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FIRST Robotics Competition Kickoff

Students AIM HIGH in 2006



The packed stands at the University of Southern New Hampshire in Manchester, NH were abuzz with expectation. They had come from all over New England, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and even from Canada, sporting brightly colored t-shirts and names like "Gladiators," "Blue Stars," "Tough Techs," "Cyber Knights," "Spontaneous Combustion," and "Duct Tape Bandits." They were joined by others in 38 remote locations, who tuned in via NASA broadcast and webcast.

Speculation came to an end on Saturday, January 7 for over 28,000 eager high-school students and their mentors at the 2006 *FIRST* Robotics Competition (FRC) Kickoff. *FIRST* unveiled the long-anticipated engineering challenge that will engross over 1,125 teams for the next six weeks. In the process, they will tackle "a problem too big, a time too short, a budget too small, and a team too large," according to Dr. Woodie Flowers.

Presenters *FIRST* chairman John Abele, president Paul Gudonis, founder Dean Kamen, advisor Dr. Woodie Flowers, and NASA program executive Dave Lavery thanked the sponsors and mentors whose contributions make it possible for *FIRST* to inspire an appreciation for science and technology in tens of thousands of young people. They urged students to have fun, appreciate the opportunity and experience of *FIRST*, and learn about themselves in the process; emphasized teamwork, cooperation, and gracious professionalism; reinforced the importance of

safety practices; delivered best wishes from *FIRST* LEGO® League and *FIRST* Vex™ Challenge teams; and - at last - revealed the AIM HIGH game details.

[AIM HIGH](#) requires students' robots to launch or push balls into goals and climb a ramp to the platform in their end zones, while human players enter balls into play and score points by throwing/pushing balls into corner goals. The game offers teams exciting new challenges including:

- A 3 versus 3 alliance competition, with 3 versus 2 offense/defense periods
- A lighted target to improve the vision system function (camera and associated electronics)
- Launching balls and pushing balls into goals

2006 Season Fast Facts

- 1,133 teams
- 28,000 high-school students
- 16,000 mentors
- 3,400 event volunteers
- 7 countries
- 33 [Regional events](#)
- 1 Championship, April 27-29, Georgia Dome, Atlanta
- Close to \$8 million in scholarships
- 56 suppliers
- Over 2,000 sponsors

FIRST is pleased to welcome Bill Miller as Director of the *FIRST* Robotics Competition. A high-school athlete and Eagle Scout, Bill went on to the Military Academy at West Point and served on active duty, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel in the US Army Reserves. Bill began a 27-year career at Polaroid where he started in thin film coating operations and later held roles including VP of Technology for a commercial battery spinout and Group Licensing Operations Manager. After serving as Senior VP of Operations at Pep-Direct, Bill joined *FIRST*. As an engineer, Bill understands the importance of encouraging young people to pursue education and careers in science and technology. He also sees the embodiment of gracious professionalism at *FIRST* as "life the way it should be." He looks forward to expanding the reach of the program while preserving *FIRST* ideals and the quality of the FRC experience. Bill will lead the FRC program through its largest season ever in 2006.



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FIRST LEGO[®] League Day at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution

Experts generously share knowledge with teams

A day at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution (WHOI) in Falmouth, MA brought the Ocean Odyssey Challenge to life for 160 *FIRST* LEGO League (FLL) students and their team leaders.

On Tuesday, November 15, 2005 enthusiastic *FIRST* LEGO Leaguers were given the unique opportunity to visit the world's largest independent oceanographic institution and learn about the latest ocean science research problems from leading investigators. This half-day of scientific presentations was developed in response to a large number of requests by FLL teams for assistance with their Ocean Odyssey projects.

The presentation topics included:

- Dangers to whales in the North Atlantic
- Oil spills
- Exploring hydrothermal vent systems
- Predicting hurricanes
- Ship wrecks

The presentations were lively and informative, and conducted by WHOI experts in these fields. The students were highly engaged throughout the presentations, asking insightful questions and sharing some interesting remarks. The [presentations](#) were made available to all FLL teams on the WHOI web site.

All in all, it was a very successful day for the teams. *FIRST* wants to once again thank WHOI for

its exceptional support of the FLL program and its teams this year.

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2005 *FIRST* LEGO® League

Ocean Odyssey Challenge makes a big splash

Many of those involved in *FIRST* LEGO League can testify that the program inspires young people, introduces them to the fun and excitement of science and technology, and builds self-confidence, knowledge, and life skills. For those who have not personally participated in FLL, there is new evidence of some of the reasons for the success of the program.

[Recent independent evaluations](#) conducted by Brandeis University show that FLL provides participants with the kinds of experiences that are recommended by research on positive youth development, including:

- Clear expectations
- Supported relationships
- Opportunities for skill building
- Youth decision-making and responsibility
- Positive identification with a group
- Mentorship
- Scheduled use of after-school time
- Motivating activities
- Integration of family, school, and community

FIRST LEGO League continues to grow and have a profound influence on young people. The Ocean Odyssey Challenge has made a big splash with over 7,500 teams in 32 countries. Every FLL season brings us new stories from the FLL community, and this year was no exception as

we learned about:

- An FLL team - Cardinals Team #3031 - in Lone, Oregon, a rural town with a population of only 279.
- FLL Partner Dana Hobbs, who brought her church youth group from Alabama to Mississippi in October to help another FLL Partner clear out his parents' hurricane-damaged house.
- The FLL team at Oconomowoc Middle School in Wisconsin that asked their teacher - who had to constrain the amount of time she could devote to the program before and after school - for lunch detentions so they could come in and work on their robot.
- Fred Wright, FLL coach of IS 93 from Queens, NY, who went to Carnota on the rugged coast of northwestern Spain to introduce FLL in partnership with IES "Lamas de Castelo" secondary school. Carnota was the site of the "Prestige" oil spill 5 years ago, one of the largest in history and a very relevant topic for the Ocean Odyssey Challenge. Over 3 days, students and teachers were trained, the field set was built, and Carnota had the first FLL team in Spain. The highlight was a live video and audio transmission between the schools where IS 93 students demonstrated various missions to their Spanish teammates who will be virtual partners in current and future tournaments.
- Team 995 from Oscarville, Alaska, a village with a total population of 65 and a K-12 school with 24 students in a 4-room schoolhouse. The Oscarville Technobots will have the experience of a lifetime when they attend the FLL World Festival at the Georgia Dome in April. The Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) in Alaska had 1 FLL team in 2003 and expanded to 23 teams in 2 short years.
- A 10 year-old FLL participant from Wolcott Nitrobots Team # 3297 who was so excited to get to the FLL Tournament that she forgot to put on her shoes and spent the entire day in her fuzzy blue slippers.

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FIRST LEGO® League Looks Forward to 2006

Exploring existing sciences at the molecular level



FIRST LEGO League (FLL) proudly announces that the 2006 Challenge is Nano Quest!

There is a new frontier that will impact every facet of society, from medicine to computers to the environment. As visionaries and scientists, the 2006 *FIRST* LEGO League teams will explore unimaginably amazing new technologies that start in the Nano world and lead to the things we do and use every day. Teams will discover the secrets of everyday stuff through this cutting-edge field of research, where carbon Nanotubes, Buckyballs, molecular motors and quantum dots will be considered part of daily conversation. Sure it sounds like science fiction, but the future has arrived!

Learn more about the [Nano Quest](#) Challenge, and make plans to join us.

Registration will begin in May.

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FIRST Vex™ Challenge Pilot Off to a Great Start

Rookie teams discover the fun and excitement of the *FIRST* experience

There was no shortage of great minds, awesome ideas, rock 'n roll music, energetic high-school students, and robots as nearly 90 teams from the St. Louis, MO, Newark, DE, Orangeburg, SC, and Fort Worth, TX areas faced the challenges of this year's "Half-Pipe Hustle" game in *FIRST* Vex Challenge (FVC) pilot program events. The pilot season is off to a great start, with four of the six scheduled tournaments completed. Teams from in and around Hartford, CT and Duluth, GA are eager to have their turn in the coming months.

Jim Rapp, team mentor and father of two members of the St. Mary Central FVC team, was not prepared for the intensity of the event held December 3, 2005 in St. Louis. "It was very hair-raising." There were mechanical breakdowns and offensive moves by other teams that kept the outcome of the remote-controlled rounds uncertain until the end. "It was every bit as intense as a football or basketball game," said Jim, whose team ultimately came away with the FVC Winning Alliance Award, the FVC Connect Award, and the FVC Create Award.

The first two FVC events were paired with *FIRST* LEGO League (FLL) tournaments, giving FLL team members the opportunity to discover the next level of robotics competition awaiting them and adding energy, spirit, and fun to the overall event. Existing *FIRST* Robotics Competition team members are also getting in on the action. Several FRC teams are finding that FVC is a great off-season activity to get them ready for programming and competing with the bigger robots.

Planning has already begun for the *FIRST* Vex Challenge competition at the *FIRST*

Championship in Atlanta, GA on April 27-29. Prequalifying award winners from the six pilot tournaments, as well as teams selected through a lottery system, will compete alongside other championship teams in what promises to be an exciting, "high-fun" event in Atlanta.

For more information on upcoming *FIRST* Vex Challenge pilot tournaments and the championship event, visit the [FIRST Vex Challenge Events page](#).

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Meet new *FIRST* President, Paul Gudonis

To the *FIRST* community:

It's an honor to join you and lead the *FIRST* organization. Due to your dedication of time, money, and other support, you are having a tremendously positive effect on so many young lives. With the challenges that our young people face today, your efforts are showing them a path to a brighter future.

Since coming on board in October, I've spent the last few months meeting volunteers, sponsors, and team members across the country. I've learned what makes *FIRST* special and received input on what we can do to make it an even better experience for our participants. We've talked about the hurdles of fundraising, the type of support that the *FIRST* staff could provide to regional committees and teams, and ideas from game design to systems to marketing and public relations. There are a lot of good ideas out there.

We're having a great season of competitions in our various programs. The *FIRST*LEGO®

League has been hosting a record number of teams engaging in the Ocean Odyssey Challenge. New *FIRST* teams are taking to the Half-pipe Hustle in our *FIRST* Vex™ Challenge pilot. And I thoroughly enjoyed my first *FIRST* Robotics Competition kickoff. While we have our challenges, we have a flourishing organization that is making an impact on our culture.

After 25 years of experience in growing technology companies - in cell phones, software, and Internet services - I was attracted to *FIRST* for 2 reasons: 1) It's a "big idea." Dean Kamen's vision of inspiring young people to pursue careers in science and engineering is so important and timely in a world that has become "flat," where our youth face unprecedented global competition which will determine their standard of living in the future; and 2) There's a very personal connection. I was the first one in my family to go to college, and I was encouraged by adult mentors and was able to afford my education thanks to several scholarships. I would have loved to be part of a *FIRST* team if it had existed when I was in school.

I look forward to working with you to expand our programs so that an even greater number of students have the opportunity to experience *FIRST*. Thanks for what you've done - and what you're going to do - for the young members of our society.

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Senior Mentor Project Enters 2nd Year

Further strengthens the volunteer network



As *FIRST* continues to grow, so does its network of extraordinary volunteers. We salute the 45,000 individuals who will donate their time and talent - as mentors and event volunteers - to help *FIRST* reach over 93,000 young people this year.

In November, 2004 *FIRST* proudly launched the Senior Mentor Project to expand and support the network of *FIRST* volunteers. Senior Mentors serve for a 12-month term, dedicating an average of 20 to 40 hours per week to enhance and expand *FIRST* programs in their local areas. Their efforts are focused on recruiting and supporting *FIRST* team mentors and event volunteers. Senior Mentors have become indispensable resources to the *FIRST* staff, given the breadth of their *FIRST* experience and knowledge.

As the Project enters its second year, *FIRST* would like to celebrate the extensive accomplishments of the fifteen 2004-05 Senior Mentors who:

- Collectively contributed 10,113 hours of service
- Made over 2,900 outreach efforts to recruit and support mentors, event volunteers, and teams, and simply expand awareness and presence of *FIRST*
 - Recruited 505 new team mentors for *FIRST* teams
 - Recruited 503 new volunteers to work at *FIRST* events
 - Recruited new teams for all *FIRST* programs
- Contributed to:
 - *FIRST* Vex Challenge Pilot Game Design

- *FIRST* Robotics Competition Team Retention Study
- Beta-tested the Team Information Management System and Volunteer Information and Matching System
- Presented at professional conferences on behalf of *FIRST*
- Developed and implemented the "Pre-Rookie" concept in which individuals interested in forming a *FIRST* team were matched with an existing team to shadow throughout the build and competition season, gaining first-hand knowledge and preparing them to participate as a rookie team the following season

Now in its second year, the Project has expanded from 15 to 20 Senior Mentors. A workshop was held at *FIRST* Headquarters in Manchester, NH in October, 2005 to welcome and train the 2005-06 Senior Mentors, whose focus will remain team and team mentor recruitment and support, as well as volunteer recognition.

2005-06 Senior Mentors (with service areas):

Jenny Beatty (Baltimore)
Devin Blizzard (Central California)
Richard Bodor (Atlanta)
George Burcin (Pittsburgh)
Daniel Coget (Houston)
Stephen Cremer (Massachusetts)
Donald Gunter (New Hampshire)
Kathy Helms (Virginia)
Jean Hoppert (Las Vegas)
Paul Kloberg (New Jersey)
Richard Kressly (Philadelphia)
Janet Lathan (Washington D.C.)
Dawn Lutz (Denver)
Rob Mainieri (San Diego)
Robert May (Atlanta)
Nancy McIntyre (Los Angeles)
Scott Miller (Central California)
Jacquelyn Moore (Chicago)
John Park (New York City)
Michael Sperber (Connecticut)

FIRST extends its heartfelt thanks to these exceptional men and women who help make *FIRST* happen.

Everyone has something to contribute to the *FIRST* mission. Learn more about becoming a [FIRST volunteer](#).

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US Department of Commerce Honors *FIRST* with Export Achievement Certificate

FIRST programs now in 32 countries

FIRST has been honored by the United States Department of Commerce as a recipient of its prestigious Export Achievement Certificate. The Export Achievement program recognizes small and medium-sized US businesses that have successfully entered the international marketplace.

FIRST was selected for its ingenuity in spreading an educational-based service, utilizing an entertaining and engaging competition of engineering and science, to international markets. In 2006, *FIRST* programs will reach over 93,000 students on over 9,000 teams in 32 countries. The *FIRST* LEGO League program for middle school students has provided a majority of international growth, with close to 7,500 teams in 31 countries.

The award was presented by John J. Sullivan, general counsel of the US Department of Commerce, to *FIRST* President Paul Gudonis at *FIRST* headquarters. *FIRST* staff and Board of Directors members attended, including *FIRST* Chairman John Abele, *FIRST* Vice Chairman Jim Utaski, *FIRST* Treasurer Robert Tuttle, and Curt Selquist. Also present were over 200 *FIRST* mentors and team leaders, attending pre-Kickoff *FIRST* Robotics Competition workshops at *FIRST* Place.

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Spotlight on FRC Team 1696

Recipient of \$10,000 Lemelson-MIT
InvenTeams grant

Sun River Science Club students from Sun River Middle School and Simms High School in Simms, Montana have a lot to celebrate... and a lot to do. In addition to competing in its second year of the *FIRST* Robotics Competition (FRC), the club - known to *FIRST* as Team 1696 - will be spending the coming months developing a prototype invention for [InvenTeams](#), an initiative of the Lemelson-MIT Program. The club was one of eighteen teams in the nation to receive this prestigious \$10,000 grant.

Team 1696 joined *FIRST* in 2005 as rookies funded by the Montana Space Grant Consortium. The team's experience and success in designing a robot for FRC sparked ideas for potential inventions. When they heard about InvenTeams through a *FIRST* e-mail blast to teams, it seemed like a logical place try to make one of those ideas a reality.

InvenTeams, composed of high school students, teachers, and mentors, are asked to collaboratively identify a problem to solve, research the problem, and then develop a prototype invention as an in-class or extracurricular project. The Sun River Science Club is working on a vision augmentation device that will improve vision for an individual who needs more than just corrective glasses to function fully. Along the way, they'll be learning what to do to make their invention original and also how to patent it when it is complete. In June, delegates from the team will present their invention during the InvenTeams Odyssey at MIT.

InvenTeams is like *FIRST* in many ways. It aims to inspire creative thinking and innovation

among high school students by giving teachers the opportunity and resources to provide a hands-on, real world invention experience. InvenTeams is about invention, but there is more to the experience as students learn about leadership, teamwork, project management, communication, budgeting, and marketing skills. And there are hurdles. These high-schoolers are taking on a technically challenging project, with a lot of learning to do and little time in which to do it. An additional challenge comes in a difference between the two programs: the established mentoring system at *FIRST*. According to team leader, Chuck Merja, "The *FIRST* mentor network is awesome. It makes it possible for teams to find adult professionals who are focused on the year's game, who take the kids seriously and help them to be successful, whereas the nature of 'invention' requires finding more diverse technical capabilities from a less-defined pool." And, of course, there is the time thing. "Simultaneous big projects in a small school is a challenge, but who needs sleep anyway!"

While working on its InvenTeams project, Team 1696 will compete in the Silicon Valley and Davis Sacramento FRC Regionals this year. GO TEAMS!

If your *FIRST* team is up for an inventive challenge, [applications for the 2006-2007 InvenTeams grants](#) are available online now and are due May 5, 2006.

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Spotlight on *FIRST Vex*[™] Challenge Pilot Team - In Their Own Words

Opens new opportunities to team members

FIRST proudly ushered in the *FIRST Vex* Challenge pilot season with a tournament held in St. Louis, MO in December, 2005.

Team 98 "Robotic Showstoppers" was the proud winner of the St. Louis Regional *FIRST Vex* Challenge Award, a peer- and formal-judged award that honors the team that performs well in all categories and is viewed by other teams as the most desirable alliance partner and by judges as best exemplifying all components of the *FIRST Vex* Challenge philosophy.

Like all FVC pilot teams, members of Team 98 are rookies to the *FIRST* experience. We asked team leader, Caroline Steinhauser, to tell us how and why Team 98 was formed, and to share its experience in the FVC pilot season.

Q: Tell us about Team 98.

A: Our team is comprised of high school students from five different school districts in St. Louis, Missouri. They are part of the MSP Ascend Program, which encourages them through math and science to focus on their grades, career interests, and getting into college. The program is run through a grant called the Math-Science Partnership and is funded through the National Science Foundation. We meet at the St. Louis Science Center. We have 11 students on our team (8 boys and 3 girls). All except one are minority students. We have three engineering mentors from Boeing, Emerson, and the St. Louis Science Center. I am the team leader and one of the teachers in the MSP Ascend Program.

Q: How did you find out about the *FIRST* Vex Challenge?

A: We were originally looking into starting a *FIRST* Robotics Competition team. However, after speaking with other *FIRST* teams in the area, we realized that we did not have the time or resources to support that. One of the *FIRST* coaches suggested *FIRST* Vex Challenge and we realized that this program was perfect for us.

Q: Why did you form an FVC team?

A: This semester, the MSP Ascend teachers decided to split our 40 students into four different groups, depending on their career interests. Eleven of these students were put into the "Robotics Group" because they all have interests in things such as engineering, mechanics, and computer programming. We decided that the *FIRST* Vex Challenge was the perfect vehicle to engage these students' interest and so we registered to form a team.

Q: What was the most fun part of participating?

A: Our experience with FVC has turned out better than we ever could have expected. We have gotten so much out of this experience! I believe that the tournament was the most fun part of participating. After all of our hard work, it was exciting to see our robot perform so well in competition. It was also a lot of fun to see what designs the other teams came up with. The air was filled with tension and excitement from the very beginning in the pits to the very end at the award ceremony. When our team name was announced as the recipient of the *FIRST* Vex Challenge Award, I saw jumping, hugging, and even crying from the members of my team. That moment will always stand out as a great one in our team's history.

Q: What was the hardest part?

A: The hardest part was wrestling with the EasyC programming software. Up until the week before the competition, the software was having compatibility issues with our computer, no matter how much we (and the easyC online help personnel) worked with it. Luckily, we were finally able to put something together at the last minute for the competition that worked fairly well. This problem made November a frustrating month, because we wanted so badly to do well in the autonomous mode, but we weren't sure whether we would even be able to get into the programming system to start.

Q: Were there any surprises?

A: I think the biggest surprises occurred during the engineering process in the build period. The students were pressed to come up with design or mechanism ideas on an individual and team level and then figure out ways to implement them. I loved to see the expressions on the students' faces as a design they had come up and called "dumb" worked like a charm. Or when a design the whole team thought was genius would fail during testing because of one unforeseen problem. It was wonderful to see the students realize what great ideas they could come up with if they just put their mind to it.

Q: What did you learn?

A: By having free reign to experiment in a hands-on way, we have learned a whole lot about physics and how it works in real life. We have been able to develop our problem-solving and

logic skills. We learned that in order to build something that works really well, you have to have a lot of patience to build, test, and redesign as much as it takes to get it right. We got to work with three wonderful engineers from Boeing, Emerson, and the Science Center, who lent us their technical knowledge and guidance over the last three months. But most of all, we learned to work as a team and to appreciate each other's opinions and individual strengths.

Q: What impact has the FVC experience had on your students?

A: Participating in this program has given my students a new view on life, one where it is possible to be successful if you work at something hard enough. After winning awards at the competition, we have been invited to be interviewed live on the news, give presentations to the public at the Science Center, and talk to potential donors about our experiences. In short, this challenge has opened up new opportunities to our team members that they probably would not have had before.

Q: What's next for the team?

A: The *FIRST* Vex Challenge event at the *FIRST* Championship in April is the biggest thing on our minds right now. We are already preparing for the competition by beginning to build a playing field so that we can learn to get around issues that gave us problems at the regional competition, such as driving up the ramps toward the corner goals without skidding. I am sure that we will participate in the *FIRST* Vex Challenge again next year if it is offered. Our team had a wonderful time and we will never forget this experience! Every summer in our teen program, we set the students up into internships with professionals that work a job that is similar to what each teen would like to do when they get older. I have a feeling that we are going to get a lot more requests for internships in the engineering field this summer!

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