

TechBrick's Atlanta Trip Covered in the Aegis's Weekender

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TechBrick heading to Georgia

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TechBrick Robotics, a home school robotics club based in Forest Hill, recently had its high school program, FIRST Tech Challenge, advance to the international competition level.

The club, the only one from Harford County and the only one from Maryland in its division, is headed by Marco Ciavolino, a marketing communications consultant from Forest Hill. TechBrick Robotics will face 10,000 competing students from more than 20 countries in the FIRST World Championship, to be held April 16-19 at the Georgia Dome in Atlanta, Ga.

TechBrick Robotics has fielded 11 robotics competition teams in the past five years and won numerous awards at state competitions in Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey.

For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, or FIRST, was founded by Dean Kamen, the renowned entrepreneur and inventor of the Segway transportation device. Kamen's goal for the program is to bring the same level of energy and enthusiasm into invention as is seen in youth sports such as football and soccer. As featured on the not-for-profit program's website, www.usfirst.org, his vision is "[to] transform our culture by creating a world where science and technology are celebrated and where young people dream of becoming science and technology heroes." FIRST sponsors events for children ranging from kindergarten age through high school, and it has more than 200,000 participants globally. More than 100 colleges offered \$10 million in scholarships to past FIRST participants.

On a larger scale, a major goal of the FIRST program is to help the United States compete in the global market in science, technology, engineering and math. According to a 2005 study by Brandeis University, "More than



The TechBrick Robotics team, a home school robotics club based in Forest Hill, is, from left, Mark Hoppel, of Havre de Grace, Rachel Armiger, of Jarrettsville, Matt Walden, from Towson, Amy Ciavolino, from Forest Hill, Brady Townsend, from Abingdon, and Dalvin Byron, from Abingdon, is headed to the FIRST World Championship in Georgia April 16-19.

Robots: An Evaluation of the FIRST Robotics Competition Participant and Institutional Impacts," FIRST students are more than three times as likely to major in engineering in college, more than four times as likely to pursue an engineering career and 10 times as likely to have had an apprenticeship, co-op job or internship in their freshman year.

Earlier this month, as the director, founder and senior mentor of TechBrick Robotics, Ciavolino addressed the 24th annual National Defense Industrial Association Testing and Evaluation Conference, where 350 of the nation's top military and industrial leaders were in attendance. According to Ciavolino, their "clarion call" was that the country strongly needs more engineers and that a shortage of them is impending.

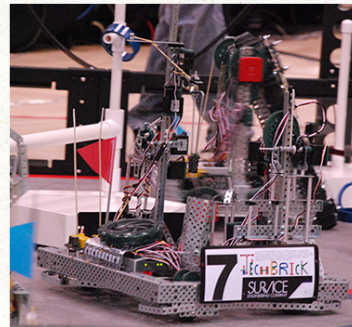
TechBrick's trek to April's global competition began last September, when FIRST released the challenges for this year's participants. For 2008, the challenge was "Quad Quandary." After a build season

of six to eight weeks, teams were able to compete in up to three state-level qualifying contests for the international levels. After winning awards in Delaware and New Jersey, TechBrick's third major award

into a pool to fill available spots. TechBrick was picked in the third and final draft round, and the last-minute opportunity came as a welcome surprise to Ciavolino and the team.

As it prepares for the international competition, the team is working hard to raise money for its trip to the world championship. Several local and national companies have donated to the team, specifically SURVICE Engineering, Custom Direct, Nehemiah Communications, The Better Hour, Broadway Appraisal, Madonna Veterinary Clinic, Wittstadt & Wittstadt, State Farm Agent Shirley Brunkhorst, Quiznos Sub of Bel Air, Consolidated Printing, WRBS 95.1, Red Brick Station, State Sen. Nancy Jacobs and Enktesis. Regionally, UMBC has sponsored hundreds of thousands of dollars to FIRST.

The team welcomes donations from the public via their website, www.techbrick.com/Atlanta, and notes that they are considered charitable for tax purposes.



The TechBrick Robotics team, whose members made the above robot, is heading to the FIRST World Championship in Georgia April 16-19.

came at the Maryland contest, held at the College of Southern Maryland.

The team's invitation to Atlanta, however, was never guaranteed. Two teams automatically qualified, while other awarded teams were put