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High school students kick off robotics competition

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Hundreds of kids from various high schools stood up and cheered kicking off the 2010 For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology Robotics season Saturday at the Kodak Theater on the Ridge.

Today marks the official start of a grueling stretch where students will spend more than 100 hours each building a robot to compete in the regional competition at Rochester Institute of Technology in March.

Teams must build a robot during the next six weeks that can score soccer goals into a net on a 27-foot-by-54-foot field. About 40 teams from across the northeast and Canada plan on competing, and a small group of those teams could move on to the national championship in Atlanta in April.

FIRST began in 1989 to spark interest in science through solving engineering problems in a friendly yet intense competition. This year, four new teams from Rochester have been added; Rochester School for the Deaf, McQuaid Jesuit High School, Eastridge High School and Pittsford Mendon and Sutherland high schools.

“The greater community will hopefully realize that deaf and hard-of-hearing students truly are on a par with their hearing peers, in terms of education, communication, personal skills, passions for learning, and competitive spirit,” said Wendy Dannels, a co-team leader for the Rochester School for the Deaf. “At the same time also they want to have fun just like anyone else. Along with that we hope that many will notice and appreciate that people who are deaf and hard of hearing – young adults and your neighbors in this community also – are active participants community-wide; like one big family. If we can do that successfully here in FIRST Robotics, then it can certainly happen anywhere.”

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