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# News Release

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **10 Years of Making a Difference**

### **IPFW and Community Partners Inspire Kids, Impact the Future of Northeast Indiana**

Favorite toys and real-life coaches inspire real careers. It is no wonder that children would enjoy building robots with the universally loved *LEGO*® toy blocks. But, the learning goes far beyond the fun, according to Dan Hummel, Purchasing and Logistics Manager for ETHOS, Inc., Encouraging Technology and Hands-On Science, in Elkhart, Indiana—the city and county with the largest unemployment rate in the nation. The impact can be measured by the motivated, confident, and focused students who get involved in the *FIRST*®, For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, *LEGO*® League (FLL) competition, and a community that is encouraged by them.

Last week, the 2009 *FIRST*® *LEGO*® League Indiana Championship Tournament celebrated its 10th anniversary of inspiring young people and encouraging careers in STEM— science, technology, engineering, and math. The tournament was hosted by Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW), as it has for the past decade. Paul Gudonis, *FIRST*®, president, was at the event to honor IPFW and 10-year corporate sponsor, ITT.

Hummel has been a coach and mentor to 4<sup>th</sup> to 8th grade students competing in the *FIRST*® *LEGO*® League State Tournament since 1998. George Randolph, Brian Boehler, and Sarah Hummel (Dan's daughter) were on the 2000 team from Mary Feeser Elementary School in Elkhart. (A 2000 picture of Sarah and George can be found at <http://bit.ly/77rcjr>). George is now at Northwestern University seeking a career in mechanical engineering. Brian is at Ball State University, finishing a degree in architecture and urban planning. Sarah is at Minnesota College of Art and Design, wrapping up a degree in graphic illustration. All have selected careers with a direct correlation to their experience with robotics and the FLL competition. They come back to Elkhart each summer to assist at week-long summer robotics camps for elementary students, sponsored by ETHOS. Elkhart teachers, who have seen the tangible evidence of the impact on students' education and career choices, participate in professional development workshops with the goal of getting robotics in the curriculum and into the community.

Brandeis University conducted an independent, retrospective survey of *FIRST*® Robotics Competition (high school level) participants and compared the results to a group of non-*FIRST*® students with similar backgrounds and academic experiences, including math and science. *FIRST*® students were more than 3 times more likely to major specifically in engineering; significantly more likely to expect to achieve a postgraduate

degree; more than twice as likely to expect to pursue a career in science and technology; and more than twice as likely to volunteer in their communities.

Dan Hummel is one of five volunteer coaches who have supported and inspired teams since 2000. Kathleen Kolberg and her husband David know that their involvement has made a lasting difference to South Bend students, in particular, their daughter, Deanna. Deanna Kolberg was a shy, bright little 8 year old 3<sup>rd</sup> grader ten years ago. Today she is a confident leader and gracious ambassador for FIRST® presenting robotics to over 2500 kids per year at the St. Joseph County Library's *Science Alive!* Deanna will attend Notre Dame next fall where she is planning to study political science. She gained skill and developed an interest in speaking as she made presentations to judges and referees in the FLL competition. Kathleen remarked, "Every coach and tournament staff can tell you that FLL is demanding and sometimes exhausting. When I think of all the kids who have been transformed by this activity, then I know the sacrifices are worth it."

Jim McCarter's Kokomo teams have won the Championship Award three times in the past. One took first place at the national FLL World Festival. "I had two teams at the first tournament. I am aware that several went on to, or are still attending Purdue, Stanford, Princeton and IU. One is in pre-med, one in aerospace engineering and another in computer engineering. One of my former FLL students, who is now a senior, was just named a Presidential Scholar. Another was a finalist. Along with one other student, the three are all National Merit finalists. It must be those little yellow robots!" he proudly quips.

Les Turner, a robotics club volunteer in Bremen, coached the team that won the very first Indiana championship tournament and again last week, his team won the 10th anniversary Indiana championship tournament. Ray Liskey is a teacher at Maywood Elementary School, in Hammond. Having seen the impact of the FLL experience on his students' lives, he too, has been involved with the program for ten years.

Universities like IPFW invest in outreach programs for K-12 students to inspire young people to choose careers in STEM, because our youth are the key to technological innovation and leadership—and economic renewal. IPFW offers 15 events, programs and camps each year involving over 4,000 adults and children. The *FIRST*® *LEGO*® League Indiana Championship Tournament is hosted by IPFW, as is the Indiana Regional Future City® Competition, Northeast Indiana Regional Science and Engineering Fair, High School Bridge Building Contest, VEX Robotics Camp, and GLO, Girls Leading Others. "IPFW is committed to providing consistent support to programs like FLL, gratefully acknowledging the contributions of business, school and volunteer partnerships across the state," says Carol Dostal, Director of Outreach for the IPFW College of Engineering Technology and Computer Science.

In retrospect, at the end of another year—or ten years, we may wonder if we have made a difference professionally or personally. The vision of *FIRST*® is to transform our culture by creating a world where science and technology are celebrated and where young people dream of becoming science and technology heroes. Yes—students have been coached to believe in themselves and trained to become leaders. Good news for northeast Indiana. Good investment by IPFW.

For more information about the *FIRST*® *LEGO*® League Indiana Championship Tournament, contact Carol Dostal, tournament director and director of outreach in IPFW's College of Engineering, Technology, and Computer Science, (ETCS), at 260-481-6905 or [dostalc@ipfw.edu](mailto:dostalc@ipfw.edu), or visit [www.etc.ipfw.edu/fll](http://www.etc.ipfw.edu/fll). The *FIRST*® website is at <http://www.usfirst.org>.

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