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MARCH 24, 2025
VOLUME 17, ISSUE 4

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FIRST Robotics: Kids build robots; robots build kids

By Leah Wheeler

Rochester High School FEDS (Team #201)

This year, the Rochester High School Falcon Engineering and Design Solutions (FEDS) team received the Impact Award, the most prestigious award in FIRST Robotics Competition, at a FIRST Robotics district event held on March 8-9 in Mount Pleasant. The award recognizes a team that reflects sustained excellence and impact within the FIRST community, in its own community, and beyond.

For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) is an international youth organization that puts on robotics competitions for students from kindergarten through high school. Founded by American inventor and entrepreneur Dean Kamen and MIT professor emeritus Woodie Flowers in 1989, its goal is to inspire students' interest in engineering and technology and encourage them to consider careers in science and technology. Its philosophy is expressed by the organization's core values of cooperation and gracious professionalism.

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During competi-

tion season, February through April, high school teams compete in at least two district events. If successful at the district level, they then advance to state level competition. Michigan's FIRST State Championship will be held the first weekend in April at Saginaw Valley State University. If successful at "States," teams will go on the FIRST World Championship April 16 - 19 in Houston. The RHS FEDS have made it to "Worlds" for the past three years.

"FEDS is a year-round team," said Jessica Gupta, who together with her husband, Shishir, mentors the team. "Activities throughout the year include leadership training, planning, goal setting, and free STEM workshops all culminating in competition season which begins in February each year. That's when the students design, build, wire, program, test, refine, and operate their robot for the FIRST competition.

"But it is about so much more than robots," Jessica said. "At its core, it's about expanding access to STEM education, especially for kids who may not have seen themselves as STEM people. It's also about building lifelong relationships, inclusion, teamwork, and problem solving. It's about high school kids mentoring younger

kids along the way." FEDS members help support a feeder network that includes over 70 FTC and LEGO League teams at elementary and middle schools in the RCS district.

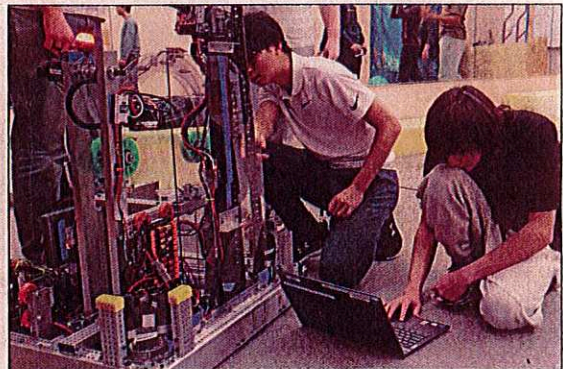
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Rochester High School Falcon Engineering and Design Solutions (FEDS)



Adams High School Adam-Bots



The Stoney Creek Cyber Cats

COMMUNITY

FIRST Robotics: from Cover

The *FIRST* impact on young people is exemplified by FEDS assistant coach and mentor Luca Wagner, a former FETS team member, who graduated from Oakland University and now, in addition to coaching the team, works as an electrical engineer at FANUC.

Robotics teams in Rochester are self-funded and completely run by volun-

teers, according to Jessica. The Gupta's head up a group of ten active volunteers who are responsible for recruiting team members and other mentors, training, administration, and standing up the events as well as working with the students on their robotics projects.

Adams High School Adam-Bots (Team #245) Rick Drummer and

Dipannita Mukherjee are the lead mentors for the AHS Adam-Bots, the largest of the three area high school robotics teams. The team currently has 85 students and 26 dedicated mentors. The Bots feeder network includes 32 middle and elementary school teams. The Adam-Bots brought home the Engineering Inspiration award from the FIM district Kettering University event on March 1, and they hope to return again this year to "Worlds" in Houston.



Adams High School Adam-Bots

"Kids are inspired by sports, and the *FIRST* Challenge harnesses that exuberance and energy to motivate interest in STEM," Rick said. "Beyond the competition, it's a great opportunity to work with professionals, to learn life-long skills, project management, communication,



Rochester High School Falcon Engineering and Design Solutions (FEDS)



The Stoney Creek Cyber Cats

problem solving, teamwork, and gracious professionalism. Members of our team often help other teams compete with the loan of a battery or by helping to wire a robot. They compete and cooperate; it's an important life lesson."

As for impact, Rick spoke of Adam-Bots alumni, Tanay Patel, who earned an engineering degree at Michigan Tech and now works as an engineer at GM. Tanay is the drive team lead mentor for the Lake Orion Dragons *FIRST* team.

The Stoney Creek Cyber Cats (Team #5436)

Jacob Russell and Ed Gemellaro are co-lead mentors of the Stoney Creek Cyber Cats. Jacob is an After-

shock (Team #468, an FRC team out of Flint) alum, who currently works for Brose North America. He has started three *FIRST* teams and been involved with six teams. Ed was drawn in by his kids' interest in robotics. The Cyber Cats, a slightly younger team, consists of 64 students and 15 mentors and works with FRC teams at Hart Middle School.

"During competitions, teams score points based on the overall functioning of the robot, its speed, mechanisms, quality, industrial design, imagery, automated controls, sustainability, environmental impact, and other factors," said Jacob.

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