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## Students learn about engineering, test robots in competition

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Issue date: 2/21/06 Section: NEWS

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### Hello, Mr. Roboto

Media Credit: Matthew Berry  
Engineer Kent Baumgardt, Delta High School senior Matt Royal and Ontario's System's electrical engineer Mike Koch work to reinstall the throwing mechanism on the Muncie/Delaware County FIRST Robotics team's robot Monday night in the Applied Technology Building as other team members watch.



Media Credit: Matthew Berry  
Homeschool student Ashley Nagel works on reassembling the Muncie/Delaware County FIRST Robotics team's robot Monday night in the Applied Technology Building. Nagel and fellow local high school students created the robot as part of the For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology organizations's contest.

A group of more than a dozen students from Muncie-area high schools and mentors from Ball State University and community businesses put the finishing touches on a robot Monday that they have constructed throughout the past six weeks. Building the robot allows the students on the Muncie/Delaware County FIRST Robotics Team to learn about engineering and to test their robots in competition.

Team coordinator Cheryl LeBlanc said this year's game, "Aim High," is similar to a three-on-three basketball tournament with three robots, each constructed by a separate team, forming an alliance. Robots run by the students work together to get as many balls as they can into one of three goals. Putting a ball in the center hole that is eight and a half feet off the ground earns the alliance three points. If the ball lands in one of the ground level side holes, the alliance gets two points. Robots are designed for playing both offense and defense.

The Muncie/Delaware County team's robot will be shipped to FIRST headquarters for inspection prior to the regional competition at Purdue University March 16-18.

LeBlanc said despite its competitive nature, the game is not cut-throat like some other robot games.

"It's not Battle Bots at all," she said. "The FIRST rule of robotics is gracious professionalism. If a team loses a part, the other teams will help out. That's the whole program: Everybody helping everybody else."

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Morrison said she helped out with the Indiana Academy team for the past three years and was excited when the program expanded this year to include other area high schools. Morrison, an English major, said she has been involved with the competition since high school, when her team won the national championship.

LeBlanc said the high school students have become very passionate about the project throughout the past six weeks.

"These kids can't get enough of it," LeBlanc said. "It's hard to send them home at night."

LeBlanc's son Nathan LeBlanc, who is a sophomore at Burriss Laboratory School, said the team planned for several weeks before it started building the robot.

"Most of the actual building was in the past two weeks," he said.

Nathan LeBlanc said his team tested three ball-launching mechanisms for its robot before settling on the current model. The idea it decided on was a baseball-type shooter composed of a system of rollers and spiral ducts, LeBlanc said.

Brad Hanauer, who served as a team mentor, said a catapult-style mechanism may have scored more points than the one the team decided to build.

"There was a feeling that the other shooter concept would have been more accurate, but it would be harder to get it to work with most of the robot," said Hanauer, an engineer at Altairman. "So we thought we had a much better chance to be successful with this one."

LeBlanc said the team confronted one of its biggest challenges when members discovered the robot was over its 120-pound weight limit by 53 pounds.

"We knew we had to rip stuff out," he said. "We took out huge chunks to take the weight out."

If the Muncie/Delaware County robotic team does well, its robot may have an opportunity to compete at the National Championship event, which will take place in the Georgia Dome in Atlanta on April 27-29.

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