

LEGO Robot Challenge Coming to Michigan Tech

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NOVEMBER 4, 2004 -- If you remember using LEGOs to build walls or little houses, you haven't seen LEGOs lately.

Think robots. Think programmable movement.

Elementary and middle school teams from all over the western and central U.P. will converge on the Michigan Tech campus November 13 to show what they can do with these 21st Century LEGOs.

It is part of the nationwide FIRST LEGO League. Each September, all teams receive the challenge, which changes each year. The teams use the LEGO Mindstorms robotic invention system to make a robot capable of completing the challenge's various missions. They have eight weeks to do so.

The 2004 challenge is called "No Limits," with robots performing missions related to technology to help people with disabilities.

Each team also does a research project on how robot technology can help people with disabilities. Students use LEGO bricks and other elements--such as sensors, motors and gears--to gain hands-on experience in engineering and computer programming.

The event will draw 36 teams from all over the UP and is the second largest regional tournament in the state. Michigan Tech's Robotics Systems Enterprise and the Western UP Center for Math, Science and Environmental Education will host the regional. Regional sponsors are Michigan Tech's Engineering Fundamentals Department, the Michigan Tech College of Engineering and McGann Building Supply.

The action starts at 8 am, Saturday, November 13, at the varsity gym in Michigan Tech's Student Development Complex. Teams will continue with their robot competitions and their presentations until 3:00 pm. Closing ceremonies will take place at 3:30pm.

"This is a great way for these students to take what they are learning in math and science classes and apply it to a real problem," said Shawn Oppliger, director of the Western U.P. Center for Science, Mathematics and Environmental Education.

FIRST means "For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology." The organization formed to interest high school students in science by sponsoring a competition with full-sized robots. FIRST LEGO League is the farm system for the FIRST competition.

For information about the competition, contact Shawn Oppliger at 906-482-0331 or sopplige@ccisd.k12.mi.us. For more information about FIRST LEGO League, visit www.firstlegoleague.org and www.michiganfll.org.