



Photos by Don Campbell / HP staff

From left, members of the St. Joseph High School robotics team, The Average Joe's, Abby Kuespert, Amelia Ostdiek, Heather Leany and Seneca Masterson, begin brainstorming ideas during the FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics Challenge kick-off Saturday at Lake Michigan College.

Robotics teams get medieval

FIRST Robotics Challenge gives teams their kits and a peek at the game field

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BENTON TOWNSHIP — This year's FIRST Robotics Challenge began with a new theme and more instructions than previous competitions.

Hundreds of Southwest Michigan and Indiana high school students packed the Mendel Center at Lake Michigan College on Saturday to tune in for a live televised broadcast from FIRST – For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology.

This year's robotics challenge theme was medieval, which threw a few curveballs at students who will be designing, building and programming their robots over the next six weeks.

Alex Porter and Nolan Annis are captains of Berrien Springs' 12-member team called GreengineerZ. The two juniors have been on the robotics team for three years now and said the main difference for this year's challenge is its complexity.

"There's so much more involved in playing and scoring," Annis said. "This is the first year where the field can change and be decided by audience vote."



Members of the Berrien Springs High School robotics team, GreengineerZ, Alex Porter, Seth Tygesen and Nolan Annis, review schematics of the game field during the kick-off Saturday.

Porter said more will go into the competition this year because the course will ask for more of the robots submitted for competition.

In last year's event, teams were instructed to create a robot that could pick up recycling totes and stack them. The year before that, robots were programmed to pick up a ball and shoot it.

"This year is crazy because there's a lot to do. Most of the time your robot only has to do two things," Porter said. "This one you have to be able to go over different kinds of bridges, climb and shoot. We have to read the rules to fully

understand the game and to figure out how to score, especially since there is so much going on with this game."

This was Seneca Masterson's first robotics challenge. She joined the Average Joe's this summer, which is comprised of more than 40 St. Joseph High School students.

Masterson said she hopes to use these skills in college and for finding an internship in engineering. Over the next six weeks, from every Monday through Thursday – as well as Saturdays – the Average

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Joe's will be working on their robot after school and eating dinner together as a team.

"I think it's really exciting. I've said that a million times now because I mean it," Masterson said. "I think it's going to be a challenge, but I am excited for that challenge."

At 10:30 a.m., teams watched a live stream from FRC Headquarters, where they were told what the challenge would encompass.

Once the kits of parts were handed out, the 26 teams began working on designs in Upton Hall. Some began sketching their robot right away, while other teams like the Average Joe's sat down and read the manual before opening their kit.

Teams also were given a glimpse of a partial game field and game pieces set up across the hall.



Don Campbell / HP staff

Teams view a mock demonstration field during the FIRST Robotics Challenge kick-off at Lake Michigan College. Twenty-six high school teams from Allegan, Berrien, Cass, Kent, St. Joseph and Van Buren counties in Michigan and Indiana gathered Saturday for the unveiling of this year's robotics challenge.

One look at the partial game field and the Berrien Springs team began mapping out their robot.

"We have a good sense of

how big they are going to be," Porter said of the game field. "It's more complex, but it gives us more to do.

The most important thing

for us is determining how we can score the most points."

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