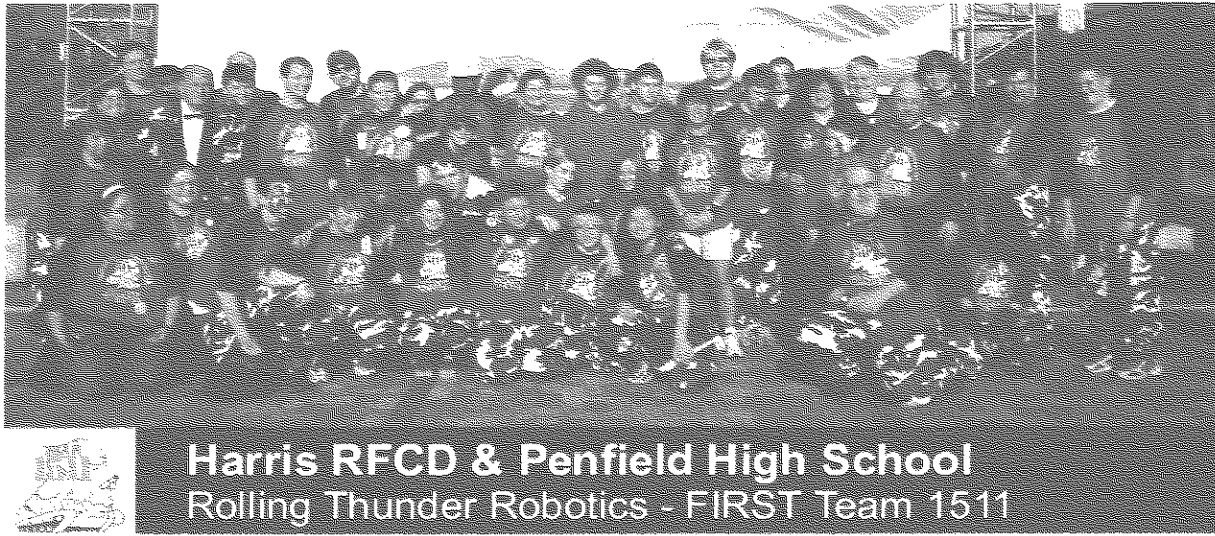


ROBOTICS AIMING HIGH THROUGH RFCD MENTORS

By Doug Hitchcock



Harris RFCD & Penfield High School
Rolling Thunder Robotics - FIRST Team 1511

The Rolling Thunder Robotics team just completed its second year in the worldwide FIRST Robotics Competition. The team, a partnership between Harris RFCD and Penfield High School, is led by mentors from RF Communications. This year's mentors were: Adzim Auzar, Eric Averill, Amy Downs, Karen Fellows, Dough Hitchcock, Larry Lewis Jr., Mike O'Brien, Kim O'Toole, Eric Peach, Josh Schmiedlin, and Gary Schwenck. They dedicated their time and skills to develop and build a robot, while inspiring high school students about the world of engineering.

In addition, the students and the Harris mentors give demonstrations of technology to many different groups in the Rochester area, provide countless hours of community service projects, and act as ambassadors spreading the words of "gracious professionalism", the mantra of the FIRST organization. FIRST, an acronym, "For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology," was started by Dean Kamen, inventor of the Segway Human Transporter and other innovative products. FIRST is designed to energize high school students to look at science and technology in the same light as a sporting event.

With over 40 students, the "Rolling Thunder" participated in two regional events and the world championship. In March, the team attended the Finger Lakes Regional competition held at R.I.T. with 30 local-area high schools, where the team won the "Engineering Inspiration" award, which is the second-highest award given. This award celebrates outstanding success in advancing appreciation for engineering as an academic pursuit and career path. At the Boston Regional, "Rolling Thunder" won the "Imagery" Award, given to the team that had the best overall professional image including elements such as the team's name, logo, attire, and pit/booth design. Both Harris and Penfield High School use red & black as their logo colors, and the students really have loved dressing in red camouflage outfits.

In late April, the entire team, in a sea of red camouflage, traveled to Atlanta GA for the worldwide championships with over 300 other high school teams. More than 12,000 students, mentors, and friends of FIRST crowded into the Georgia Dome for three days of robotics competition and knowledge-sharing about the fun and rewarding life of engineering. As Mike O'Brien, one of the Harris mentors stated: "It was truly an amazing site to see over 300 robots all programmed to complete the same tasks, yet each robot had very different uses of hardware and software to get that task accomplished." The team is always looking for new mentors. For more information, visit www.penfieldrobotics.com or contact Kim O'Toole via e-mail.