



Day of the ROBOTS

From these robotic competitions for students could come Boeing engineers of tomorrow

By Peter Pedraza and photos by Ron Bookout and Bob Ferguson



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– Rick Stephens, senior vice president of Human Resources and Administration

For four days in April, more than 10,000 of the smartest and most creative students from all over the world competed head to head in a most unusual arena.

But this was no academic or athletic competition, even though the atmosphere resembled a sporting event with cheering and sign waving from the sidelines.

Rather, the contest involved robots, designed and built by students under the guidance of mentors, performing set tasks in competition with other teams’ robots.

Eduardo Fernandez, a senior at Carl Hayden High School in Phoenix, was part of a student team mentored by Boeing employee Daniel Palomino and aptly summed up his experience: “FIRST is so fun. I plan to major in

mechanical engineering. I want to do this the rest of my life!”

What is FIRST? It’s the nonprofit organization For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology. FIRST’s worldwide robotic competitions for kids ages 14–18 is one way Boeing and its employees are providing young people with the inspiration and knowledge they need to become tomorrow’s technical workers—and candidates for Boeing’s future workforce.

“I believe we will see future Boeing engineers coming out of the FIRST program,” said Dennis Muilenburg, president and CEO of Defense, Space & Security. He attended the late April FIRST Robotics Championship in St. Louis.

Before the championships, more than 150 teams supported by Boeing grants

and mentors participated in regional competitions across the United States. Twenty-nine of those teams earned a spot in the finals.

“Employees serving as mentors are helping prepare students to meet future challenges and shaping the future of innovation,” said Rick Stephens, senior vice president of Human Resources and Administration.

Boeing has long supported FIRST through grants and educational scholarships, and with volunteers.

“When you excite students with hands-on learning experiences, success soars,” Stephens added. “These young innovators will solve the problems we don’t even know exist yet.” ■

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PHOTOS: (Far left) Boeing-mentored competitors Hayden Vrbka, left, and Jeff Cottrell compete on the FIRST Robotics playing field with their robot, “Cahuna-Cat.” (Top insets, from left) Boeing Defense, Space & Security President and CEO Dennis Muilenburg talks with Eduardo Fernandez about the robot “Dulce’s Dream”; Nate Lindgren, left, and Boeing mentor Marc Sklar troubleshoot their robot, “2.0.” (Above insets) FIRST Robotics competitors add to the excitement with festive team costumes.