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FIRST Robotics Team Being Assembled At Regional # 7

Posted on 17 October 2011.



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By: Andrew Pelletier

When I was a kid, I was a Sci-Fi junkie. Especially robots... the robot from Lost in Space, Robby the Robot, R2-D2 and C3PO from Star Wars. Mechanized heroes of yesteryear, who were programmed to protect and assist their human masters. However, today's modern high school students are doing something much cooler... even cooler than science fiction. They're joining Robotics Teams like the one that is now forming at Northwestern Regional # 7 High School, and building their own robots!

The "FIRST" Robotics Team, FIRST being an acronym for: "For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology", is a program that is capturing the imaginations of Northwestern Regional # 7 High School students. Already, students are eager to take on the challenge, which will call on them to work together as a team, brainstorm and share ideas, to imagine, plan and design and to work with experienced mentors who currently work in the fields of technology and engineering. The club will meet after school and is for high school students grades 9 – 12, but a middle school program is being looked into, to develop an interest early in younger students. The team will have a strict time schedule to follow and must work together to design and build a robot that must carry out a specified task while competing with their peer's mechanical creations under stressful competition. Spectators and contestants alike are just as enthusiastic as any crowd that has ever attended a varsity sporting event. It gets downright *wild!* The FIRST Robotics team, is being touted as "The Varsity Sport of the Mind" that combines the excitement of sports with the rigors of science and technology. Here's what the FIRST Robotics schedule look like: In October, the Northwestern team will register with the FRC (or FIRST Robotics Competition), visit Farmington High School and their established Robotics team, and meet and greet with potential adult mentors and engineers. In November/December, the Robotics team will hold strategy meetings and receive training and technical advice on building a robot.

In January, the FRC season begins! On January 7th, 2012, the Robotics team will watch a live broadcast of the competition regulations and will also be given a password to decode the FRC competition manual and to pick up a pre-packaged kit of parts. The kit of parts is exactly the same for every team involved nationally. From January 7th, 2012 the Robotics team has 6 weeks to design and build a working robot that will carry out a specific task that is to

be detailed in the competition manual.

In February, the Northwestern team will be notified of any changes or improvements to the regulations via email. Then it's Robot Ship Day. The team must stop work on their robot and have the robot shipped Fed Ex to the competition location.

In March, the competitions begin. The robot entries compete and will be judged and awarded for design, creativity, innovation and cultural changing behavior.

In April, winning teams will send a delegation to the FIRST championship in St. Louis, Missouri! From there the team could also earn a place in the World Championships and qualify for \$15,000,000 in college Scholarships.

Alcoa Foundation provides full funding, engineering support for Robotics Program

In an interview with Superintendent Judith Palmer and High School Principal Ken Chichester, they both spoke enthusiastically of the program. According to Superintendent Judith Palmer, "The thrust right now in our national educational system is in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, or STEM areas. The Robotics program is an ideal way to introduce our young students to STEM areas." High school Principal, Ken Chichester, added, "We're experiencing an era much like the late 50's and the Sputnik era space race. America is lagging behind in the STEM areas. The Robotics competition is the perfect mechanism to bring applied theory of STEM-based curriculum and to use it practically." The program will be ideal for students concentrating their studies in the STEM areas and who may apply to such schools as MIT, RIT, Rensselaer or Worcester Poly Tech. They also said that the students will be working with local professionals in technology and engineering who can "share knowledge and real world experience". The Robotics Team's lead Engineer and Mentor will be Mike Sullivan of Alcoa Howmet with assistance from Sterling's John Lavieri who has offered shop access to the students on the Robotics team. Alcoa Foundation will provide 2 years of funding thanks to a \$35,000 grant from the Alcoa Foundation. No funding will be necessary from Regional towns to support the Robotics team start up during this two-year period. It is hoped that other local businesses and corporations will recognize the enormous value of the Robotics program and help support the program in the future.

Applying what is learned in the classroom toward building a robot

When asked what classes would benefit the team, Ken Chichester and Judith Palmer said that the students will act as their own administrators, so business skills will be useful for press releases, communications, facilitation and promotion. Graphic artists and web designers will be needed, CAD operators for designing components and computer animation and 3-d program operators can be utilized to render their robot design before it's built.

Mathematics will involve fractions, decimal points, Algebra, Geometry, trigonometry and calculus. Computer science and Physics will be called on as well as electrical and mechanical engineering. Practical skills will also help the team such as using hand and power tools and measuring devices.

Recruiting and community outreach

A great deal of interest was created when Ken Chichester and Judith Palmer went to the school cafeteria and science classes and promoted the FIRST Robotics Program. At last count they had 30 students signed up. Principal Chichester also said that he is going to send a letter to each town selectman, promoting the program in each town and asking for their input. "Regional 7 High School is a compilation of communities.", he said, "When the robot is completed, we're going to take it on a tour to local Town Halls, so that the community can see what they helped create through their input."

What the program needs

2-3 Professional Engineers who can guide the students through the engineering, designing and fabrication challenges.

2-3 additional adults to handle organization, communication, registration, website and travel arrangements

Anyone who is interested in assisting in this endeavor should contact Mr. Ken Chichester, Principal of Northwestern Regional # 7 High School, at 860-379-8525 or email him at kchichester@nwr7.org

FIRST Robotics and what its competitions look and sound like

To learn more about Dean Kamen's inspirational FIRST Robotics programs visit the [USFIRST website](#). Watch the video posted on [YouTube](#) to get a taste of the Robotics programs and to understand why the FIRST Robotics program at Regional is causing such a stir.

More about Alcoa and the Alcoa Foundation

Alcoa Howmet is located on Price Road in the Winsted Industrial Park off Route 8, north of the Winsted center. Alcoa is the world's leading integrated aluminum company, providing jobs to 59,000 employees across 31 countries. Since inventing the modern-day aluminum industry more than 120 years ago, Alcoa innovation has been behind major milestones in the aerospace, automotive, packaging, building and construction, commercial transportation, consumer electronics and industrial markets.

This is how the company describes the work of its Foundation and its employees:

"Wherever we operate across the globe, we work hard to earn our social license to operate every day. Guided

by the Alcoa Community Framework, Alcoa and Alcoa Foundation partner with nonprofits, academic institutions, local governments, and civic organizations to address community development needs and advance the company's core priorities around environment, empowerment, education, and sustainable design.

Our commitment is further strengthened by the hands-on work of thousands of our employee volunteers, who each day play an active role in making the neighborhoods and the communities in which we operate safer, stronger, and more compelling places to live and work."

To learn more about how Alcoa is addressing local needs and tackling global challenges, please visit the [Alcoa Foundation website](#).

HUGE THANKS: To the **Alcoa employees** and the **Alcoa Foundation** for launching the Robotics Program at Regional # 7 – the ultimate in fun while learning!



A team's robot competes at a recent FIRST Robotics competition. Photo from the internet

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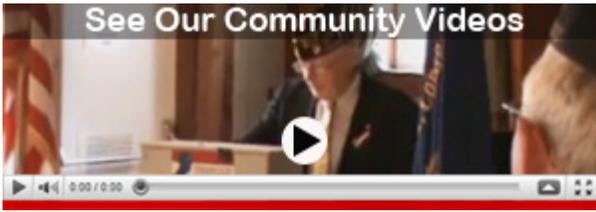
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