



Trinity College
HARTFORD CONNECTICUT

NEWS

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An Invasion of Robots: Trinity Hosts 15th Annual Competition
Versa Products Offers Awards for Creative Use of Valves
and Launches Program for Trinity Students to Mentor Hartford Children

HARTFORD, Conn., February 8, 2008-The 15th annual Trinity College Fire Fighting Home Robot Contest will bring robot enthusiasts and engineers of all ages from as far away as China and Israel to the College's Hartford campus April 12 and 13. More than 120 teams are expected to participate in the event, one of the world's best known international robotics competitions.

The objective is to build an autonomous computer-controlled robot that can navigate through a maze resembling the floor plan of a house, locate a burning candle, and extinguish the flame in the shortest time. The contest is unique because the robots must be autonomous – contestants may not use joysticks or remote controls or have manual assistance.

The lead sponsor of the contest is Versa Products Company, Inc. of New Jersey, which produces directional control valves. The company's president and CEO is Jan Larsson, a 1977 Trinity graduate, who was motivated to sponsor the competition to interest students in engineering education and robotics, and expand the reach of this unique international event. Not only is Larsson a Trinity alumna, but she is a former student of Dr. David Ahlgren, the contest director. Her company also is underwriting six \$500 prizes, the Versa Valves Challenge Awards, to recognize the entry in each division that shows the greatest ingenuity and creativity using a Versa Valve, which the company is making available free of charge to each team.

In addition to sponsoring the robot contest, Versa Products Company is supporting a new Versa Valves Engineering Internship Program in which two Trinity students will serve as mentors working with as many as 120 Hartford students attending Trinity's Dream Camp during the summer of 2008. The Trinity students will work with the Hartford students during the summer, as well as throughout the 2008-09 school year, to introduce basic principles of robotics and prepare the students to enter the competition in the spring of 2009.

According to Ahlgren, contest director and Karl W. Hallden Professor of Engineering at Trinity College, the Trinity College Fire Fighting Home Robot Contest encourages imagination and creativity among inventors of all ages and levels of skill, from elementary school children through retired engineers. "The contest serves as a laboratory for invention and innovation and a focal point for science and engineering education. What is really wonderful and exciting about the contest is to see the robots in action and to feel the enthusiasm of the participants and the spectators," says Ahlgren.

A robotics symposium on Saturday, April 12, will feature three leading robotics researchers: Paul Oh from Drexel University; Francois Michaud from University of Sherbrooke, Quebec; and Jenelle Piepmeier from the U.S. Naval Academy. Oh will present his work with the indoor aerial robotics competition, Michaud his work with robots to aid autistic children, and Piepmeier her work with nanorobots. The symposium is free and open to the public.

The Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities (CCDD) also is a sponsor of the competition, making possible the April 13 “Robot Hide and Seek” event. The goal of “Robot Hide and Seek” is to develop robots capable of finding a child with autism or intellectual disabilities who might panic in a fire and hide in a burning house. The CCDD is also sponsoring the April 12 presentation, “Interactive Robotics for Health Care and Assistive Technologies,” by symposium speaker Francois Michaud.

Registration runs from January 26 through March 24. A full schedule of events and other details can be found at www.trincoll.edu/events/robot. All events are open to the public.

Founded in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1823, Trinity College (www.trincoll.edu) is an independent, nonsectarian liberal arts college with over 2,200 students from 44 states and 28 countries. It is home to the eighth-oldest chapter of Phi Beta Kappa in the United States. The faculty and alumni include recipients of the Pulitzer Prize, the MacArthur award, Guggenheims, Rockefellers and other national academic awards. Trinity students integrate meaningful academic and leadership experience at all levels on the College’s celebrated campus, in the Capital City of Hartford, and in communities all over the world.

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