in class," says Claude Charron, Gulliver's science department chairman and the students' mentor. "We want to encourage hands-on learning and push them to see what they can create."

\*TURN TO GULLIVER, 4E

