

Robotics team leaves Huntington behind for World Championships

Herald-Examiner 4-24-19 p. 1



PLAN: Team members discuss how to tackle their next event during regionals this year. PHOTOS PROVIDED

Competition prepares team T.H.R.U.S.T. for future careers as they head for 'deep space'

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The Huntington County 4H Robotics Team 1501, team T.H.R.U.S.T., has packed up their robot named Apollo and are on the road to Detroit to begin their pursuit of the FIRST Robotics Competition world championship title.

So far this year, the team of 47 students and 26 adult mentors have logged 5,751 hours during the season, leading up to this final stretch of events. The team has practice rounds today, but qualifiers begin tomorrow and then the finals will take place Saturday.

Anyone who can't make it to Michigan can watch online at thebluealliance.com/. "I'm very proud of the team," Karen Hinshaw said. "They've put in a lot of hard work... They spend Monday through Saturday during the six-week build season planning, prototyping, building and perfecting. They've earned their spot at the world championships."

This is Hinshaw's daughter's first year on the team. She said Vivian works on the electrical team, which troubleshoots any issues that



SALUTE: The robot drivers give the signal that they're ready for takeoff during regionals this year.

arise during competitions and make sure the robot is ready to go on competition day.

Hinshaw said the program teaches students things that aren't traditionally taught in the classroom, and she said it's especially effective since the teens are having fun while exploring different career paths. She said the team is constantly solving problems across the entire group, whether the student is helping on the business, electrical, engineering or safety teams.

They just keep tweaking it and tweaking it," she said. "I think the real value in it is that you don't fail, you just keep trying. Nothing's ever perfect and you just keep making adjustments and keep making improvements

until you get it to where you want it to be."

Tammy Jackson, who's son Darren will be a senior this year and was a part of the 2016 team that placed seventh at worlds, learned a lot during his time on the team, especially about his career path. "I think it's a wonderful opportunity for them," Jackson said. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime thing, and for some of our seniors who've already been through it their freshman year, I think it's extra special for them."

Darren began the program thinking he wanted to be an electrical engineer, but this year he found that he wants to pursue a career in forestry, since he wants to spend his life and career outdoors. "A lot of people may look

at that as a negative thing, but I looked at it as positive," Jackson said since he was able to find out electrical engineering wasn't his calling two years into the 4H robotics program and not two years into a college degree, saving him and their family money.

For those who have gotten involved and found out they love robotics, engineering, business, marketing, safety auditing or any of the other career paths involved in the robotics competitions, Hinshaw said prospective employers are giving current and graduated members paid internships, scholarships and job offers regularly.

When Joyce Sitton's daughter Sharon joined the



TEAM: The entire T.H.R.U.S.T. team poses for a picture after their regional competition this year.

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First Lego League in eighth grade and shadowed the 4H robotics team, electrical engineering was no where on her radar as a career choice. Sitton said after Sharon joined the team in ninth grade, she was offered an

internship from Suttleworth and has been working for them ever since. They are even paying for her college tuition, Sitton says.

"This program has given her the confidence to move forward and will carry her through the rest of her life," Sitton said.

Lead mentor Chris Elston said there are currently

seven graduated members interviewing with the company Shuttlesworth and "countless" others in college now on scholarships and working in the field.

Parent mentor Matt Brubaker, who works for a design company, said his company is constantly building relationships with the members because of the

skills the kids emerge with. "You can't beat the kind of kids you're going to get from this team," Brubaker said. "They basically started this because they wanted to grow engineers. You can't find the quality of (candidates) like these kids. They're growing good, employable people."

Brubaker said there is a

definite shortage of skilled employees who have the drive and energy like the members of the robotics team.

"And these kids have got that," he said. "It's so good for (the members) to have this opportunity in their community."

"There are more than 40 mentors and those people

are plugged into all sorts of areas of our community," he said.

Hinshaw said anyone who's interested in joining the team should reach out to Purdue Extension (260-358-4826) or kdhinsha@purdue.edu to get on a mailing list so that they can attend the open house and informational sessions to join next season.