

TechNews

STUDENT NEWSPAPER OF ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY SINCE 1928

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SUBMISSIONS

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Illinois Tech Robotics volunteers at local youth robotics competition

Kori Bowns
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In addition to building and maintaining several competitive robot projects each academic year, students who are part of Illinois Tech Robotics (ITR), an IIT student organization, volunteer hundreds of hours of their time toward STEM education outreach and youth robotics programs. Much of this outreach is through an international youth robotics nonprofit called FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology). In the past, ITR has assisted as coordinators and volunteers at dozens of FIRST events both at the local, state, regional, and international level.

Last Saturday, members of ITR served as volunteers for a local FIRST Tech Challenge competition held at Horizon Science Academy in Chicago's McKinley Park neighborhood. FIRST Tech Challenge events generally involve up to 40 teams consisting of between five and 20 middle- and high-school age students. Each team brings a robot that they have constructed with the objective of completing specific tasks that change from year to year. The teams and their robots, which are usually the size of an 18-inch cube, are randomly paired up with another team at the event and play against another random pair of teams in a two versus two match. Each match played on the standard 12-foot square field

lasts two and a half minutes, during which each team of robots tries to complete tasks in order to score the most amount of points before time expires. In this season's challenge, students built robots to move around small balls and cubes and climb a mountain-like structure at each corner of the playing field.

ITR students served in a variety of roles at Saturday's competition. Members of ITR assisted with inspecting robots to ensure they followed design guidelines, helping teams connect their robots to their control hardware, refereeing matches, announcing play-by-play commentary, and entering scores into the event's scoring software. In addition to several Illinois Tech students who volunteered, a few IIT alumni who participated in Illinois Tech Robotics also joined to help out the event.

The South Chicago meet that ITR assisted with last weekend is only one of several events Illinois Tech Robotics students participate in each semester. Several students with ITR who volunteer with FIRST programs participated in the youth robotics program when they were in middle and high school and want to give back some of their time to a program that interested them in postsecondary STEM education. Other students who volunteer with ITR simply want to give back to their local community and help get the next generation interested in science and technology. Volunteering with FIRST also

gives Illinois Tech students an opportunity to contribute their technical skills to a good cause.

Next on the agenda for ITR's volunteer force is the Chicago FIRST Tech Challenge Championship, which is being held at Benito Juarez Community Academy in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood on Saturday, February 13. The event is being managed primarily by Illinois Tech Robotics students and alumni and will bring together the top 24 teams in the city of Chicago to determine which teams will progress to the Illinois State Championship. Many volunteers are still needed for the event. Any member of the IIT community is highly encouraged to volunteer; no experience or specific skills are necessary in order to be a volunteer. Those who are interested in volunteering for the event can contact Michael Martinez at mmarti42@hawk.iit.edu.

Students who are interested in the outreach activities that Illinois Tech Robotics has planned for this semester or who would like to join one of ITR's several active robot projects can join the organization on HawkLink to receive weekly emails regarding meeting and project times. No experience is necessary for any participation in ITR and all students are welcome.



Photo courtesy of Estlin Mendez

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