



Photos by Brad Kicklighter and Bill Ramseyer

'Kats' compete with DE support

Topped by their distinctive "Kat in the Hat" chapeaux, members of the KHS FIRST team had a great — if not totally victorious — time at "Hexagon Havoc," the U.S. FIRST National Robotics Competition at Walt Disney World's EPCOT Center in April.

Several Delco Electronics employees joined 27 Kokomo High School students and four teachers at the fifth annual U.S. FIRST (United States Foundation for Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) national contest.

In the competition, participating teams design radio-



Kokomo High School-DE team makes its fifth appearance at the annual U.S. FIRST event.

Maneuvering the red-and-blue KHS FIRST "Sabre Kat" in competition with 73 other teams, the Kokomo High/DE group was among a handful of school/industry partnerships who have competed in all five of the project's national contests.

The U.S. FIRST Competition is a national engineering contest designed to immerse high school students in the exciting world of engineering. Teaming up with engineers from businesses and universities, students get a hands-on, inside look at the engineering profession. In six intense weeks, students, teachers and engineers work together to brainstorm, design, construct and test their "champion robot". With only six weeks from brainstorming to competing, all jobs are critical.

The partnerships developed between high schools, businesses and universities are designed to provide an exchange of resources and talent, highlighting mutual needs, building cooperation, and exposing students to new career choices. And, in the end, the program offers a fun, exciting and stimulating environment in which all participants discover the important connection between classroom lessons and real world applications.

Dean Kamen, the New Hampshire inventor/entrepreneur who founded U.S. FIRST and tirelessly promotes it, said the goal of his brainchild is to offer students interested in science and technology an opportunity to experience the spirited competition usually associated with athletics. The Orlando event — complete with "uniforms," mascots, cheers, songs and good-luck charms — shows Kamen is reaching his goal.

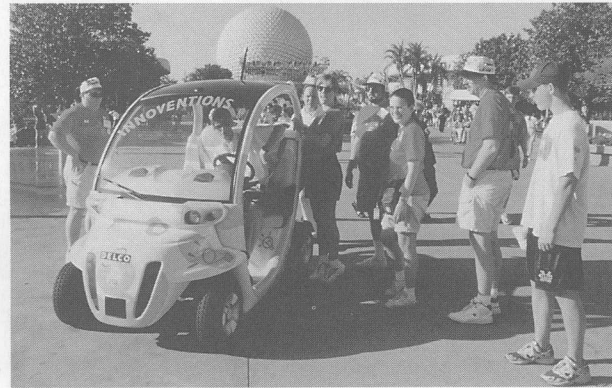
Noting that ESPN was covering the contest, Kamen said, "Interest has grown — and the quality of the games and the competitors has grown — so that we've proved this is a real sport. Kids can get into this stuff just like kicking and dribbling and throwing."

It certainly is a program that's grown through the years at Kokomo High School. As teacher/sponsor Tim Railey said, "Look at the school yearbook. There's the baseball team, the basketball team, the football team ... and the KHS FIRST team. Kokomo High School even has photos of the team on its 'Wall of Stars.'"

DE has been an important supporter of U.S. FIRST; along with sponsoring the KHS FIRST team, DE provides four auto seat motors in the kits that go to every team. Kamen expressed his appreciation for DE's support and noted, "Kids play high school sports so they can play college sports so they can play on the NFL. You guys are the NFL of engineering."

Participants from DE included engineers Judy Godeke and Brad Kicklighter, who helped guide the project throughout the year, and Jeff Burch and technician Kit

Baldwin and driver Steve Sensel. (Below) Members of the team gather around the Delco Electronics "Innoventions" vehicle, an EPCOT feature that will be officially unveiled in July.



Gerhart, who were part of the design-and-build effort and accompanied the students to Orlando. Bill Ramseyer and Gary Tilley also worked with the group and went to Orlando, along with Joe Harter and Tim Toole. Others who worked on the project included technical writer Bridget Kerr, who compiled the team's entry for the U.S. FIRST Chairman's Award, as well as Jack Myers, Marcus Thomas, Ginny McKinney, Jane Powers and retiree Rodney Malkoff.

Godeke, who served as lead engineer for the KHS FIRST effort this year, is a project engineer with DE's Manufacturing Technology Center in Kokomo, location of many of the employees who work with the program.

"We are all very proud of the things we accomplished this year," Godeke said. "Everyone learned a lot and that's the goal of the whole project. We'll be ready to start the next season with the Pop Can Regatta, a mini-engineering competition, this fall. Everyone should watch for that."

Among the hundreds of people cheering on the team representing Kokomo, KHS FIRST, and 73 other teams was Bob Schumacher, director of DE's Advanced Technology Center.

Schumacher agreed with organizers that all who participated in the robotics competition were winners in terms of education, experience and fun.

"This year we had our largest team to date, and we are still recruiting more students," Godeke said. "Students get an opportunity to see first hand what it's like to be a member of an engineering team. It's a lot of work, but it's a whole lot of fun too."

gaining three firsts and one second in the three-team rounds, and earning position as seventh seed for Saturday's 74-team double-elimination tourney. However, hit by a loose set screw in their first round for a 34-24 showing and out-gunned 40 to 33 in their second, the KHS FIRST team was out after two rounds.

The KHS FIRST team earned kudos from the two first-year teams they "mentored" in preparation for the national tournament.

Team Hammond — a team made up of Indiana's Beatty Machine and Manufacturing and Clark, Gavit, Hammond and Morton high schools — earned the No. 1 Seed Award for their showing in the Friday preliminaries and finished 10th in the overall competition. The Chiefs — a team representing Delphi Interior and Lighting Systems and Pontiac Central High School in Troy, Mich. — received the "National All Star Rookie of the Year" award and also was selected by vote of all participating teams to receive the inaugural Worcester (Mass.) Polytechnic Institute's "Design Innovation Scholarship" valued at more than \$68,000.

Delphi engineer Joe Johnson said the information provided by the KHS FIRST/DE team put them "way ahead" of all the other novice teams and even some with one or two years of experience. And Johnson was philosophical about the intensity and commitment the program demands.

"For the last two months, my life's been on hold. I've had no life," Johnson said during the Orlando competition. "But when I'm 80 and I go to a retirement party and someone says, 'I became an engineer because of you,' then this will all be worthwhile."

In June, he received a more timely award; he was named by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers' Southeastern Michigan Section as its "Young Engineer of the Year" for 1996 as a result of his work to interest students in engineering as a career through U.S. FIRST.

Both CNN and ESPN were on hand to videotape the event with its 3,500 official participants. Among the speakers at Saturday evening's award ceremony were Dr. Neal Lane, director of the National Science Foundation, and NASA astronaut Linda Godwin, a member of the space shuttle crew that recently had transported Shannon Lucid to the Russian Space Station MIR.

National champion was a team made up of representatives from Harris Corporation, the Rochester Institute of Technology and Edison Technical School in Rochester, N.Y. The Chairman's Award went to Procter & Gamble Company and Walnut Hills High School of Cincinnati.

— Linda Ferries