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News Release
Friday, April 08, 2011

3rd Annual All-Earth Ecobot Challenge set for April 16 at UH Engineering contest for after-school preteens creates 'thumbs-up' mindset for math, science, marketing.

Excitement builds for approximately 1,000 team members taking part in the All-Earth Ecobot Challenge set for Saturday, April 16, 2011 from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. at the University of Houston Athletics/Alumni Center.

The All-Earth Ecobot Challenge recipe mixes communication skills with engineering, math, science and technology to connect fifth through eighth graders to the future of commerce and industry in greater Harris County. This year, fourth graders are invited to participate in the marketing portion of the competition.

Harris County Department of Education is the 2011 presenting sponsor of Ecobot Challenge. Cole Chemical served as founding presenting sponsor in 2009, followed by Reliant Energy and NRG Energy, Inc. in 2010.

Students in public and private schools form Ecobot teams with an adult sponsor. Teams enrolled in 2011 include the following Texas school districts: Houston, Humble, New Caney, Pearland, Deer Park, Galena Park, Cypress-Fairbanks, Channelview, Dallas, Huntsville, Luling, Conroe, Lamar Consolidated, Spring Branch and Pasadena. Boy scout troops and private and charter schools also sponsor teams.

Through Ecobot students build, program and operate autonomous robots to accomplish tasks related to energy generation, conservation and the environment. Marketing teams propose and defend business plans for their robotic inventions. The competition brings engineering to life outside the classroom, said Lisa Caruthers, director of the Cooperative for After-School Enrichment (CASE), a division of Harris County Department of Education.

"The Ecobot Challenge involves real-world problem solving, critical thinking, intellectual collaboration, perseverance and learning through keen observation," Caruthers said.

Douglas Kleiner, CEO for the Education Foundation of Harris County, said that students engaged in the challenge also develop important workplace skills for the 21st Century, including software programming, digital communications technology and teamwork. Socially, the competition exposes students to a diverse socioeconomic and ethnic spectrum of students in a fun, peer-group setting. The training and culminating competition spanning four months engages students in after-school hours and some weekends.

The Ecobot Challenge also allows students to think about career options for the future. Research from a 2010 survey shows that Ecobot students gain interest in careers related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) after participating in the competition. About 80 percent of students met at least one adult working in the fields of STEM as a result of being a part of the project, and most students reported learning more about technology.

"Thanks to our generous corporate donors and sponsors for helping kids prepare for the 21st Century workforce," Kleiner said.

For more information about Ecobot, go to www.ecobotchallenge.com.

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