

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Your son or daughter has expressed an interest in becoming a member of *Triple Helix* -- the Menchville Robotics Team. I am the team's head coach, and I would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to our program and to solicit your support. **If the idea of your student participating in a competitive, educational, and motivational program utilizing student designed and fabricated 150-lb robots, then please read on!**

*Triple Helix*, the Menchville Robotics Team, began competing during the 2007 – 2008 school year. We had a successful season, culminating in a trip to Richmond, Virginia, to compete in a regional competition where we were honored to have received the *Rookie Inspiration Award* – the second highest honor extended to rookie teams. During the 2008 – 2009 school year, the team competed in two events – one in Trenton, New Jersey, and the other the regional competition in Richmond. We were again honored by receiving the Underwriters' Laboratory Industrial Safety Award at the Richmond competition.

*Triple Helix* team participates in the *FIRST* Robotics Competition -- an annual event that challenges teams to design, build, and program their own competition robot -- as team number 2363. *FIRST* (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) is a non-profit organization founded in 1989 by noted American inventor Dean Kamen, inventor of the Segway Human Transporter, to increase student awareness of the value of scientific and technical careers.

*FIRST* Robotics Competition teams consist of students and professional mentors who work side-by-side to create their robot, which is designed to accomplish a specific set of tasks defined by a game that is best described as a sporting event. The games are very much goal and cooperation oriented, as opposed to the destructive content of events like *BattleBots*, but are noted to have all of the excitement of a high school basketball or football game. The game is new each year, and released by *FIRST* during the first weekend in January. From that point, teams have a short 45 day "build season" in which they must design, fabricate, and prepare their robots for the competition season, which is held late-February through early April. The best teams will move on to the championship event, which is held in mid-April each year at the Georgia Dome in Atlanta.

Please permit me to assure you that your student is not alone in their desire to become a member of a *FIRST* Robotics Competition team. During the 2009 *FIRST* Robotics Competition season last spring, over 42,000 high school students on nearly 1,700 teams participated worldwide. These teams were supported by over 23,000 adult mentors, and more than 3,000 sponsoring companies and organizations. The competitions are great fun, and have a way of motivating the students far beyond that which is evident in the classroom setting. Parents often notice that their students are exhibiting more self-confidence and responsible behavior as a result of their

association with the *FIRST* Robotics Competition, and student who remain with *FIRST* programs are eligible for substantial college scholarships, which, in 2009, amounted to almost \$10 million.

This year, the team will be attending an off-season event called the *Robot Rumble* at the State Fair of Virginia in Richmond. This event will occur on October 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> and you are encouraged to attend to see this exciting competition first hand. The event will feature last year's game and robot. Details regarding this competition are still developing, and we will let you know as soon as things are finalized. Students should anticipate meetings on Thursday evenings from 6:00p to 9:00p, and on Saturdays from 1:00pm until 6:00pm during the time leading up to the *Robot Rumble*.

For the remainder of the fall months, October through December, the team mentors will work with the students to train them for the build season, which begins in January. This training will be specific to the position that the student holds on the team and may include training in engineering design, fabrication techniques, electronics, pneumatics, or computer programming. Other positions available on the team include photographer/videographer, web site development, public relations, and team management. The mentors will strive to work with the strengths and the desires of each student to place him or her in an appropriate team position.

The *FIRST* Robotics Competition season will begin on Saturday, January 9, 2010. A worldwide kick-off will be held by *FIRST* to unveil the new game for the year. We will view the kick-off at the Virginia Air and Space Center in downtown Hampton. We will have only 45 days following the kick-off to decide on a team strategy, design our robot, fabricate it, and program it to play the game. ***The students will be very busy with team activities during this time, and should expect to spend at least 12 to 17 hours a week engaged in team activities outside of their normal school day.*** On Tuesday, February 23, 2010, our robot will be packed into a crate and we will not see it again until we arrive at our regional competition venue. At a minimum, we will plan to attend the NASA/VCU Regional competition in Richmond. If sufficient funding is available, we will also seek to attend a second regional event somewhere on the East coast.

**Throughout the year, the students will be utilizing power tools and other potentially dangerous equipment.** The team mentors will make every effort to keep the students safe and to train them in the proper use of these tools. We have an excellent engineering technician, trained by NASA and the U.S. Army, that leads our fabrication efforts. He is well versed in tool safety and we had no serious incidents last year, although we did have a few things happen that reminded us that we always need to be on guard. **It is our intent to keep up our excellent safety record; however, since accidents do happen upon occasion, we are requesting that parents sign a letter of consent and to provide emergency contact information for each student. Please complete the attached forms and have your student return them during the next team meeting. Your student will not be permitted to use power tools until the forms are returned to the team.**

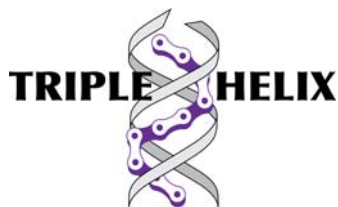
Finally, you should know that the operation of a *FIRST* Robotics Competition team is a very expensive venture. An average team can expect to spend \$12,000 to \$13,000 each year just to attend one regional competition. Some team's budgets range in the \$50,000 to \$60,000 range. Thus, sponsors are required to finance such complex activities. The U.S. Army Research Laboratory is our team's primary sponsor, and is currently processing the paperwork to forward \$20,000 to the team to support this year's activities. As a result of this generous sponsorship, and the sponsorship of other companies, your student will be exposed to hardware and software

with a value in excess of \$150,000 this year. There will, however, be some cost to the student/parent for team T-shirts and travel expenses. We are also implementing membership dues this year at a cost of \$50.00 per student. Dues are required to be submitted by Friday, October 30, 2009. This will give students the chance to decide if the robotics team is the right activity for them prior to the expenditure of funds for dues. Students who do not pay their \$50.00 dues will not be extended voting rights when the team selects a student captain and student safety officer in November. All dues collected from students will be applied to offset the cost of the first competition that they attend in the spring of 2010. The last two years, the cost for a single student to attend the NASA/VCU Competition in Richmond was \$75.00, which included all of their transportation, food, and lodging for the three day event. Hence, the current projected cost for the trip would now be \$25.00 because the cost will be offset by the student's dues. Under no circumstances will dues be refunded to a student at a later date should they decide to leave the team. The purpose of the dues is for the students to have a vested interest in the team to promote team stability. Should any of the above costs represent a burden to you or your family, financial assistance will be extended to you because we are dedicated to providing each student with an opportunity to experience this amazing program. Please contact me directly should you require assistance in this area.

It is my pleasure to have your son or daughter on the team, and I am hopeful that they will find the activity both challenging and stimulating. Should you have any questions regarding the program or our plans for this year, please feel free to contact me using the information provided below. We will be announcing a team parent meeting to be held at the school over the next few weeks. Currently, the most likely date and time for such a meeting is Monday, September 28<sup>th</sup>, at 7:00pm, so please mark your calendars and plan to attend. Once the meeting date and time is confirmed, I will be contacting you again.

Sincerely,

Matthew L. Wilbur  
Senior Research Engineer  
U.S. Army Research Laboratory  
Vehicle Technology Directorate  
NASA Langley Research Center  
Mail Stop 340  
Hampton, Virginia 23681  
PH: 757-864-1268  
E-mail: [matt.wilbur@menchvillerobotics.org](mailto:matt.wilbur@menchvillerobotics.org)



[www.menchvillerobotics.org](http://www.menchvillerobotics.org)  
[www.triplehelixrobotics.org](http://www.triplehelixrobotics.org)  
[www.team2363.org](http://www.team2363.org)



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