

that respectful collaboration trumps winning.

"It's so different than any other paradigm that people are used to seeing in competition," said Donald Bowers, FIRST regional director for New Jersey, Delaware and eastern-Pennsylvania. "FIRST isn't about robots, it's about teaching kids life skills and life lessons, and FIRST uses the medium of robotics to do that." Bowers said it's not unusual to see one team at a competition supplying another with spare parts and troubleshooting.

Impact

A study conducted in 2005 by Brandeis University found that FIRST alumni are twice as likely to volunteer in their communities as adults. The same study found that a large majority of FIRST participants went on to college after graduating high school compared to high school graduates nationally. Another study is currently underway to provide a more accurate picture of FIRST's impact on students given the organization's growth in the past decade.

FIRST, in conjunction with technology companies and universities, disburses almost \$15 million in scholarships to its participants every year.

"FIRST provides activities that can inspire students to pursue studies in science, technology and math," said New York City Regional Director Pat



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Donald Bowers
FIRST Regional Director
NJ, DE and eastern-PA

Daly. "By making engineering fun, it allows students to see that there are many applications for those subjects and makes them curious and eager to learn more in the classroom."

If FIRST's immediate impact is seen in schools, its larger contribution is to offer students an alternative to traditional sports and a head start on a career path. The idea is that this will help to revitalize science and technology development in the U.S.

"The leading engineering schools in the U.S. seek out our students because they know how serious they are about engineering and how well-prepared they are to start an engineering curriculum and coursework in college," said Bowers. According to Bowers, FIRST is in about 15 percent of high schools nationwide and growing every year.

In the community

Team Aperture at Newton High

School in north New Jersey made their first foray into robotics three years ago. This past season they earned varsity designation in their district — a distinction not many robotics teams achieve. Bowers said only a handful of the 99 teams in his territory have achieved recognition as a varsity program.

Team Aperture participates in technology summer camps and mentors teams in other FIRST divisions in area schools. In the community, they regularly hold information sessions at events and work with local Boy and Girl Scouts. This past season, Team Aperture participated in a community cleanup day and organized a food drive and fundraisers.

This level of community involvement is built in to the FIRST family of programs and overall philosophy. "The competition is critically important, but the biggest award you can have out of all is the how big of an impact you make on your community," said FIRST President Jon Dudas. "It's great to get involved (in FIRST), but what are you doing to give back?"

In April, Team Aperture piled into a bus and traveled to the FIRST Championship in St. Louis, MO, where they placed 29th in their division of 100 at the FIRST championship.

In Vernon High School, also in New Jersey, captain Jinan Andrews said joining the Vernon Viking Robotics team has led her to begin pursuing a career in engineering. "In engineering, especially as a woman, you have a lot of opportunities," said Andrews. She added that many engineering companies are looking to hire females.

"I want these kids to get the very same opportunity that the athletes get," said Newton Team Aperture coach Jim Hofmann. "They should have just as much chance to get recognition for the academic stuff because, quite honestly, most of them are going to wind up employing all the athletes later on in life anyway."



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