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Coming to an Arena Near You: The Ultimate Robotics Competition That Celebrates Science and Technology

***Inaugural New York Tech Valley Regional FIRST® Robotics Competition (March 13-15)
at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute***

Troy, N.Y. – Get ready to see the ultimate display of science, mathematics, and technology in action as 38 teams of high school students from the Capital Region, as well as other teams from New York state, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Washington D.C., Indiana, and two international teams from Turkey and Canada, put their robots to the test and compete in the inaugural New York Tech Valley FIRST® (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics Competition.

“FIRST brings a unique combination of science, technology, creative collaboration and mentoring from professional engineers to students,” said Elliott Masie, FIRST Board of Directors and CEO of Saratoga Springs-based MASIE Center. “This inspires creativity and forges the skills, self-confidence and rounded life capabilities young people need to become our future leaders.”

During a six-week time frame, students work with professional engineering mentors to design a robot that solves a problem using a standard kit of parts and set of rules. Once these young inventors create the robot, their teams participate in competitions that measure the effectiveness of each robot, the power of collaboration and the determination of students.

“At Rensselaer, our goal is to develop well-rounded, engaged, mature thinkers and innovators who are intellectually agile, and who possess the multicultural sophistication to become transformative forces across the globe,” said Rensselaer President Shirley Ann Jackson. “We are pleased to host the Tech Valley FIRST Robotics Competition, which brings together high school students from around the world to test themselves and experience the excitement of discovery and innovation – preparing the leaders of tomorrow for the challenges ahead.”

The New York Tech Valley Regional is one of four FIRST regional competitions in New York state and one of 100 regional events taking place across the country this month. Winners for design excellence, sportsmanship, teamwork, and more will advance to the FIRST championship competition in St. Louis, Mo. in April.

“Robotics and engineering education benefits all students, even those who pursue a career in something other than engineering,” said U.S. Congressman Paul Tonko (NY-20). “Events like this at RPI help our future leaders hone their analytical, problem-solving, and team-building skills, while providing them with an overall preparedness for the workforce of tomorrow. I thank RPI for continuing the push in our community to better equip our students for quality, 21st century jobs and for meeting our engineering education needs.”

FIRST Robotics Competition sponsors and volunteers come from some of the most highly regarded organizations that share a concern for providing STEM opportunities for Tech Valley’s future workforce, including the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) which is the regional lead sponsor, General Electric, National Grid, Rensselaer, Time Warner Cable, Integrated Liner Technology, Global Foundries, Hilton Garden Inn and Recovery Sports Grill. Sponsors provide resources including time and talent from professional mentors, services, equipment, financial contributions, and volunteers.

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“NASA has supported and sponsored teams participating in the *FIRST* Robotics Competition for the last 20 years. We do that because we know that these students represent the next generation of great engineers, scientists, and inventors. They will create the workforce behind the national economy for the next several decades,” said Dave Lavery, program executive for Solar System Exploration at NASA Headquarters. “They will be the ones who will help us create the robots that will explore the solar system – and we hope that one of these students will be the first human to put her footprint on Mars.”

“This event will help prepare today's students for the demands of tomorrow's highly technical jobs by teaching science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills; innovative thinking; and the value of collaboration,” said John B. Rhodes, president and CEO, New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA.) “As Governor Cuomo’s energy agenda continues to expand the clean-tech economy in New York state, programs like this help inspire and develop a skilled workforce for those high-tech job opportunities.”

“GE is committed to initiatives like NY Tech Valley *FIRST* Robotics because they are critical to the cultivation of a future, technology talent pipeline,” said Mark M. Little, GE's chief technology officer and senior vice president of GE's Global Research Center in Niskayuna. “Our scientists and engineers are working with and mentoring these young innovators and helping to show them how problem solving, teamwork, and perseverance can translate into a technology career on a global scale.”

This year’s *FIRST* game, titled [AERIAL ASSIST](#), is played by two alliances each comprised of three teams. Alliances compete by trying to score as many balls in goals as possible during a two-minute-and-30-second match. Additional points are earned by robots working together to score goals, such as by throwing and catching balls over a truss suspended about five feet above the floor as they move the ball down the field. Participating teams compete for honors and recognition that reward design excellence, competitive play, sportsmanship, and high-impact partnerships among schools, businesses and communities.

"To build an excellent robot, you need an excellent engineer," said National Grid Regional Director William Flaherty. "The *FIRST* Robotics competition is a starting point for many of those excellent engineers. National Grid has been a sponsor of *FIRST* events for more than 10 years in New York and Massachusetts, and we recognize that this is a wonderful way to get young people thinking about careers in science and technology fields. As our engineering team retires, we will need these young engineers to take their place building and maintaining the electric grid of tomorrow."

“*FIRST* Robotics Competitions really bring the excitement of a sporting event to science and technology via robotics. Students are engaged, inspired, and excited to participate in science and technology – a mindset that will last long after the competition and put them on a path to a successful career and bright future,” said Paul Schoch, associate professor in the Rensselaer Electrical, Computer, and Systems Engineering Department and director of the university’s Center for Initiatives in Pre-College Education (CIPCE). Schoch and Mary Burke, manager of special projects at NYSERDA, are co-chairs of the New York Tech Valley competition.

“Time Warner Cable has been a longtime supporter of robotics in the Capital Region so it’s very exciting to be involved as a founding sponsor of this new regional *FIRST* tournament. Through our Connect a Million Minds program, which offers hands-on STEM learning to tomorrow’s problems solvers, our employees are able to engage with communities and students in impactful ways,” said Gary Withey, area vice president of operations for Time Warner Cable. “For us, it’s all about inspiring kids to think differently about learning, finding a passion, and giving them options for future careers. Congratulations to all of the local corporate partners engaged in this event weekend who recognize, as TWC does, that investing in our community’s future is the key to success.”

More than 1,000 high school students, along with hundreds of teachers, industry and college mentors, parents and 3,000 pounds of metal, gears and electronics will converge on the East Campus Athletic Village at Rensselaer for two days of matches. Congressman Tonko, Rensselaer President Jackson and GE Chief Technology Officer Little will deliver remarks on Saturday, March 15 at 9 a.m. Competition matches (Friday, March 14, 8:20 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. and Saturday, March 15, 9:20 a.m. – 3 p.m.) are open to the public. Admission is free.

“I was asked to find a place to hold a new competition where demand was greatest and enthusiasm was the best, and felt that the Capital Region is the place,” said Ana Martinez, *FIRST* regional director. “With the current cluster of *FIRST* teams in this area, the long list of sponsoring organizations, and the support of the business community and our many partners, I predict that this will be a very popular regional competition for years to come.”

This season, participating *FIRST* students are also eligible to apply for more than \$19 million in scholarships from 150 scholarship providers.

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About *FIRST* Robotics Competition (FRC®)

The *FIRST* Robotics Competition (FRC®) is a program that challenges high school students - working with professional mentors - to design and build a robot to contend in competitions that measure the effectiveness of each robot, the power of collaboration, and the determination of students. Now in its 23rd season, the *FIRST* Robotics Competition anticipates close to 2,720 teams in the United States and 16 countries worldwide to compete in 54 Regional Events and 40 District Competitions. Teams in the New York Tech Valley *FIRST* Robotics Competition will vie for regional awards and a spot at the *FIRST* Championship to be held April 23-26, at the Edward Jones Dome in St. Louis, Mo.

About *FIRST*®

Accomplished inventor Dean Kamen founded *FIRST*® (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) in 1989 to inspire an appreciation of science and technology in young people. Based in Manchester, N.H., *FIRST* designs accessible, innovative programs to build self-confidence, knowledge, and life skills while motivating young people to pursue opportunities in science, technology, and engineering. With support from more than 200 of the Fortune 500 companies and more than \$19 million in college scholarships, the not-for-profit organization hosts the *FIRST*® Robotics Competition (FRC®) for students in Grades 9-12; *FIRST* Tech Challenge (FTC®) for Grades 7-12; *FIRST* LEGO® League (FLL®) for Grades 4-8; and Junior *FIRST* LEGO® League (Jr.FLL®) for Grades K-3. Gracious Professionalism® is a way of doing things that encourages high-quality work, emphasizes the value of others, and respects individuals and the community. To learn more about *FIRST*, go to www.usfirst.org. To learn more about *FIRST* in New York Tech Valley, visit www.techvalleyfirst.org.