

Team spirit helps Penfield's robotics squad advance

High schoolers to compete at Georgia Dome next week

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(April 4, 2007) — PENFIELD — Penfield High School's Rolling Thunder Robotics Team has designed and built a robot that can hang plastic inner tube rings on a 10-foot-tall rack with spokes. At the FIRST National Robotics Competition at the Georgia Dome next week, this robot will compete against other robots in what mentor teacher Eric Brewer describes as a "three-dimensional tic-tac-toe game."



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JEN RYNDA staff photographer

Penfield High School's Rolling Thunder team, including parents and mentors, hang around with ROFL Bot, center, last year's robot.

[Day in Photos](#)

Rolling Thunder advanced to the national competition in Atlanta not because of how well this robot operates, but rather how well the team does.

FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) is a nonprofit organization that aims to motivate young people to pursue education and career opportunities in science, technology, engineering and math.

At the FIRST Finger Lakes Robotics Competition in March, Rolling Thunder won the Regional Chairman's Award for creating the best partnership effort among team participants and best exemplifying the spirit of public service.

Rolling Thunder students mentor 15 teams of middle and elementary school students who compete in the FIRST Lego League. They also clean up roads and collect food for the needy.

Senior leader and team captain Mark Mascadri says his team is guided by the spirit of gracious professionalism and cooperation.

"If something breaks on another team's robot, you want to go help them," said Jackie Nielsen, another senior team captain.

This marks the third year that the team has participated in the FIRST robotics competition. In January, teams around the world received rules for this year's game and a set of common basic parts. They had six weeks to get their robots built and shipped.

"Everyone has touched at least one part of this robot," said Austin Quinn, Rolling Thunder's FIRST Lego League junior coordinator.

During the building season, some students spent up to 40 hours a week working on their robot.

To make sure the students stay up on their schoolwork, the team hosts mandatory homework sessions with mentors during building season. "It's very intense," said Brewer. "The ones who stick with it, they get so much out of it."

Mascadri says being on the team changed his life. "I'm going to school to be an engineer," he said. "When I started I didn't know what I was going to do."

There are 30 students and 25 mentors, including engineers and parents, on the Penfield High School team, which is sponsored by Harris Corp. A team from Benjamin Franklin High School on Norton Street also will be traveling to the national competition.

Multimedia extras

Battling Bots at RIT

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- [Photo gallery: Contest kicks off](#)
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Alexis Buckley, left, makes buttons with team mentor Sharon Wolf, right, both of Penfield. The team's robot will be one of 500 that will compete at next week's national competition.

More than 500 robots will compete next week.

Theo Mett, Rolling Thunder's freshman leader, says the students aren't nervous. "We're just going to go out and have fun."