

TechNews

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Illinois Tech Robotics finishes year of outreach at FIRST World Championship

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Illinois Tech Robotics (ITR) prides itself on being not only a student organization where members can learn new things and build exciting projects, but also as one where students have an opportunity to help others and make an impact by helping inspire children to pursue an interest in science and technology fields. Each year, ITR offers its members a variety of ways to get involved.

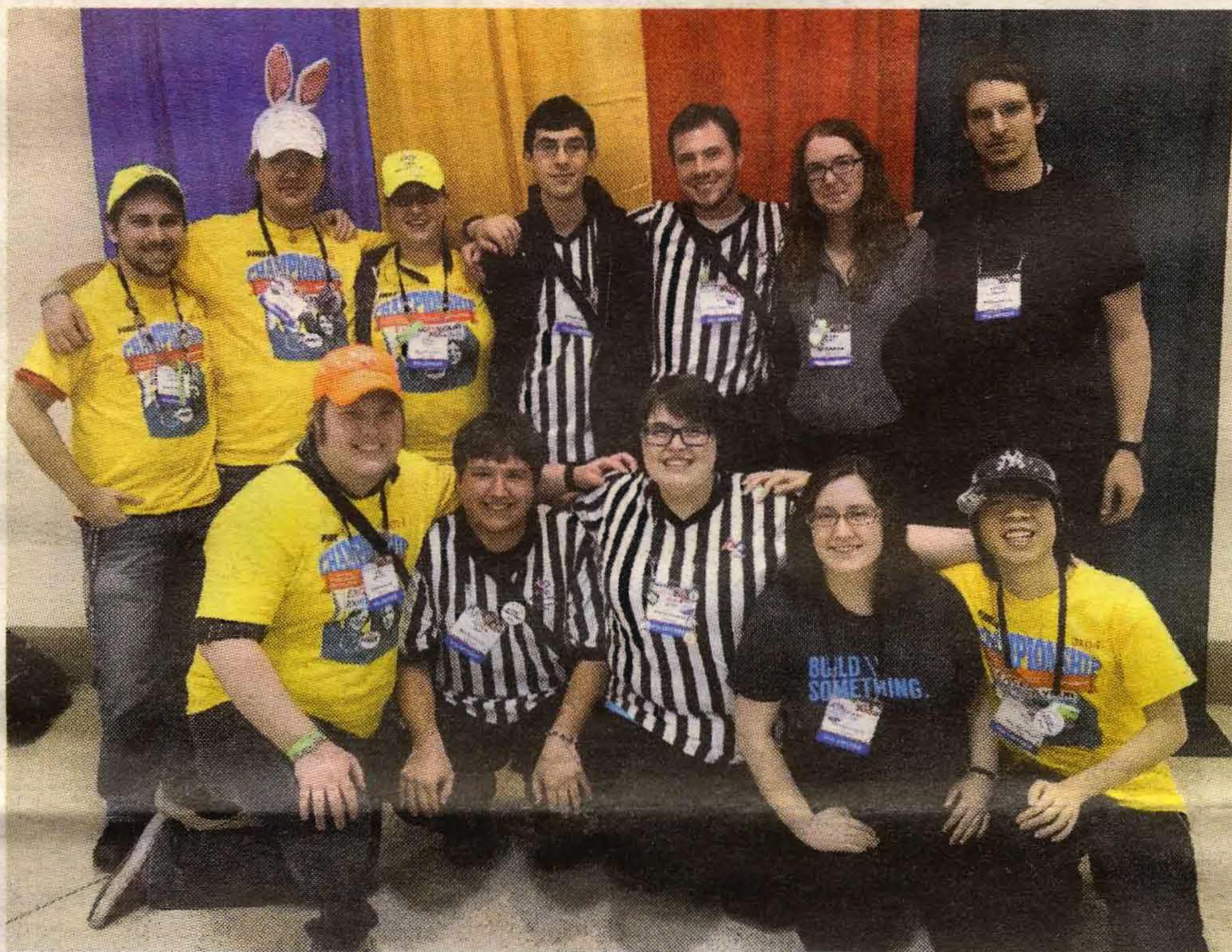
During this academic year, ITR students hosted two youth robotics competitions, volunteered at 11 youth competitions, mentored a high school robotics team, coordinated a season kickoff event for high school robotics students, and participated in public outreach events, including the Museum of Science and Industry's annual Robot Block Party, where exhibitors from around the world show off their creations to inspire museum guests. This academic year, ITR students donated over 2000 hours of their time to help thousands of younger students learn about futures in science and technology.

The vast majority of ITR's outreach and volunteer opportunities work closely with a youth robotics organization known as FIRST.

For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) was founded in 1989 by inventor Dean Kamen with the mission of showing students that science, technology, and problem-solving are not only fun and rewarding, but are proven paths to successful careers and a bright future for society. The organization achieves this mission by offering robotics competitions for students in elementary school, all the way through high school. The competitions value not only gaining engineering skills and creating useful machines, but also things like good sportsmanship, cooperation, teamwork, and something FIRST calls "gracious professionalism," a way of doing things where students learn and compete like crazy, but treat one another with respect and kindness in the process.

Last week, ITR volunteered at the final event of the FIRST Robotics season—the FIRST World Championship held in St. Louis, Missouri. The FIRST Championship takes up much of the space in the Edward Jones Dome, home of the St. Louis Rams NFL team, and America's Center, a convention center attached to the dome. More than 12 thousand students attended the event, as did thousands of additional parents, mentors, supporters, and volunteers.

Illinois Tech Robotics sent a delegation of 12 members to St. Louis to volunteer at the event, which ran from Wednesday, April 23 through Saturday, April 26. Members volunteered in a wide variety of ways that helped further the program and allowed them to interact with hundreds of young STEM enthusiasts over the course of the weekend.



Several of ITR's members volunteered as referees for the competitions, working with teams to ensure they follow rules of the games and having the tough job of keeping score for the fast-paced competitions. Other volunteered as inspectors to make sure team's robots met size, weight, and material specifications, and others volunteered in other ways, including resetting and repairing the playing field for each competition, running scoring system software, troubleshooting robot technical problems, and announcing play-by-play for the competitions as they progressed.

As always, ITR members enjoyed volunteering their time to FIRST, and had a great time working with the increased energy and competition that comes with the world championship event.

Ryan Tan, second year mechanical engineering major, volunteered for the first time at youth events with ITR this year. "My favorite part was the appreciation that the kids showed all of the volunteers," said Tan. "It was also extremely exciting to see kids in engineering and so elated to be working in a STEM field; I'm used to hearing everyone talk about how boring math and science are, so working with them and their cool projects is really a breath of fresh air. I'll definitely keep volunteering in the future; it was a ton of fun."

Ryan Kamphuis, fourth year physics education major and ITR's Vice President of Philanthropy, said: "it gives us the opportunity to inspire an interest in the STEM fields, which is not only something that the world needs, but we also have an interest in it because we go to IIT; it gives us an opportunity to volunteer alongside current, past, and future students of IIT."

Kamphuis also has more personal reasons for giving back to FIRST. "Being on a FIRST Robotics Competition team in high school was instrumental in bringing me to Illinois Tech, and I wouldn't be the individual I am today without that experience; I want others to be able to have it as well." A few other members of Illinois Tech Robotics are alumni of the FIRST Robotics program, and enjoy giving back to an organization that inspired them to pursue science and engineering futures at Illinois Tech. Kamphuis was also awarded the Outstanding Volunteer of the Year Award among hundreds of other volunteers in March at a local FIRST Robotics Competition event hosted at the University of Illinois at Chicago for over 50 student teams.

Illinois Tech Robotics is a strong and vital force in helping give students all over the world opportunities to explore innovative and exciting futures in the science and technology fields. For more information about Illinois Tech Robotics, visit their website at illinoistechrobotics.org or join their organization on HawkLink.

