

techVISION21

FIRST Robotics Challenge

I'm standing on a balcony looking down at controlled chaos 30 feet below me. The auditorium is filled with hundreds of fans and family. Music blares through the loud speakers as teenagers heft robots and carry them to the arena for the next round of competition. ***TechVision21 is immersed in a FIRST regional robotics competition taking place at George Mason University.*** CEO Kelly Carnes is among the long serving judges, and I'm a volunteer helping to re-set the floor after each competitive match.

FIRST is an experience where learning is team-building fun, and kids get to be themselves. Since being founded by Segway inventor, Dean Kamen in 1992, this event has been proving learning does not have to be boring.



Rote memorization gives way to hands-on collaboration and discovery. In our movie star culture, Kamen has always asserted, "you are what you celebrate." Scientists are the rock stars here.

Words like "gracious professionalism" and cooperation have worked their way into the FIRST lexicon. With the help of mentors and teachers, students have six weeks to build a robot that will compete in short games. Participants polish skills in business strategy, fund raising, engineering, design and teamwork.

FIRST National Advisory Board member, Dave Lavery enjoys a quiet moment after signing autographs and posing for photos. For over a decade, Lavery has led the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Telerobotics Technology Development Program. His research program produced the Sojourner Mars rover as well as a robotics camera used on the Space Shuttle.

