

For Immediate Release

For More Information, Contact
Sylvia A. Martinez
214-750-4243 (o) 646-373-6672 (m)
smrtinez@cftexas.org

**Texas High School Project Sponsors 36 Teams
in FIRST Robotics Competition
A New Varsity Sport of the Mind**

Dallas (March 9, 2009) – The Texas High School Project announced today that it is sponsoring 36 Texas high school teams in the 2009 FIRST Robotics Competition, including (# or name(s) of local area high schools). The teams will compete at two Texas venues, SMU’s Moody Coliseum, March 12 – 14 and Houston’s George R. Brown Convention Center, March 26 – 28. This marks the first time a Dallas venue has held any of the Competition’s 40 regional contests. On April 16 – 18, regional winners compete in Atlanta, GA, for the National Championship.

Supported by more than 3,000 sponsoring companies, FIRST is a non-profit corporation founded in 1989 with a mission “*to inspire young people to be science and technology leaders, by engaging them in exciting mentor-based programs that build science, engineering and technology skills....*”

Toward that end, FIRST established the FIRST Robotics Competition to help high-school-aged young people discover how rewarding the life of researchers and engineers can be by combining the challenge of science and the excitement of competitive sports. FIRST National Advisor, Woodie Flowers, says, “*It’s like life. You never have enough information. You never have enough time. The kit of materials may be what you have in the warehouse. There are always people doing competing things and you must have a strategy. We’ve created a microcosm of the real engineering experience.*”

Harmony Science Academies, a Charter Management Organization that operates nine college prep schools focusing on science, mathematics and information technology in Texas, values the program enough to enter 6 of its 9 schools in this year’s competition. Harmony Chief Executive Officer Soner Tarim evaluates the experience as “*a valuable tool to stimulate student interest in technology, math and science.*”

“*Winning is not the ultimate goal. The overall goal is participation and education. If a robot is not working or fails, the students learn that it is not the end of the world. They work together to fix the problem and learn problem-solving skills in the process,*” Tarim said. “*If a team wins an award, the trophy is an acknowledgement of what they have done.*”

Tarim noted that robotics is no longer a male-only sport. There are more girls competing in robotics. “*It is changing,*” he said, adding, “*We know for sure that female students, if you catch them at a certain age, will continue working on those subjects.*” Currently, 26% of participants are female.

Executive Director of the Texas High School Project, John Fitzpatrick also appreciates the fact that students get to work with real-world professionals in a real-world professional experience, saying, *“The competition rewards design excellence, team spirit, gracious professionalism and the ability to overcome obstacles. It’s a unique experience.”* It is also an experience that allows students from prep schools and underperforming schools alike to compete on a level playing field. This year, 31% of FRC participants are minorities.

Now in its 18th season, the Competition has grown from 28 to more than 1,600 teams, involving more than 42,000 high school students, 22,000 mentors and 6,000 other volunteers. This year the contest is expected to draw teams from 48 states, 4 provinces and 11 countries, with more than 130 Scholarship Providers offering more than 630 merit-based awards worth a total of \$9.7M.

A FIRST Robotics Competition match is 2 min.15 sec. of total excitement, as thousands of robot fans cheer on their favorite teams. Winning is a tremendous thrill. But losing can be just as rewarding. That’s because the Competition’s many awards are not given only on the basis of points scored but on the basis of team interviews conducted by the Competition’s judges.

The most prestigious award is the Regional Chairman’s Award, which honors *“the team that best represents a model for other teams to emulate”* The Engineering Inspiration Award *“celebrates outstanding success in advancing respect and appreciation for engineering within a team’s school and community.”* Other awards, 21 in all, are presented for achievements as varied as *“enthusiasm and spirit,” “elegant and advantageous machine features,” “innovative control”* and *“excellence in team websites.”*

The Competition’s judges consist of upper level management personnel from various companies, organizations and universities with a variety of professional experience and perspectives. Their assessments and critiques provide students with insights that constitute valuable rewards in themselves.

The accolades accrued by the FIRST Robotics Competition are impressive. Over 91% of the high schools and their company mentors have stayed involved year after year and over 40,000 high-school students have experienced science and technology as intensely exciting fun. RFC participants report an increased interest in science and technology, improved self-confidence and, above all, greater determination to go on to college.

Sponsoring a FIRST Robotics team requires 3 to 6 volunteer engineers or other professionals with the support of their companies, 15 to 25 high-school-aged young people led by a teacher and funding of \$15,000 to \$30,000 to participate in 2 to 3 regional competitions, usually provided by a single company, a group of companies and/or school fundraising efforts. To learn more about establishing and sponsoring a FIRST Robotics Competition team, contact _____.

A unique public-private alliance, the Texas High School Project (THSP) is dedicated to ensuring that all Texas students graduate high school college ready, career ready, and life ready. The THSP focuses its efforts on high-need schools and districts statewide, with an emphasis on urban areas and the Texas-Mexico border. Public and private organizations in the THSP include the Texas Education Agency (TEA), Governor's Office, Texas Legislature, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, Wallace Foundation, Meadows Foundation, Greater Texas Foundation, Communities Foundation of Texas (CFT) and National Instruments. THSP private philanthropic investments are managed by CFT. State and federal investments in Texas schools are managed by TEA.