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## **Trinity School Robotics Team Competes at World Championships, Place in Top Third**

ATLANTA, GA– The pressure is on. The energy is palpable. The stakes are high- a World Champion title and over \$9 million of college scholarships are on the table. On April 15, 2009 more than 12,000 high schools from 42 countries took center stage at the Georgia Dome to face-off in one of the premier “varsity sports of the mind”– the FIRST Tech World Championships. This is no up-and-down the court athletic competition; teams in this game poured themselves into months of skillful robot building, calculated programming, and intentional team-building to earn a spot at the highest level of competition.

Eight students (Emily Barnett, Ayele Deribe Biratu, Reilly Butler, Cobey Culton, Thomas Hostetler, Preston Parham, Stuart Sundseth, and Jack Wagstaff) from Trinity School of Durham and Chapel Hill earned their spot at the Atlanta competition by winning the North Carolina FIRST Tech Challenge Championship Tournament in Greensboro, NC on March 21. Their robot, *AS Scorpion Mark VI*, captured 1<sup>st</sup> place on the merit of its superior defensive strategy. Mark Butler, the team’s volunteer coach is quoted as saying, “The team learned a tremendous amount in designing and building this robot and the prototypes that preceded it,; and it was a lot of fun. I think that we were all a little amazed that we won the tournament – especially considering some of the other fine robots that we had to compete against.”

And that was just the beginning for the young engineers. Only four teams from North Carolina (Trinity the only school in the Triangle) earned a bid to the World Championships in Atlanta; among them, Trinity School’s team was the most successful, placing in the top third of all competitors. Though the team did not advance to the final round, this young team (mostly freshmen and sophomores, with one junior) was encouraged to learn that they truly could compete with the cream of the crop. This is the first year that Trinity has fielded a robotics program, and as they stepped into the Georgia Dome for the first time and realized just how big this competition is, they were humbled and very much encouraged to have the opportunity to compete against seasoned veterans, whose corporate sponsors included names such as NASA, Lenovo, IBM, and GM.

The FIRST program, which has three divisions for middle school and high school students, was started 20 years ago by Dean Kamen, inventor of the Segway®. Kamen intended to build a program that encouraged students to pursue the fields of math, science, and technology and provided a competitive outlet for those students as a training ground for future work in those industries. Not all robotics competitors intend to go to a tech school, of course, but through Kamen’s program, more than 80 colleges and universities have offered more than \$9 million in scholarships annually to these students as an incentive to compete with excellence. In an interview with ABC News, Kamen aptly said that this “varsity sport of the mind” is one in which *all* competitors can become successful professionals. In fact, the program’s main support is given by more than 75,000 engineers who volunteer their time to mentor the teams and allow the students to gain exposure to their work as engineers.

Trinity’s Emily Barnett reflected on the season in saying, “I’ve never had so much fun working so hard. I can hardly wait for next year.” As Trinity School seeks to build a legacy of excellence in science, it will continue to look for opportunities like the FIRST Tech Challenge, which engage students in hands-on project management outside the classroom. Team coach Mark Butler comments, “Next year brings a host of promising opportunities for the robotics program at Trinity. For one, we hope to partner with the area’s corporate leaders in science and technology to create a more robust program. We’ve learned quite a lot in this inaugural season, and after having a taste of the World Championships, we’re eager to return.”

*For more information about the Robotics program at Trinity School and their recent success, please contact Allison Dowlen. Pictures available upon request.*

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