

## *Publicity FIRST*

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Publicity is how your team gets funding, members, advisors, mentors, resources. Students cannot join *FIRST* if they don't know about it, fundraisers and events must be advertised to attract audiences and sponsors are more likely to contribute if they've already heard about you.

You should give your sponsor and school good press coverage because they deserve it! This is a case of tooting your own horn. People will never know what great things you accomplish unless you tell them, and that includes using articles to promote the team and *FIRST* (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology), recruit new students, advertise for events, appeal for engineers, appeal for resources. In a broad sense, even the *FIRST* Chairman's Award submission is a form of team publicity. You're showcasing and promoting both the best features of your team and *FIRST* objectives and goals.

Good publicity takes time and effort, but getting your message across clearly can lead to excellent coverage of and attendance at your event.

Your publicity at the local level, while it only reaches people who live in your area, will be seen by the workers of regional publications who make their home in your community. In that way, local publicity can in turn lead to broader media coverage.

We'll talk about many different kinds of publicity, the specific benefits of each, and types of media you can take advantage of. Few teams, without the benefit of massive support, will be able to do it all. That isn't our intent. We just want you to be aware of the many possibilities that can make a difference for your team. It's like any of the engineering disciplines applied to the robot, where the team has to decide on the best course and how focusing your efforts will return the best results, or the best return for the time devoted to publicity. We'll concentrate on pointers in getting material into local free publications/websites/broadcasts, writing press releases, and finally, there are ideas and sample press releases to help get you moving. Most of all we want you to know how easy it is and the value it has for your team. Publications, radio, and television need new stories every day! When you supply a community publication with a regular, steady stream of stories, they start to look to you for filler stories when they are running short.

Remember to maintain an archive of what you publish, where you publish it, contacts, and any other important details for those generations of teammates who come after you. When you get established and accustomed to getting the word out about *FIRST* you will no longer have a need to refer to any of this, but remember you should be teaching and passing on your experience to others. Learning and passing on knowledge should be our goal.

Other sources of information on publicity include classes at local colleges and volunteer centers, your local library, and public relations websites.

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## I. Why Should I Publicize?

Communicating team activities around school through flyers, posters, public address (PA) announcements, etc. attracts students, teachers, and administrators to build your team and retain existing members. Broader public relations builds awareness about *FIRST* and attracts parents, mentors, advisors, working and retired engineers, sponsors, and donors and generally enhances your image in the mind of the school, sponsors, and general public. Plus it's fun to see your team in the papers and gives you news clippings to paper the walls with. You even want people who don't get directly involved with your team to read about you and *FIRST* and to speak of you in a positive way, spreading your fame by word-of-mouth. Good publicity projects an image of your team that makes people want to participate and contribute. Good publicity also shows the school, and by association the whole school system, in a positive light — very important in maintaining the principal, superintendent, and school board interest in funding the team and in providing meeting space, tools, materials, teacher support, etc. Keeping your sponsor's name(s) in the papers makes them more interested in keeping your funding, facility, and engineer support going. They want to be well looked upon by the community as well.

### **It's so easy...**

You're probably already doing posters and flyers to advertise for new members. If you expand that to advertise all your events, community service, and competitions throughout the school year, even if you aren't actively recruiting, students will be primed to join when you start recruiting next year. It takes minimal effort to ask for a PA announcement, put up posters, and distribute flyers around school. The secret to the wider world of public media lies in prompt, adequate preparation of meaningful stories for print, broadcast, web media, etc. Stories must be targeted for the communities that will read the publication, and school, community and local newspapers are just as important to your public relations efforts as larger regional newspapers.

### **Publicize your publicity**

Let the movers and shakers for your team know about your publicity efforts. Send your principal, the school board, the school system superintendent, and sponsors copies of published articles. Post them on your team bulletin board, in your show case, on your teacher advisor's doors. It's important to let the critical people and organizations in your team's life know when you've been successful at publishing. Publicity has great impact when coming from a third party not affiliated with the team; that's why it's good for the school system superintendent, principal, school board, PTA, sponsors, advisors, etc. to hear when someone else says good things about your team and to get copies of any publicity you garner. Clipped articles also look great on your team bulletin board or the doors of your robotics advisors. It adds an out-of-school, community-wide dimension to the team.

### **Who's job is it anyway?**

Your publicity efforts are only limited by the people available to dedicate at least some time to it. It isn't a 24-hour job, but the person or persons doing it should always be on the lookout for good press opportunities and be prepared to take advantage of them as they arise. Publicity can be handled by a single person, but there are also lots of student/parent jobs available here! You already have some of these jobs in place, such as team T-shirts and handouts, photographer/videographer, etc. To do it all would be a full-time job, so choose what works best for you and has the most impact for your team, but be consistent with whatever you chose to do. Remember, too, that larger sponsors have public relations departments of their own and can complement your efforts to get regional media coverage. Coordinate your efforts with and learn from them.

## II. Targets of Publicity

We've mentioned that publicity is used to reach and communicate with people who affect your team and those who are affected by your team. Each type of publicity or media must have a target audience in mind because that defines the kind of information you include and how that information gets presented. Each of the following broad targets of publicity identifies some of the associated benefits that good publicity can bring.

### ❖ **Team**

Inter-team communication keeps team sponsors, members and, very important, families informed about current news. Promote upcoming events - weekend doings, after school meetings, projects, experiments, etc. Promote team pride and camaraderie and improves overall attendance, cooperation, and teamwork.

- Keep team members informed and involved
- Draw parents onto the team
- Retain existing members
- Locate needed resources
- Promote *FIRST* principles

### ❖ **School**

Make the H.S. and school system administration and students proud of the work the team is accomplishing and how they are representing/promoting the school. Create and maintain a priority status with the administration when it comes to funding, space, and other assistance. We want students who don't even know any of the kids on the team to be saying, "Our robotics team is cool."

- Keep team activities before the administration
- Draw in new members
- Make the team an integral part of the school's culture
- Promote *FIRST* principles

### ❖ **Community**

Develop pride of hometown "ownership." Local businesses, community organizations, and local politicians are potential sponsors, promoters, and resources. Local political goodwill can be especially helpful when you need support at budget time.

- Retain current sponsors
- Attract new sponsors
- Identify community resources
- Build community identity and gain recognition
- Promote *FIRST* principles

### ❖ **Multi-Team**

Identifies team as organized; shows you've "got it together."

- Build name/robot recognition for alliance building
- Promote idea exchange
- Facilitate inter-team resource sharing
- Promote *FIRST* principles

❖ **Company/Sponsors/College**

We're referring here to potential sponsors as well as companies and sponsors with an existing team relationship, however tenuous, and to colleges with or without active mentors. The plan here is similar to the one for school administrations in creating and maintaining a priority status with existing sponsors. Capitalize on existing parent/mentor relationships with companies or sponsors to reach and recruit more mentors and locate available corporate resources, especially when parents/mentors work for a mid-size to large company.

- Recruit mentors
- Recruit sponsors
- Identify company resources

### III. Media – From Buttons to Broadcasts

Media takes many, many forms, but some forms are better suited to specific audiences than others. For instance, flyers and posters may be better suited to getting the word out in school than a website, but that website can reach audiences outside the school. Distributing flyers may work well on a street corner, but they will reach only as many people as happen by that day. A poster on the same corner can reach everyone who passes by all month.

We'll briefly touch on a sampling of target audiences and suitable media types.

#### Target Audiences

Here are some ways to get the word out about your team to the specific target audiences identified in the last section. We're not going into detail about all forms, especially since many of them will be very familiar to you.

##### Team/School/Multi-Team

- ❖ Tri-fold brochures
- ❖ Flyers
- ❖ Posters
- ❖ School public address system
- ❖ Branding in the form of unique team shirt, etc.
- ❖ Team buttons and other handouts, including special awards to other teams who exemplify *FIRST* principles, great plays, best alliance partner, etc.
- ❖ Team newsletter/email
- ❖ Banners
- ❖ Website
- ❖ Team business cards & email addresses

##### School/School System

- ❖ Team trophy showcase/bulletin board space
- ❖ Booth at school club days or homecoming, for example
- ❖ School/school system/PTA newsletter/email
- ❖ School yearbook
- ❖ Open house/parent night videos
- ❖ Website
- ❖ School/District-wide calendars (e.g., dates of *FIRST* competitions)

##### Community

- ❖ Community calendars
- ❖ Local community newspaper
- ❖ Regional/national newspaper
- ❖ Radio stations
- ❖ Broadcast/cable television
- ❖ Website and web advertising
- ❖ Banners
- ❖ Volunteer centers or services that match volunteers with needy organizations

##### Company/Sponsor/College

- ❖ Company newsletter (for established mentors/parents/sponsors)
- ❖ Websites (employee highlights, community interest)
- ❖ Promotional video/CD/DVD (potential sponsors)
- ❖ Presentations (potential sponsors)

- ❖ College newspapers/campus advertising (college mentors)

## **Non-Professional Media**

These include branding items, the flyers you print up yourself, and the team, PTA, or school system newsletters. No one makes money off of these.

### **Branding**

Branding is a strategy that makes people automatically associate a particular team with a signature item, logo, slogan, look, etc. Branding works best of course when such items are worn en masse. Teams that apply branding are easy to pick out, whether at a competition or on the street, and people remember them. The most common examples of branding items are unique team shirts, buttons, or team handouts - all these work best when worn or distributed en masse. Many teams feel strongly about keeping the T-shirt very similar in style, colors, and logo year-to-year and including that brand in everything they do. Buttons and other team handouts need to be readily identifiable with the team. Printing the team number and name on each item or, in the case of buttons, applying small stickers to the back gives room to include your team web address, *FIRST*'s website, and the websites of your sponsors.

### **Flyers, tri-fold brochures, etc.**

We won't go into any depth discussing how to do flyers, brochures, posters, banners, etc., since most you will already be doing those. Suffice it to say they must be colorful and eye-catching, and not so crowded with information that it frightens readers. Posters and banners need large text so they can easily be read at some distance. Banners should draw them in, while brochures can be used to provide the main points you need to make. Team business cards are an easy way to follow up contacts.

### **Team Newsletter**

Kathie formerly of Team 173 R.A.G.E. published a team newsletter "about every 4-6 weeks during the school year. It was e-mailed to parents, school administrators and teachers, Boards of Ed, local politicians, and our sponsor reps. It didn't 'say' a whole lot, but was intended to make them aware that we were a club who met year-round, who participated in community service events, etc. In other words, we did more than the average 'club' in our high schools. We got some good feedback from the newsletter and it only costs the team my time to produce it (i.e. NOTHING!)."

Newsletters are all about communication and keeping contact with people interested in the team and its doings. They can be distributed via email, handouts in class, or US Postal Service. Jenny Beatty, a former *FIRST* Senior Mentor for Maryland, comments, "I do targeted email newsletters, so they vary by audience." Some important people to put on your email list include your sponsors; H.S. principal; school system superintendent; school board; administrator for the school board; school system head of technology, education, and careers; system head of math and science; communications officer for your school system; etc.

Here are some newsletter thoughts to keep in mind.

#### 1. HOW OFTEN?

How often should newsletters go out? That varies depending on what information needs to be communicated. Are team committees or sub-groups giving input to newsletter? Remember, committees/committee members are busy folks, so don't put a strain on their time! Are there specific activities upcoming that need to be advertised? What's the

team doing? Are you in the middle of build? A regular schedule of publication release is recommended (i.e. monthly, bi-monthly, or quarterly). Try to remain consistent and not publish erratically, but remain flexible and realistic if you have limited time.

Special or short-notice events may force special edition mailings of flyers or special invitations, but don't hesitate to avoid special mailings if possible as specific message mailings are expensive and don't return enough "bang for your buck." However, publish/distribute as needed or advisable.

## 2. CONTENTS

*Team president/lead advisor messages* – can stress upcoming activities and emphasize the relevant topic/deadlines for commitments by others (i.e. drivers, fundraisers, etc.)

*Committee reports on activities or coming events* – may include fundraising, lectures, community demonstrations, sponsor visits, workshops, off-season experiments.

*Editorials* ("letters to the editor") -- suggestions, miscellaneous comments can make the reader feel his voice will be heard, inspire folks to get active, make us feel like "one big happy family."

*Team schedule of events* – helps involve parents and other family members who like to know what's going on (teammates often don't remember to pass on information of interest). If you can get the newsletter into homes, more family supporters will be drawn in.

*TO AVOID:* Inside jokes and "you hadda be there" stories as they tend to alienate team members who weren't there and inspire cliquishness.

## 3. MAKE IT VISUAL

Use photos, drawings, computer and cut-and-paste clip art, etc. to draw the reader into the story, but don't overdo it (KISS – Keep It Simple, Stupid and "less is more" both apply). Don't overdo different typefaces and point sizes, including underlining, boldface, etc.; you're not trying to frighten or confuse your readers.

### School/PTA - newsletter/bulletin

Your school may have more publications than you realize, so ask around and investigate. These publications typically need short blurbs due to space constraints, but you might be able to get a feature story in one issue. As with any other publication, but especially with any school publication, you'll get the best results if you work through friends of the staff or are otherwise on good terms with the editors. Don't neglect middle school publications, particularly if the team helps or demonstrates at the junior high. That's where next year's team members will be coming from. Line them up now, before you have the competition from other high school clubs.

### Yearbook

Due to the lead-time required by the publishers of bound volumes, the yearbook staff typically needs photos and write-ups in the fall or by early winter at the latest, before the *FIRST* season starts. You'll need to have a good set of photos from the previous year or at least group photos featuring the previous season's robot. You want to write the yearbook entry so it appeals to and attracts those upcoming sophomores and upper classmen and, as with every other media outlet, it has to match the style (look & feel) the yearbook editorial staff has established.



**Website**

The most important issue with using web pages for team communication is keeping the content up-to-date. Team schedules, meeting minutes, sub-team status all must be kept current on at least a weekly basis or team members will cease to depend on and visit the site for their information. Newsletters or email arrive whenever there's news to report, but a website depends on people to poll it to see if anything's changed or been updated. You can side-step this problem by combining website updates with a notifying email. If you're on good terms with the school administration you can lobby for a link to the team website directly from the H.S. or school system website. High school alumni groups can be sources of donations and they may have websites that can be linked to yours.

Investigate website/search engine promotion. "Our web has a press center and is optimized for search engines. For awhile I used a free online service to see how our web was being found, and to see what keywords brought us visitors, and to see how high in search engines we were for keywords and perhaps see a way to improve that or meet a need - like a single page on LEGO<sup>®</sup> League Tournament, or a single page on the Los Angeles Regional," says Cheryl of Team 294, Beach Cities Robotics (see the Beach Cities Robotics press center at <http://www.bcrobotics.org/>).

Common team-based email addresses (which can be forwarded to regular mailboxes) make it easy for everyone on the team to rattle off everyone else's address, and easy for an outsider to contact multiple people on a team. It can disguise the problem of teammates frequently changing their email addresses, as well. Email (or website) addresses that are short or memorable (to a non-*FIRSTer*) are important, too. On all your team email use a signature line that identifies your name, team name and number, and contact information such as your email address and phone number. Remember some people are web-savvy while others are phone-savvy so providing multiple ways to be contacted will be more successful.

Finally, I encourage you to post all the articles you write on your website and identify those that get published, along with where and when they were published.

**Direct Advertising**

Mount banners where they are easily seen by the public you are trying to reach -- for instance, on a school fence at a major intersection, in the school cafeteria, on hallway walls, outside your sponsor's place of business, etc. Banners are also great ways to advertise those great sponsors who support you. Cheryl of the Beach Bots says, "Our sidewalk sign is well recognized, always on the sidewalk when we're working, and has brought us unexpected sponsors and team members. The community is beginning to realize that if they see the sign, they can drop in." Bulk mailing to the community or potential sponsors is about 1/3 less expensive than first class. As a guideline, if you are mailing a few hundred pieces at a time, a few times a year, or if you plan to make a large, one-time mailing—for example, 5,000 flyers to announce an upcoming sales event—bulk mail may be a good deal for you, but there is an additional fee.

We're brushing over paid advertising here, but that can be used as well. In your direct marketing include efforts such as recruiting students at homecoming or on school Club Days. Having last year's robot there or mini-robots such as Robovation, Robosapiens, or soccer bots can make your display the most interesting of all the club signups and draw crowds of new members.

## Professional Media

Professional media outlets have their own needs, agendas and ideas about what they publish or broadcast. Make contacts and form a relationship with an editor, reporter, or TV/radio personality to make it easier to get information to the media and to give them a contact for when they need information from you, too. Visit your local library reference department for your community's communications and publications directories which list all print, TV, cable, and radio news media. All broadcast media will do occasional news spots or Public Service Announcements for *FIRST*, and that means free air time (usually 10 to 30 second spots). TV and radio stations donate this air time to meet the Federal Communications Commission's public service requirements. There are organizations that will do pro-bono production, but it is more common for local stations to do it, although it's expensive for them. Be prepared, a request to a station for sponsor/partnership will take 6-12 months, so do it with next year in mind. If you can find a "talent" interested in causes like *FIRST*, it's an easy sell if you contact them directly.

### TV

Local TV news stations (broadcast and cable), PBS and public access educational stations are likely to be looking for local stories; and cable usually has a few special purpose channels dedicated to community events and public service. Don't forget local college stations as they can also attract engineering students as mentors.

You can request specific "talent" to come to your event. The stations want *visual* stories, like robots in motion with lots of people around, so competitions or demonstrations are the best appointment to make. It is a commitment of time and money on their part, so they may want an exclusive story. Don't invite two film crews at once. There is usually a weekend assignment editor who can be contacted. Ask them if they want a follow-up call the week before the event. Community Bulletin Boards on cable look for up to 12 lines of 30 characters each as far in advance as possible, at least 3 weeks.

### Radio

Time your spoken announcements. They must be written for 10, 15, 30, 60, or 90-second timeframes. Stations tend to like short announcements. Send the written material to the Public Service Announcements (PSA) Dept. or Community Bulletin Board Dept. Public Radio tends to do in-depth stories. Radio stations generally conduct interviews live or the week before a broadcast. TV and radio often are interested in trend stories, such as "The popularity of science-related school clubs like *FIRST* is on the rise. Membership in *FIRST* Team 4321 has risen over the past two years from the 10 original founders to 35 members today. Worldwide participation in *FIRST* has increased over the same time period 28%." Be sure to go beyond dry statistics and data to make the script concrete enough to engage listeners. You can record your own PSA or write a short script to be read on-air by the DJ. Ask the station which they prefer. If you submit a script, read the message out loud and time yourself. It will be read as part of a community calendar or whenever there is spare broadcast time to fill.

### Web

Look for on-line magazines, community calendars and bulletin boards, "what to do around town," etc. Take advantage of web enhancements such as embedded audio/video clips and hyperlinks. Submit news releases for free to prweb.com, where they'll be turned up by search engines. Keep an eye out for unexpected places where your information may show up. With on-line publications, unlike print media and TV or radio spots, the material stays around for awhile and any errors can be corrected. Potential sites to submit material to include prweb.com and volunteermatch.org, but search out local equivalents.

**Print**

This includes articles and letters to the editor. You can usually submit the same story to several publications. They won't all carry it, but you improve your odds of getting it published somewhere. However, if reporters come to do a story on you, consider it an exclusive. With each article, include a photo or two with captions to choose from that supports the story. Technical magazines such as *SERVO* specialize in articles about robotics. "Letters to the Editor" are used for a specific reason, such as a thank you to the community for support of specific fundraising activities; support for or opposition to a current event or legislation that affects the team or *FIRST*; or reaction to some related technological issue. Letters must be short, sweet, and very to-the-point, i.e., no more than 300 words. They won't be edited or rewritten, so make sure you have someone edit them.

## **IV. Issuing Press Releases**

Growth in *FIRST* depends on publicity -- getting the good word out to the uninitiated and recruiting new sponsors as well as teams. It may be hard for an individual to attract the attention of the major networks, but a grass roots program of local publicity by all of us will reach the network employees where they live and build street recognition of *FIRST* and hence momentum for major coverage.

The most popular form of getting your story out is with a news release. Writing press releases may seem daunting at first, but it's one of the easiest and most effective methods to get your information out to a broader audience. A press release shouldn't be a dry statement of facts, but a story that readers will find interesting. Think of yourself as a freelance reporter for that newspaper you're trying to get an article into. They've gained an employee for a day (sorry, strictly commission). Yours is like one of those Associated Press stories, about local interest news. If your story is written during an event, get it to the media as soon as possible. They like to print timely stories. You can let your audience know that this story is only a part of what *FIRST* is all about, and you can check the *FIRST* website for supporting quotes and succinct descriptions of *FIRST*. If you use existing material verbatim, always remember to credit the original source and ask permission to use others' material where appropriate.

None of the discussion which follows on writing press releases means you shouldn't try to interest media in covering an event or your team's story with their own reporter, cameraperson or photographer. But it's much more common, generally easier (especially for the smaller papers), and you'll get more press coverage if you deliver a ready-made press release that can be used as is with little effort on their part.

Invite local politicians, school officials and teachers, the PTA executive board, sponsors, anyone who could have an influence your team. Don't be discouraged if they don't come; they are busy people. However, keep sending them notices, because often they enjoy keeping track of your team. When they do come be sure to get photos taken and jot down notes about their visit. Then release an article describing their visit. Lead off the article with their name and office held as the most important fact: "President Lincoln met with *FIRST* robotics team 358 from Hauppauge High School yesterday at a special ceremony for well known dead presidents. President Fillmore was unable to attend."

We'll deal in the following sections with the issues of locating media, informing media, and dealing with editors, as well as the basic format of a press release, writing style, and photo tips, and we'll finish up with ideas for stories.

## Locating the media

The first question everyone faces is who might publish your story? For local school media, it's easiest to work through any team members who know school, school system, or PTA newsletter, bulletin, yearbook, or newspaper staff; or you can introduce yourself and get to know the editors of these publications personally. Probably the foremost thing to remember is this: one contact leads to another. You'll hear of other reporters, websites, publications, community calendars, and so on just by always keeping your ears and eyes open and asking everyone. Follow up new leads and make new contacts just as a reporter would, only in your case you're hunting reporters (be vewwy vewwy quiet).

Check the local newsstand, local library, drug and grocery stores for local publications you may not be aware of. See what publications circulate within your community. You'll be surprised at how many newspaper and magazine weeklies and monthlies, important to the local community and businesses, there are. Ask your parents and mentors about their internal company newspapers. The editors of those company newsletters are interested in stories about employees working as mentors. Take a look at the free papers that come in your own mailbox. Remember those smaller community newsletters: "Church members mentor local high school students in science and technology..." These can be used to attract new mentors from the community or solicit donations of tools or material.

Visit your local library's Reference department for your community's communications and publications directories that list all print, TV, cable, and radio news media. Each library will stock different reference sources, but here are some examples:

- ❖ *News Media Yellow Book* – detailed contact information for all national media, including local and on-line affiliates, listed by internal dept. and editor
- ❖ *Standard Rate and Data Service (SDRS) Advertising Source* volumes – general contact info. for TV, cable, radio, newspaper, community and business publications
- ❖ *Working Press of the Nation: Newspaper Directory/ Magazine and Newsletter Directory/TV and Radio Directory (News Media Directory)*.

For known media you can also check the local business yellow pages or their websites for contacts. Locate the community news departments of local television and radio affiliates and independent stations for both broadcast and cable. Look for the people or departments responsible for publishing community calendars on the web, in local papers, on community cable channels, and those produced by your local library system. After you have a list of the media you want to approach, call each of them to identify and locate the appropriate contact to send your articles to. When sending articles to publications that cover multiple areas or that use inserts for different towns, make it clear which community(ies) your team is from or the edition that covers your area.

Now call on those local editors you've identified and establish a personal relationship. Yes, this includes the school's yearbook staff. If an editor can connect a face and name with an article, there is a much greater chance it will be used. Staff are much more likely to pay attention to your press releases if you have already established a connection. Do your homework on the publication itself, so you aren't unfamiliar with the publication when you talk to that editor for the first time. You want to be able to address your submissions to an editor or reporter by name, not "Dear Smithtown News." Who wants to open a letter addressed to "occupant?" Avoid visiting them at deadline time, such as the day before a weekly goes to press. Early mornings or early afternoons are usually less hectic. You can increase your chances by sending releases to both an editor *and* a reporter.

You want to make it as easy as possible for the media people to do their job.

- ❖ Find out the newspaper's deadlines for articles. Deadlines may vary section-by-section within a paper. For instance, the "Around Town" and lifestyle sections of the newspaper will be finalized earlier than the front page, late-breaking news.
- ❖ How often are they likely to publish your articles? Community papers may cover your events every month or so, regional/national papers maybe once a year. Don't send them an article a week.
- ❖ How do they want to receive submissions (email, mail, hand delivered)? Some large media organizations will block email attachments for fear of viruses. Learn how the editors and reporters you will deal with prefer to communicate. Don't, for example, persist in sending email to someone who prefers to talk on the phone. Since you have that contact sheet for reporters, etc., include notes on how each of them prefers to receive news releases or articles (email, fax, postal service).

Finally, after you've done all this legwork, preserve the product of that hard work by maintaining a comprehensive list of your local media contacts, names/numbers for radio/TV station news directors, business/general interest/community reporters for daily newspapers, reporters/editors for weekly papers, web content providers for "This Weekend" type of news, etc. The next team PR person will thank you.

## **Informing the media**

Okay, you've researched all that contact information for local papers, TV, magazines, radio, etc., so you know who to send releases to. I know this has been said before, but make personal contact with those people before you begin sending articles. A personal relationship will always get you much, much further than blindly sending out news releases. Press releases and accompanying photos can usually be sent via email and that's easiest for everyone. Email costs you nothing to send as many articles to as many publications as you like. The photo is already in digital format and the article comes ready-to-edit. Use club letterhead; it's good for both regular mail and for email and is a variation on branding. You want them to readily recognize your submissions (at least the media that regularly publishes your press releases).

Local newspapers are always looking for community interest filler articles. Your articles will go in on a space-available basis. Weekly publications will often carry your story as-is, if well written, while daily papers will edit your material to fit space and editorial needs. If you feed them a steady stream of good articles they will even begin to call you for filler material. The best time to get anything published is during slow times, such as January and the summer. The worst time of year is October/November because of elections, and April/May due to school board elections and school budget votes.

When we publicize our upcoming *FIRST* events to outlets such as TV, radio, or newspapers we hope they will run our story, but major media such as the *NY Times*, for example, will send a reporter and write their own in-depth story. If you are trying to get radio, television, or major print media to come to your event, then allow enough time for the media to react to your announcement, decide to come, and prepare for your event by scheduling the reporters time. When major media look for material for stories they themselves decide to develop, they follow leads and work through people they and their employees know or know about. That's where good local publicity can attract the attention of bigger and better publications. Major papers will typically conduct interviews during the day and they look for teachers/students/mentors and quotable quotes. Provide good sound bites, quick and to

the point just like ChiefDelphi forum spotlights, but they must be comprehensible and readily understandable to people outside the *FIRST* culture. When reporters come to call, provide them with written backup material such as team and *FIRST* brochures, and team and *FIRST* website addresses. It helps the reporter to have some reference material for greater understanding and to draw from and condense to deepen their story. Prepare for interviews by knowing the message you want to convey and listing points that can be worked into the response. Give direct answers to the reporter's questions, beginning with your conclusions followed by supporting facts, and don't ramble. SLOW DOWN, because most people talk too fast for the reporter to quote accurately or an audience to keep up. Avoid *FIRST* jargon or any jargon for that matter. Amusing "behind the scenes" stories can be great, but they shouldn't be so specific to *FIRST* and insider knowledge that they won't be instantly understood and identified with by outsiders. Avoid using "our," "us," or "we;" use your team name instead. When the sound byte (10-15 seconds) gets edited, no one may know who "us" is, so make sure your team name is always in the sound byte.

The best way to thank an editor is to buy copies of his or her publication, or reprints of an article. Remember too that they'll be left with unsold copies when the next edition comes out, and you may be able to pick up additional copies for free. Remember you want to send copies to all the important people in your team's life: sponsors, school superintendent, high school principal, school board, administrator for the school board, school system head of technology education and careers, school system head of math and science, communications officer for your school system, etc.

## **Public Service Announcements (PSA)**

These are a special type of press release that is a natural fit for *FIRST* teams. PSAs are usually issued by non-profit organizations and are short, non-commercial and, in this case, intended to provide information to the public on your activities and events. A non-commercial announcement contains information that benefits its intended *audience*, rather than the team that created it. You're not advertising the team, but something it does to affect or benefit the community. Usually this translates to *FIRST*'s basic goals, better schools, an educated community, etc. They cannot be used to promote your sponsors, so their names do not get mentioned. For instance, good PSAs might tell the public about a free, off-season competition or a team open house, but will not advertise the sponsors of that event.

On top of your release type:

### **PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT**

Common examples of audio, video, and press PSAs addressing a wide range of environmental and social issues can easily be found on the web. The message itself must be short, crisp, clear and concise -- all information without extra fluff. For TV and radio, try to keep the PSA to a single page double spaced; use short upbeat sentences written in everyday language; tell how this information can help the listener/viewer; and remember who, what, when, where. Edit very tightly and always ask the listener for action. Include a reading or running time for radio or TV spots. Pre-recorded radio or TV spots require a double-spaced, printed script along with your audio/video tape for the editor's review and to guide the live announcer. A sample TV script is shown at the end of this manual. Label all recordings with the same header you put on the printed script, i.e., contact name and information, team name, and headline. Send PSAs to the station as far in advance as possible, but at least four weeks. If you need help producing a video spot try asking the

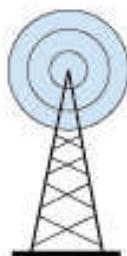
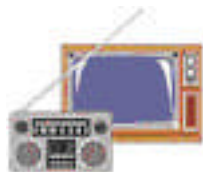
local TV or college stations to produce it with their on-air talent and share the tag line with the station. Community stations may offer classes and low-cost assistance.

## ***FIRST* Brand**

To protect valuable *FIRST* assets and help build and maintain a strong and consistent visual identity for *FIRST*, we must adhere to the latest *FIRST* Branding and Design Standards and Trademark Policy described in the *FIRST* website media section: <http://www.usfirst.org/brand>.

In general, *FIRST* is always italicized and other terms are registered or unregistered trademarks. For example:

- *FIRST*®
- *FIRST*® Robotics Competition
- FRC®
- FTC®
- FLL®
- *FIRST*® Tech Challenge
- LUNACY®
- Coopertition™
- Gracious Professionalism™



## Basic format of a Press Release

The following section covers the type of information newspapers are looking to see. Collect this information before writing the article. These are the dry facts; your story will become more palatable when you actually write the full article. The most likely reason your story will be valuable to a publication is that is both relevant to their readers and makes at least mildly interesting reading, so make sure it is both!

### Most important

Foremost is to give the editor the name and phone number of a *contact person* and the best time to reach them (usually this is you, the writer). This means day/evening cell phone #'s. They'll need this if they are on deadline and need to contact you NOW! Include the team name and the date of the press release.

Add the statement: “**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**” or “**FOR RELEASE ON (or AFTER) <date>**” or “**PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT.**”

Provide a short *headline* that summarizes the press release at a glance, and a dateline (CITY, date). Make sure you use the date you expect it to arrive on the journalist's desk. You don't want them to think it's old news. Try to include your team name in the headline to bring name recognition.

### Vital information

The Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How of the matter.

- ❖ What was or will be the event?
- ❖ When did or does it take place?
- ❖ Where was it or will it be held?
- ❖ Who sponsored or will sponsor the event and who did or will benefit from it?
- ❖ How many people are expected to or did attend and who are they? (Team members, people interested in becoming team members, families, open to the public?) Did or will (might) any dignitaries attend?

Include team contact info. for readers to call for more information, to volunteer, to donate materials/services. Include as many ways to make contact as possible: address, website, phone, fax, email. For non-school publications such as the web or newspapers, you might want to make the contact an adult who would be the most available and knowledgeable for additional information. Provide a student/teacher contact for school newspapers.

### Less important

If the event is coming up, then state clearly the cost of the event (especially if it's free!) and who may attend (everyone). If post-event, then are there any photos? What's happening in the picture and who's in the photo? (Identify, printed or typed for correct spelling of names, left-to-right.) If you don't know everyone in the photo, then immediately after the photo is taken get everyone's name and *FIRST* or other affiliation if any and write it down. Try to get at least one or two people in the photo to give it human interest appeal. Choose high contrast photos that will look good reproduced in black and white newsprint. See photo tips.

Quotes liven up an article. Make it a point to always include two or three quotes from different people in every article you write. This means keeping an ear open for those memorable quotes whenever you're talking with people or listening to another



conversation. Jot the quote down immediately upon hearing something good, along with the person's name and *FIRST* affiliation.

Are there any other interesting comments about the event that you can add?

**General background information that can be thrown in**

How long has team been in existence?

What is the next upcoming event people should know about, to encourage them to attend?

What community outreach programs/events does the team sponsor or support?

Any unique selling points? What's special about your team?

*FIRST* isn't yet a household name, so you can always add a generic description and reference [www.usfirst.org](http://www.usfirst.org) for more information.

**Standard *FIRST* background paragraph**

Where did *FIRST* come from? How long has it been around? Who is the force behind it?

A 2011 sample is included at the back of this manual on page 17.

Reference the *FIRST* Press page for all the background material a reporter could want, as well as *FIRST* media contacts: <http://usfirst.org/aboutus/press-room>

**Putting it together**

Now that you have the information in front of you, put it into double-spaced sentences and paragraphs. Write fast to get the story on paper and edit later. That'll give your story a natural feel. Ask yourself what you want your readers to be thinking when they finish your article. Don't forget to make your last paragraph "for more information about *FIRST* [www.usfirst.org](http://www.usfirst.org) or this Team, please call .... at .... (phone #)."

Double check all facts and spellings, such as names of people, sponsors, organizations, streets, titles, businesses. Is all background information correct? If possible have someone else read and edit it and verify your facts.

## **Writing style**

Have others review your article for style, clarity, content, spelling, grammar, punctuation, tone, etc. You'll have a blind spot for some problem areas because you'll so easily see what you meant to say. Don't agonize over formatting. The editor will set that to fit the publication's look and style.

The media determines the basic writing style, and you'll need to adjust your copy to match the style of a newspaper or other publisher. Read their publication first to understand the kinds of stories they favor, the style of writing (terse and informative vs. chatty narrative), the variation in the length of articles, anything to get an idea of what kind of writing makes it into the paper or onto the website. Read the media and write what you see.

**Regarding story type:**

To make your story more engaging and press-worthy you need to look at writing it from different angles. *Business News* will be interested in your student/sponsor relationship, while the local town paper might want to see more of a human interest side to your story. The *National Enquirer* doesn't want a *NY Times* style article; they want robots with two heads, and may not care who your sources are. How about:

*New evidence uncovered that Elvis was kidnapped by FIRST robotics team as a new game design gone awry. Spotted wearing a blue Hawaiian shirt at FIRST National competition.*

*Aliens abduct robot! Team gets it back with sensors and electronics not available through the approved suppliers. Robot refuses to part with new “brains,” now a judge at Long Island regional.*

**Regarding style and tone:**

Adapt your writing to the style of the web, magazine, daily, weekly, etc. Magazines, for example, are published with a particular audience or demographic in mind. Don't send them articles that are completely wrong for their style and audience. Match their tone: factual, witty, practical, sophisticated, emotional, etc. Keep stories positive and upbeat, even if they are a desperate cry for help. Your enthusiasm for robotics will make any story more appealing. Remember, except for the Team newsletter, an article must be understandable to people outside the *FIRST* organization, so avoid jargon, inside/cliqish details, veiled references, and overly technical descriptions. This includes the acronym *FIRST*, too! You may have noticed *FIRST* was defined at the start of this document, even though I expect all of you to know what it stands for.

**Regarding length:**

The stories that are published are not usually the complete original submissions; the editor has tailored the article to fit the available space, so you can probably make your stories a little longer than what you see printed. Write as much as you need to get your story across and let the editor do his or her job – editing it to fit! Better too much information than not enough to explain *FIRST* to the uninitiated general public.

**Regarding organization and content:**

Most importantly, the title has to communicate the story in just a few tightly edited and easily understood words. If at all possible, include a benefit of your story within the title, it really can help. Make sure the first few sentences or lead-ins are effective, since they will be the ones read by most readers. You've got one sentence to make them want to read your story. The lead-in doesn't have to be packed with facts; instead hook the reader immediately with an interesting angle on the story to follow or vivid imagery that sparks the imagination. You want to snare those readers who are casual browsers. After the lead-in state the most important facts first. For example, the following are two potential ways to open the same story. The first example gets all the facts into the opening line and might work well as a photo caption, while the second concentrates on grabbing the reader's imagination and works better as a lead-in to the full story.

- 1. NYS Senator Owen Johnson was honored at a fund-raising dinner for FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) at Chateau Briand, 440 Old Country Road, Carle Place, on Wednesday, November 3, 2011.*
- 2. Every year thousands of high school students across the country are challenged to design and build, from scratch, unique robots to compete in regional events all over the nation leading to a national playoff. Without NYS Senator Owen Johnson, the Long Island FIRST Robotics Competition could never happen, depriving 40 Long Island teams of the opportunity of a lifetime.*

The standard newspaper approach (Journalism 101) teaches an inverted pyramid: Theme and major conclusion on top, followed by the most important supporting information, then the next most important, and so on, dribbling off to the point of the pyramid at the bottom. The reason for this is copy often gets cut from the bottom up to fit the available space, so this organization makes it easier on the editor. This is a good practice to follow, especially starting out, but it isn't as critical with today's computers as it was in the days of typography. With word processors, editors can easily trim excess copy from anywhere in the story, which is one of the reasons they like to receive digital copies. However, you do risk having the article suffer if the editor works for a smaller paper and/or is rushed and harried by a deadline. Sometimes your most important details don't make for an opening sentence that hooks readers. For variation, try mixing the basic facts with the most interesting side notes. Use some of the more colorful details at the front to grab readers' attention and keep them reading through the drier stuff. A dramatic opening can be given a context with the later sentences. You still want to deliver the most essential information early in the story, but it doesn't always have to be at the very start. Do not include physical directions in references to photos in your article (e.g., "in the photo above"). What is "above" in your version will probably not be in the editor's layout.

Here are some additional suggestions:

- ❖ Decide who the audience is and address that audience. Think about how people will be able to relate to what you have written; will they be able to make a connection? Schoolmates' interests will differ from those of the community-at-large, as will their shared connection to the school. If you mention the principal's name, all of your schoolmates will recognize it and immediately connect, but the community will need to be told "Springfield High School Principal Skinner..."
- ❖ Develop a one-line description of your team that not only does it justice but sells it. In "advertising," less is more (memorable).
- ❖ Tailor each article's length to the publication or media. Some prefer articles to be short and to the point (maybe 300 words) because, news is most effective when brief; others, such as local papers, will accept anything from a single photo with a 20-50 word caption to a full page article. Editors will use long stories if they seem particularly newsworthy. Newspapers usually prefer longer articles (800-1000 words) that they can cut to fit the available space, magazines (1500-2500), but write what works best for you, too. It's easier to regularly knock out 200 words than 800.
- ❖ Use a tight writing style with lots of information in few words. Most of this is advice your English teacher is trying or has tried to drill into you. Use first person, fast-paced, brief, upbeat, active verbs, with quotes to liven up the reading. Avoid lots of adjectives (the previous statement notwithstanding) and fancy wording. Use plain, everyday language -- simple prose writing in a natural voice. Don't develop a masterpiece of literature, but write as if you were speaking using your own voice, not how you think an author would. No high-falutin' third person kind of talk. Think of it as talking with a reader one-on-one, even though an article may be read by hundreds of people. Use short sentences (15 words or less). Use the active voice:
  - Active voice: *The team offers several advantages.*
  - Passive voice: *Several advantages are offered by the team.*

- ❖ Edit out unnecessary adjectives, adverbs and prepositional phrases for a tense, fast-paced style. State your message simply, without a lot of jargon. Impassioned is okay; let the reader know how you feel about *FIRST* and show a little personality, but avoid judgmental or opinionated remarks and never put any other extracurricular activity or organization down. Edit out details that don't directly support the theme or focus of your article. Ask yourself, "Does the reader need to know this?"
- ❖ Quote people accurately and in context, properly credit sources, and get permission to quote people or publish their photograph. This isn't usually a problem, but it is courteous. Tell anyone quoted or pictured about an article's actual publication.
- ❖ Use exact numbers whenever possible, e.g., "352 students, teachers, and parents enjoyed..." rather than "about 300 people enjoyed..." Exact numbers give your story more authority and credibility to the editor as well as the readership.
- ❖ Proofread your news release carefully and ask someone else to look it over to make sure the information is correct, and complete, and that the story makes sense. It's always a good idea to have others review for style, clarity, content, grammar, punctuation and tone. If you are submitting a type-written story, it should be double-spaced, on one side of the sheet of paper only.

## Photo tips

The availability of good quality photos can sell your article to an editor. Often if there is only a small amount of space available the photo w/caption is all that gets printed.

- ❖ A published photo of the team grouped around the robot with your sponsor's name prominently displayed is a great way to say thank you!
- ❖ Digital cameras work best, not cell phones. Most media prefer photos in electronic format at higher resolution 300-600dpi (at least 800x600pixels, but bigger is better) in jpeg format.
- ❖ For newspapers make sure the photo looks good in black & white. Choose high contrast photos that will look good reproduced in black and white newsprint. If you have a digital photo you can use a photo-editing tool to change it to black & white so you can preview how it will appear. You can also use a copier for a pretty good idea of what it will look like.
- ❖ Photos printed in a newspaper will darken a little, so keep them bright, and avoid shadows on faces or robots facing the camera. This means no overly lit backgrounds such as a bright window, but no dark or black backgrounds either.
- ❖ Fill the frame when you compose the shot or by cropping the photo later to eliminate dead space at the sides of the photo and emphasize the main subject.
- ❖ Use sharp focus photos with good to high resolution, cropped to emphasize the most important subjects and backgrounds.
- ❖ Don't center a single subject; have it slightly off-center.
- ❖ Take several shots so you have a few to pick from.
- ❖ Use available light as much as possible and fill with a flash only if necessary or to be safe.
- ❖ Be aware of the composition of your photo; especially avoid poles, flowers, or the like appearing to grow out of people's heads.
- ❖ Try for natural, candid shots of an event in progress or the subjects in action, for example, working on a robot or teaching middle schoolers. If people are awkward in front of the camera, try having them talk to someone off camera or have a group of people talk to each other. Some media will like to see standard group photos or shots of someone receiving an award, shots with politicians or other well-known people of note (who would impress your next-door neighbor?).
- ❖ If the story calls for a head shot, tightly frame only a person's head and shoulders, and take the photo slightly to one side rather than straight on.
- ❖ Try to avoid too-complex, busy or cluttered backgrounds -- hard in the pits I know, but they can detract from the foreground subject unless the background is part of the story.
- ❖ Identify everyone in the photo. Write down this information when you take the photograph unless you know everyone and can identify them and spell their name correctly later.
- ❖ Do not write captions for photos on the photo. Provide on a separate piece of paper attached to the photo with removable tape. If emailing, just place the caption under the photo.
- ❖ If you are running an event and plan to use photos of the events, then it is a good idea to have attendees sign a blanket permission to use any photographs of them that may be taken. You can use the *FIRST* form or one that is similar for this purpose.
- ❖ Magazines and other non-news agencies may require that you include publication releases from anyone who is readily identifiable in the photo. All minors pictured will require a release form from the parent or guardian.



## Ideas for stories

Here are a few starter ideas for stories that can be written for publication.

- ❖ The *FIRST* program and values or a focus on a specific aspect of *FIRST*, e.g., graduating seniors who decided to pursue Engineering because of *FIRST*, or English majors who have developed an understanding of technology because of *FIRST*.
- ❖ Human interest angles (these can be very interesting to editors).
- ❖ Upcoming events or events just past (open-house, on- and off-season events, fundraising events, meetings). Events you are running, attending, volunteering at, on & off-season.
- ❖ Successful presentations to sponsors who sign on to support the team. You might even do a story about the search for sponsors.
- ❖ How to mix Robotics with sports and other clubs, e.g., fall & spring sports (not winter! You'll be very busy for six weeks in winter), complementary clubs such as Audio-Visual, etc.
- ❖ Public/Community service projects, charitable events, *FIRST* outreach events or activities.
- ❖ Stories about participation in local community events - parades, shows, street fairs, etc.
- ❖ Important people or organizations visit or make positive comments about *FIRST* or your team; work it into a story or build a story around it.
- ❖ News about people on the team, even if it's focused on something they do outside *FIRST*, such as work at a soup kitchen or shelter. Publicize particular members' contributions to *FIRST* and wider community life.
- ❖ Team or individual awards, honors, scholarships, or other recognitions or presentations your team makes to others, maybe to your advisors.
- ❖ Upcoming elections and new team officers.
- ❖ "Retirement" of teacher advisors or graduating seniors. New advisors or incoming freshmen.
- ❖ Photo of several mentors who work for the same company (at an event or grouped around the robot); send an article to their company newsletter/paper.
- ❖ All the activities your team does that might lead to any of the *FIRST* awards, such as Chairman's, Engineering Inspiration, the Safety Award. You don't have to win any *FIRST* award to publicize all the activities that might qualify you to win one.
- ❖ A record number of team members or just getting new members.

## V. Samples

To take some of the work out of writing articles here are a few simple samples that can be modified or used as a guideline to get you started, although you can certainly do a better job yourself. These samples demonstrate different audiences and objectives. Some are intended to attract new members, while the goal of others is to attract team or regional sponsors, or simply to spread awareness of *FIRST* and your team. You can also check the press releases posted on the *FIRST* media center for ideas and style samples, <http://usfirst.org/aboutus/press-room>.

A final note on photos and captions, more people read photo captions than the articles. Don't stint on the effort you put into writing the caption. It may end up being all that gets published, so it should tell the whole story at a glance and in very terse language.

When sending a printed press release, if it covers more than one page, double spaced, then end the first page with a complete paragraph and the word “-MORE-“ at the bottom center of the page. At the top of the second page include the same contact, headline and team name in case the pages get separated. Mark the end with a centered “###” or “-30-” (think of it as a journalistic “10-4”).

Since *FIRST* may not be a household word in your neighborhood, you can close a press release with a statement describing *FIRST* or an aspect of *FIRST* and its goals with a reference to [www.usfirst.org](http://www.usfirst.org) for more information. Background information and references that are not intended to be a part of the article can also be included at the end for editors or reporters to work in as they may see fit, but make it clear such additional information is not part of the body of your article by separating the paragraph(s) and single spacing it.

I want to emphasize that you should avoid plagiarism, give proper credit for materials used, and should quote people accurately, in context, and with their permission (you *are* looking for goodwill). Plenty of *FIRST* descriptions, quotes, and statistics are available for generic use. The BlueAlliance.com videos for example, are free to use to promote *FIRST*, just give credit where it's due to BlueAlliance.com and its creators.

Team names in the fictitious articles to follow were used with permission of team representatives who are also members of NEMO. These sample articles and the people and events depicted are mostly fictional. Any resemblance between these and actual events is strictly coincidental, unless the events actually happened or the people actually exist!

**Standard FIRST Background Material*****FIRST* Background**

Accomplished inventor [Dean Kamen](#) founded *FIRST*<sup>®</sup> (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) in 1989 to inspire an appreciation of science and technology in young people. Based in Manchester, N.H., *FIRST* designs accessible, innovative programs to build self-confidence, knowledge, and life skills while motivating young people to pursue opportunities in science, technology, and engineering. With support from three out of every five Fortune 500 companies and more than \$14 million in college scholarships, the not-for-profit organization hosts the *FIRST*<sup>®</sup> Robotics Competition (FRC<sup>®</sup>) and *FIRST*<sup>®</sup> Tech Challenge (FTC<sup>®</sup>) for high-school students, *FIRST*<sup>®</sup> LEGO<sup>®</sup> League (FLL<sup>®</sup>) for 9 to 14-year-olds, (9 to 16-year-olds outside the U.S. and Canada) and Junior *FIRST*<sup>®</sup> LEGO<sup>®</sup> League (Jr.FLL<sup>™</sup>) for 6 to 9-year-olds. Gracious Professionalism<sup>™</sup> is a way of doing things that encourages high-quality work, emphasizes the value of others, and respects individuals and the community. To learn more about *FIRST* and to find *FIRST* Robotics Competition events and teams in your area, visit [www.usfirst.org](http://www.usfirst.org).

FRC is an annual competition that helps students to discover the excitement of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and the rewards a career in STEM can bring. More than 50,000 high-school students from the U.S., Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Israel, Mexico, Turkey, and the U.K. will participate in this year's competition.

In 1992, the *FIRST* Robotics Competition began with 28 teams and a single 14-by-14-foot playing field in a New Hampshire high school gym. This season, a projected 2,400 teams – including 400 rookie teams – will participate. Fifty-two regional competitions in the U.S., Canada, and Israel, plus fourteen district competitions and two state championships in Michigan and the Mid-Atlantic region, will lead up to the 2012 *FIRST* Championship at the Edward Jones Dome in St. Louis, April 26-28.

*FIRST* programs are spearheaded by more than 90,000 dedicated Volunteers worldwide, most of them professional engineers and scientists who mentor the next generation of innovators.

*FIRST*<sup>®</sup> and the *FIRST* logo are registered trademarks, and Gracious Professionalism<sup>™</sup> is a common law trademark, of the United States Foundation For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (*FIRST*).

LEGO<sup>®</sup> is a registered trademark of The LEGO Group.



***FIRST* Hauppauge Robotic Eagles Team 358****HAUPPAUGE, NY - November 13,2011**

Page 1 of 2

Contact: Abe Cedarhurst, Team Advisor

Phone: (123) 456-7890 (day), (123) 987-6543 (evening)

Email: abc@def.com

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****FIRST* Robotics Honors NYS Senator Owen Johnson**

Every year thousands of high school students across the country are challenged to design and build, from scratch, unique robots to compete in regional events all over the nation leading to a national playoff. Thanks to the efforts of NYS Senator Owen Johnson, the Long Island *FIRST* Robotics Competition could happen, giving 40 island robotics teams of the opportunity of a lifetime. Senator Johnson is a major sponsor of the Long Island *FIRST* (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Regional Robotics Competition. He was honored for his dedication to high-tech education at a dinner held in his honor at Chateau Briand in Carle Place on November 3. Also honored as a long time outstanding supporter of the Long Island regional was the CEO of Festo Corp., Hans Zobel, who said, "We have found that this competition truly works to inspire young people to pursue careers in the engineering field. The students of today are the workforce of tomorrow. We owe it to the communities in which we live to help with this event."

Dinner was sponsored by the founder and organizer of the Long Island *FIRST* Robotics Competition, School-Business Partnerships of Long Island (SBPLI). Fred Breithut, president of SBPLI, remarked, "The annual, three day Long Island regional robotics competition is attended by more than 10,000 spectators, making it the best-attended educational event on the Island." Hauppauge High School's Team 358, the "Robotic Eagles" provided the evening's entertainment by demonstrating their 2011 robot for the guests. The robot's entrance was straight out of Hollywood as it appeared rising up out of the floor from a strobe-lit fog and without human intervention, turning and delivering its driver controls to the student demonstration team at their table. The students then proceeded to put the robot through its paces for SBPLI and the guests.

-MORE-

Contact: Abe Cedarhurst, Team Advisor

Phone: (123) 456-7890 (day), (123) 987-6543 (evening)

Email: abc@def.com

### ***FIRST* Robotics Honors NYS Senator Owen Johnson (cont.)**

The *FIRST* Robotics Competition is an innovative program for high school students that is not only about robotics, but has as its goals building self-confidence, knowledge, and life skills while motivating young people to pursue career opportunities in science, technology and engineering.

*FIRST* ([www.usfirst.org](http://www.usfirst.org)) has grown from 28 high schools in 1992 to 946 in 2011. That's 23,000 students who participated last year along with 4,500 volunteers, including professional engineers, teachers, parents, college students and 4,000 sponsoring companies.

For more information on Hauppauge H.S. Team 358 or *FIRST* see their website at <http://team358.org> or contact Mark McLeod at abc@def.com or (123) 456-7890.

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<insert photo here>

photo caption: NYS Senator Owen Johnson, and FESTO CEO Hans Zobel with members of Hauppauge H.S. *FIRST* Robotics Competition team 358 at the fundraising dinner where Sen. Johnson and Mr. Zobel were the guests of honor. (l-r) front row: Anthony Antonio-president, Beth Bethany-vice president, NYS Senator Owen Johnson, Hans Zobel. Back row: Clyde Clipper-secretary, and Denise Daniels-treasurer

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Sample Press Release - New Team Officers

***FIRST* Team 237 Sie-H2O-Bots  
Watertown High School  
123 Main St.**

**WATERTOWN, CT - October 13,2011**

Contact: Abe Cedarhurst, Team Advisor

Phone: (123) 456-7890 (day), (123) 987-6543 (evening), cell (123) 111-2222

Email: abc@def.com

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***FIRST* Robotics Team 237 Sie-H2O-Bots Elects New Slate of Officers**

Anthony Antonio of the Watertown H.S. Senior class has been elected President of *FIRST* Robotics Team 237, and fellow officers are Beth Bethany - vice-president, Clyde Clipper - secretary, and Denise Daniels - treasurer. *FIRST*, For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology ([www.usfirst.org](http://www.usfirst.org)), promotes science, technology, and engineering in an environment of friendly competitiveness, but it's not all about robotics. *FIRST* is about motivating young people to pursue opportunities and careers in science, technology and engineering. "It's about working side-by-side with professional and retired engineers developing an appreciation and understanding of technology -- working co-operatively with other teams that could be our alliance partners one minute and our opponents the next," explained the new team vice-president Beth Bethany.

In addition to the *FIRST* Robotics Competition held in March and April, Team 237 is also active in community volunteer activities such as the Haunted Graveyard during the month of October, where a portion of the proceeds go to the Juvenile Diabetes Association, and Safe Halloween where younger children play games for candy "prizes." "The little kids get such a kick out of trying to toss balls into a goal the robot pulls as it tries to dodge the throws," said Anthony.

Interested students in grades 9-12, parents, and retired engineers and other community members are invited to stop by and see the action! The team meets regularly in Room 222 at Watertown High School, 1234 Plymouth Blvd. through the Fall on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2pm until 4pm, and every weekday January through February with Competitions held in March and April. For more information on Team 237 or *FIRST* visit the team website at <http://www.team237.com/> or contact Xavier Y. Zeider at (123) 987-6543 (days or evenings) or email abc@def.com.

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<insert photo here> Watertown H.S. *FIRST* Robotics Competition team 237 officers demonstrating last year's robot to Middle School students. (l-r) Denise Daniels-treasurer, Anthony Antonio-president, robot "Sie-H2O-Bot," Clyde Clipper-secretary, and Beth Bethany-vice-president.

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Sample Press Release - Upcoming Event

**Beach Cities Robotics Team 294      MANHATTAN & REDONDO BEACH, CA- May 13,2011**  
**Redondo Union High School**  
**Mira Costa High School**

Contact: Abe Cedarhurst, Team Advisor  
 Phone: (123) 456-7890 (day), (123) 987-6543 (evening)  
 Email: abc@def.com

**PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT**  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Second Annual Robotics Summer Camp Starts July**

How about an exciting, unique experience this summer? National Award winner Beach Cities Robotics, *FIRST* (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Team 294 presents the second annual Robotics Summer Camp from July 5-30 on Monday through Friday, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. This educational camp, designed for children ages 9 to 15, is being taught by three team 294 mentors: Lead mentor LeRoy Nelson is joined by retired engineer Bill Kunz and robotics engineer Dr. Rick Wagner. Experienced team 294 student members, who have undergone teacher training in LEGO® MINDSTORMS, will be supporting their mentors during the camp in guiding students to design and construct both MINDSTORMS and the more powerful *FIRST* Robovation robots to accomplish a variety of exciting challenges.

Robotics Summer Camp will be held at Redondo Union High School, 620 Diamond St., Redondo Beach and costs a tax deductible \$300 for each two week session. Beginners camp is the first two weeks of July, while Advanced camp is the second two weeks, July 15-30. Students can attend one or both sessions, but enrollment is limited to 30 students per session. For more information on summer camp visit [www.bcrobotics.org](http://www.bcrobotics.org) or call Cheryl Miller, Team Mom, at 123-456-7777 (days or evenings) or email her at [cheryl@bcrobotics.org](mailto:cheryl@bcrobotics.org).

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Dear Editor:

*FIRST* runs the high school *FIRST* Robotics Competition, as well as the middle school *FIRST* LEGO® League for children ages 9-14. Both are exciting, nationwide educational competitions that team volunteer professional engineers and young people to solve an engineering design problem in an intense and competitive way. The program is a life-changing, career-molding experience—and a lot of fun. In 2011 the *FIRST* Robotics Competition reached more than 50,000 students on 2065 teams in 58 competitions nationwide. Our teams come from Canada, Brazil, Great Britain, Israel, Turkey, Chile, Mexico, Bosnia, Germany, Australia, and almost every U.S. state. The competitions are high-tech spectator sporting events, the result of lots of focused brainstorming, real-world teamwork, dedicated mentoring, project timelines, and deadlines.

<insert photo and caption here>

A group of last year's campers and their robot creations.

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Sample Press Release - Competition

**FIRST Team 173 R.A.G.E.**  
East Hartford & Rockville High Schools

**EAST HARTFORD, CT - March 22,2005**  
Page 1 of 2

Contact: Abe Cedarhurst, Team Advisor  
Phone: (123) 456-7890 (day), (123) 987-6543 (evening)  
Email: abc@def.com

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**R.A.G.E. ‘Hangs 10’ to Win at Robotics Competition**

A raucous crowd filled the bleachers at Hofstra University on Long Island as Team 173 R.A.G.E. from East Hartford and Rockville High Schools, along with two alliance robot teammates, won the *FIRST* (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics Regional Competition that took place March 17 through 19. Each year *FIRST* challenges students, working with professional engineering mentors, to design a robot to play an original game and to build that robot from a standard kit of parts. Once these young inventors create the robot, it competes in regional, then national competitions to test their solution both against other robots and in cooperation with those same robots. “We’re preparing for Nationals in Atlanta in April by revising and improving our strategies based on what we learned from the other teams,” said R.A.G.E. parent mentor Kathie Kentfield.

This year at the Long Island *FIRST* Regional Competition, robots built by 40 teams from New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey faced off in a game called “*FIRST* Frenzy: Raising the Bar<sup>®</sup>.” In collaboration with human players, robots collected up to 30 balls and brought them to the human, who earned points by throwing the balls into goals. Extra points were given to teams whose robot could also hang from a bar 10 feet above the floor.

While the competition is intense, the cooperation among teams can be just as intense. *FIRST*’s highest awards go to teams who support, teach, and cooperate with their fellow teams and rivals. “*FIRST* is not just about the design and building of sophisticated robots. These students also develop maturity, professionalism, teamwork, and mentoring skills that enrich their lives,” said Fred Breithut, president of the School-Business Partnerships of Long Island, the coordinator of the Long Island regional competition.

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Contact: Abe Cedarhurst, Team Advisor  
Phone: (123) 456-7890 (day), (123) 987-6543 (evening)  
Email: abc@def.com

### **R.A.G.E. “Hangs 10” to Win at Robotics Competition (cont.)**

946 teams nationwide came together to compete in 26 regional competitions of 40 to 70 robots each during the month of March, when tens of thousands of fans watched the free-to-the-public, three-day events. Lucky teams move on to the National Championship, held in Atlanta’s Georgia Dome in April. But winning a competition, even Nationals, isn’t the highest award *FIRST* ([www.usfirst.org](http://www.usfirst.org)) bestows. The highest honor belongs to the Chairman’s Award winners and represents the spirit of *FIRST*; this award honors the team that best represents a model for other teams to emulate and which embodies the goals and purpose of *FIRST*: Inspiring greater respect and honor for science and technology. *FIRST* founder Dean Kamen, inventor of the Segway, is looking “to create a world where science and technology are celebrated....where young people dream of becoming science and technology heroes.”

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<insert photo and caption here>

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**Vital Information Sheet**

Organization:	Date:
Writer's name and phone #/email and best time for the editor to reach you	
Date and Time (When)	
Place/Location (Where)	
What was the event?	
Why was it held?	
Who is sponsoring the event and who will benefit from it?	
How many people and who attended?	
Did any dignitaries attend?	
Contact information for readers to call for more information, to volunteer, donate materials or services, etc.: address, website, phone, fax, email, etc.	
State clearly the cost of the event and who may or is expected to attend.	
Photos? What's happening in the picture and who's in the photo (identify left-to-right, check for correct spelling of names)	
Quotes? Any other comments about the event that you can add?	

**TV Public Service Announcement Script Format**

<b><i>FIRST</i> Team 358 Offers Free Introduction to Robotics</b>	
<b>Time: 30 seconds</b>	
<b><u>Video</u></b>	<b><u>Audio</u></b>
Business woman working with PDA, man working at office desktop computer, engineer working on site.	Employers today demand workers with a high degree of basic technical skills.
Panning shot of the entrance of Hauppauge High School with students going in and out of the front door.	The fundamentals for those skills begin in our schools.
Mixed scenes of students working on robot with mentors looking on or assisting.	In today's high tech world, education of the young in science and technology is critical.
Competition season highlights.	<i>FIRST</i> Team 358, the Robotic Eagles, is offering a free introduction to robotics open to the public at Hauppauge High School on Saturday, Nov. 6. For information, call...