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FIRST Pilots New Event Competition Structure in Michigan

FIRST in Michigan's District Events to Provide Increased Opportunities Statewide for Student Participation

MANCHESTER, NH and DETROIT, MI July 30, 2008 – *FIRST* (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology), an organization founded by noted inventor Dean Kamen to inspire young people's interest and participation in science and technology, today announced that, in cooperation with the volunteer leadership of *FIRST* in the state of Michigan, a new pilot district event model will be launched to provide increased robotics competitions statewide. The new model, which will offer a high-quality *FIRST* experience for all students, will subdivide the state into 16 districts to leverage local action plans for growth and make robotics events accessible and closer to home.

The establishment of the new Michigan model follows a study undertaken by the *FIRST* volunteer leadership in the state in 2008 to follow the district models used by other youth sports programs that allow teams to play more and closer to home, thereby reducing the need for costly travel. A pilot district event conducted at Kettering University in Michigan in 2008 proved successful in potentially scaling the infrastructure, establishing new relationships with local schools, increasing the number of local mentors and volunteers, as well as increasing local sponsorships for events. The *FIRST* pilot program will implement and execute a new district event model for the 2009 season.

FIRST teams in Michigan currently number 118 *FIRST* Robotics Competition (FRC) teams with approximately 150 high schools involved and another 310 *FIRST* LEGO® League (FLL) teams with over 3,000 students competing. FRC alumni are expected to make up 20 percent of the student body this fall at Kettering University's School of Engineering in Flint. *FIRST* in Michigan, the official 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization responsible for implementing all *FIRST* programs in the state, will provide robotics competitions which make the most effective use of local resources to better serve communities and create more opportunities in robotics for new students by allowing more playing time for teams with lower entry fees while enabling sponsors to receive statewide recognition.

"The stakes are high for U.S. competitiveness," noted *FIRST* president Paul R. Gudonis, adding, "A recent report by a coalition of 16 of the nation's leading business organizations showed little progress in the country's goal of doubling the number of students earning bachelor's degrees in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) by 2015. Here at *FIRST*, we are determined to assist the national goal by establishing *FIRST* high-school robotics programs in 15 percent of the public schools in the U.S. by 2012. This new competitive model will provide a scalable infrastructure for expansion with local Michigan mentors, volunteers and sponsorship opportunities to continue to strengthen science and technology education. We are pleased to work with Michigan on this pilot because of the committed volunteers and sponsors and also because state has one of the leading number of high schools in *FIRST* in the country."

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“Michigan’s youth needs innovative skills and creative thinking to be able to navigate in a 21st century workplace increasingly characterized by global competition,” said Francois Castaing, Director, *FIRST* in Michigan and a member of the *FIRST* board of directors. “As one of the early proponents for *FIRST* initiatives in Michigan, I am thrilled to have the opportunity to lead during this time of transition and create a new structure for the young men and women in this state which will assist the region’s workforce development by exposing students at a very young age to careers in science, technology, engineering and math. The *FIRST* volunteers in Michigan have been diligently working towards this transition since early in 2008 and are committed to a smooth and seamless process for the teams.”

In 2009, *FIRST* in Michigan will include 16 districts: Western Upper Peninsula, Eastern Upper Peninsula, Lake Huron North, Lake Huron Central, Grand Traverse, West Michigan, Saginaw Bay, Greater Genesee, Macomb County, Oakland County, Detroit, Western Wayne, Washtenaw County, Greater Lansing, Greater Monroe, and Southwest Michigan.

The district event model, piloted in the *FIRST* Robotics Competition 2009 playing season from January to April, will include seven district events and one state championship event. During the pilot year, only Michigan teams can compete within the state. Those same teams can register to compete at other traditional FRC Regional events outside of the state and also qualify for the *FIRST* Championship to be held in Atlanta, Georgia in April 2009.

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 the support of many of the world’s most well-known companies, the not-for-profit organization hosts the *FIRST* Robotics Competition (FRC) and *FIRST* Tech Challenge (FTC) for high-school students, *FIRST* LEGO® League for children 9-14 years old (FLL), and Junior *FIRST* LEGO® League (Jr.FLL) for 6 to 9 year-olds. To learn more about *FIRST*, go to www.usfirst.org.

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