

# Robotics team wins bid to host state championship in Huntington

Huntington's robotics team will host the Indiana state robotics championships in April, bringing 32 robotics teams and thousands of dollars to town for the three-day event.

The announcement was made Sept. 13, by Indiana FIRST, which coordinates the statewide robotics competition. District events will be held in West Lafayette, Mishawaka and Indianapolis in March, with 32 teams qualifying to advance to the state championship in Huntington.

Team THRUST of Huntington may or may not be one of those 32 teams qualifying for the state competition, notes Chris Elston, one of the mentors for the local team.

"Of course, we hope to be qualified this year because we are hosting in our hometown," Elston said in an email. "We are hungry for the state title, and wouldn't that just be the Cinderella story ending this year?"

Team THRUST has placed second in the state for the past two years and last year, for the fourth time in its 11-year existence, won a spot in the world championships — winning world gold in its division and ending up in seventh place overall out of 3,100 teams.

Elston says he's been working for several years to put all the pieces in place for a chance to host the state competition in Huntington. Those pieces finally fell into place earlier this year, and Elston sent his proposal to Indiana FIRST. He received word in late August that the state competition would be held in Huntington.

Renee Becker-Blau, executive director of Indiana FIRST, said a record number of hosting proposals were received over the summer for the 2017 sea-

son.

In his proposal, Elston wrote, "Robotics is a very impactful activity for the youth in our community. Local sponsors hire or offer internships to students from our robotics program. They prefer to 'home grow' engineers or professionals ensuring future employment sustainability."

The championship event will be held at Huntington North High School, with teams unloading their equipment the evening of April 6.

Qualification matches will be held all day on April 7, beginning at 8 a.m. and continuing until about 8 p.m. Competition will take place again on April 8, from 8 a.m. until about 6 p.m., with qualification matches in the morning and finals after lunch.

The playing field will be set up in the HNHS gym, while robot pits will be located in the fieldhouse.

The competitions on April 7 and 8 will be open to the public at no charge. Very young children must be accompanied by an adult to enter the robot pits and

anyone visiting the pits will be required to wear safety glasses, which can be borrowed at the event.

Events leading to the state championship will begin Jan. 7, when the 2017 game is announced. Robotics teams must then design and build robotics that can accomplish the specific tasks required in the game.

The 32 teams that make it to the state championship in Huntington will consist of about 2,000 high school students, coaches and mentors, who will bring along 500 to 1,000 family members, Elston says. He expects between 500 and 1,000 Huntington residents to attend as spectators.

The Kokomo team, which hosted the state event last year, reported booking 375 hotel nights in that community. This year's event could generate more than \$100,000 in revenue for hotels and restaurants in the Huntington area, he says.

While the teams and their supporters will be spending most of their time at Huntington North, Elston says there are plans to bring

the "Huntington Experience" to them.

Local businesses will be invited to sell goods on the upper level of the HNHS gym. Elston says several businesses are already on board, including Nick's Kitchen, The Party Shop, JB's Food Truck, The Berg Ale Haus and Sugar Mama's Bakery. Other businesses are also welcome to participate, he says.

Elston says the host team

will also need about 175 volunteers to help out during the weekend. Jobs are available that last a few hours, all day and all weekend. All volunteers will get free championship shirts and free food.

The team hopes to have all planning for the event completed by the end of December so it can concentrate on designing and building its robot for the 2017 competition season beginning in January.

The cost to host the event will be about \$15,000, Elston says. The team is looking for a title sponsor as well as anyone else willing to help fund the

competition.

To become involved with the event, email Elston at [chris@elstonsystems.com](mailto:chris@elstonsystems.com) or call or text him at 224-3657.