

Aurobot students to go into 'deep space' with first robot build



By Brock Weir

Aurora High School students are preparing to 'boldly go' into 2019 with some creative new ideas.

Now that school has resumed, over 80 Aurora High School (AHS) students will get down to business, joining the ranks of St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School with their inaugural robotics club.

The fledgling Aurobots recently received encouragement from Mayor Tom Mrakas as they prepared their build season, which will continue over six weeks.

'We have a lot of anticipation,' says Amanda Bishop, Grade 11, founder of the Aurobots. 'Our engineering and programming side has been trying to teach all the kids who don't really know programming to get them up to speed, as well as brainstorm what the requirements of robots [in competition] have been in previous years, trying to come up with ways on how we can build. On the business side, they have been doing a really great job of fundraising by going to local businesses, presenting to them, and getting quite a few sponsors for us.'

At this point, the Robotics Team has little idea of what will be in store for them when they set out for competitions in the FIRST Robotics League; all they know is the theme is 'Deep Space' and, in this case, the sky isn't necessarily the limit.

Founding students began laying the groundwork for the club as soon as the school year began in September. After putting up posters all around AHS, there was an immediate response and excitement, says Amanda. The club offers something for everyone regardless of interest.

'There is a goal for everyone in this team: there is the programming and engineering component, which is building the robot, but even for people who aren't interested in engineering at all, and who don't like sciences and math, we still have our business side and our design side, which are both really important and really great roles to be in for our team.

'Of our 80 students, around 53 per cent are women. In head positions, we have over 80 per cent women, which is great, because it is generally quite hard to get girls interested in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) field and things like extra curriculars that involve STEM. I was really happy with that turnout and how much excitement there is for this kind of team at Aurora High.'

The team has also received generous community support in its first few months, receiving sponsorships from Magna and Almac.

'It really means quite a lot because just getting started and getting the kits for the basic robot parts is around \$8,500 and then there is the whole cost of production,' says Amanda. 'Not all the teams do this, but we wanted to make ours free so anyone can join. Most teams make their members pay to be on the team, buy their own shirts and safety goggles, but we decided we wanted to make our team available to anyone, regardless of their financial standing, so we decided to pay for all their shirts, all their entrance fees and all of that. Having all our generous sponsors really helped with that.'

To learn more about the Aurobots, see what they're working on, or provide sponsorship opportunities, follow them on Instagram @frc7456 or email frc7456@gmail.com.