

Dear Friends,

This year, we made waves.

Through every match, every mentor meeting, every late night of troubleshooting code or wiring a drivetrain, our students didn't just learn how to build robots—they learned how to build futures. They learned how to lead, collaborate, and persist. And they did so with a tenacity that reflects the very best of what our region has to offer.

At FIRST Chesapeake, we believe that **every young person in DC, Maryland, Virginia, and beyond deserves access to the transformative power of STEM.** That belief drives everything we do. From expanding into West Virginia and launching 16 new FTC teams through Geared Up, to establishing FIRST Robotics Day alongside the Virginia General Assembly and VCU Engineering, we've taken bold steps toward a more equitable, more innovative future.

I've seen firsthand what these programs can do. I'm a proud alum of FRC Team 346 and a product of Chesterfield County Public Schools. What I gained from FIRST wasn't just technical knowledge—it was confidence, purpose, and a community that believed in me. And that's what we're working to provide for every student who enters this space: the opportunity to be seen, challenged, supported, and inspired.

We are dedicated to nurturing the spark of curiosity in young minds. We provide a dynamic platform for students of all backgrounds and abilities to dive into STEM—not just as learners, but as innovators, collaborators, and advocates. Our programs teach students to think critically, solve real-world problems, and lead with empathy and excellence.

This year's numbers speak for themselves. But beyond the data lies the deeper truth: this community is growing stronger, more inclusive, and more impactful every year. And none of it happens without you.

So thank you—for standing with us, for believing in these students, and for helping us make waves that will carry into generations to come.

With gratitude,

Alex Bryant

Executive Director, FIRST Chesapeake

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CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA 22902



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Our Mission

FIRST Chesapeake provides life-changing robotics programs that give young people in DC, Maryland, and Virginia the skills, confidence, and resilience to build a better world.

Our Vision

FIRST Chesapeake believes every young person in DC, Maryland, Virginia, and beyond deserves access to the transformative power of STEM.

MENTOR-BASED, STUDENT-CENTERED STEM PROGRAMS

At the heart of FIRST Chesapeake's mission is a simple but powerful idea: that every student, regardless of background, geography, or experience, deserves the chance to discover what they are capable of. That belief fuels a diverse and inclusive portfolio of mentor-based STEM programs that guide young people from curiosity to confidence, from LEGO bricks to world stages. These programs aren't just about building robots—they're about building students who know how to think, to lead, and to persist. Whether a third grader exploring energy systems through LEGO, a high schooler engineering a robot that can climb, or a mentor helping both navigate the journey, the impact is undeniable—and it lasts a lifetime.



FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC)

High school students (ages 14–18) collaborate to design, build, and program industrial-sized robots for high-energy competitions. These teams tackle engineering challenges, develop business and outreach strategies, and present their innovations to panels of judges—an experience that prepares them for the real world.

- **Teams:** 112, including 3 rookie teams, 93.5% retention
- **Participation:** 2,800 high school students
- **Events:** 5 in Virginia, 2 in Maryland
- **Geographic Distribution:** 10 teams in District of Columbia, 67 in Virginia, 35 in Maryland
- **Type:** 83 in schools, 29 community-based

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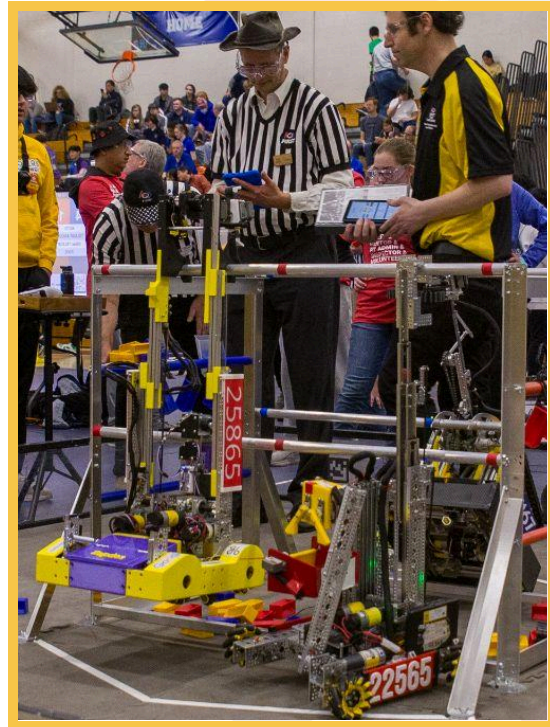


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FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC)

Middle and high school students (ages 12–18) work in teams of up to 15 to build 18-inch robots and compete in alliance-based matches. The program emphasizes systems engineering, coding, and creative problem solving in a team-driven environment.

- **Teams:** 266, including 60 rookie teams, 75.7% retention
- **Participation:** 3,192 middle and high school students
- **Events:** 7 in Virginia, 7 in Maryland, 3 in District of Columbia
- **Geographic Distribution:**
 - 17 teams in District of Columbia, 136 in Virginia, 113 in Maryland
- **Type:** 148 in schools, 118 community-based



FIRST LEGO League Explore (FLL Explore)

Students ages 6–10 use LEGO elements to build models and develop research projects based on real-world STEM themes. New to FIRST Chesapeake in FY25, FLL Explore now ensures a full K–12 pipeline for Maryland students entering STEM

- **Teams:** 100 new teams to the District
- **Participation:** 600 elementary students
- **Events:** 6 Festivals in Maryland
- **Geographic Distribution:** 100 in Maryland
- **Type:** 51 in school, 49 community-based



CELEBRATING CHESAPEAKE CHAMPIONS

At the 2025 FIRST Championship in Houston, **26 teams from the Chesapeake District** took the global stage—each bringing their passion, ingenuity, and relentless team spirit. Among them were rookie teams experiencing the thrill for the first time and veteran teams chasing new milestones. Every one of them carried the hopes of their communities and inspired thousands along the way.

From Baltimore to Fairfax, from Henrico to Moorefield, students advanced to division playoffs, earned prestigious awards, and showcased the depth of talent growing across DC, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Standout Honors

- Team 10224 – MAV MECHANICS (Henrico, VA): Rookie All-Star Award – a first for FIRST Chesapeake!
- Team 31851 – M.A.J.A.S.S. (Monrovia, MD): Core Values Award (FLL Explore)
- Team 6417 – Blu Cru (Rockville, MD): 3rd Place Innovate Award
- Team 18442 – Gear Rotation (Sykesville, MD): 2nd Place Motivate Award

Beyond the field, our **volunteer community showed up in full force**—38 dedicated individuals traveled to Houston to support students and ensure the event's success. Their behind-the-scenes leadership and hands-on guidance reflect the best of FIRST: humility, generosity, and unshakable belief in youth potential.

To the mentors who coached late into the night, the volunteers who packed crates and wrangled field cables, and the families who made the trip to cheer in the stands—**thank you.** You made these moments matter.

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Ninth Annual Maryland Tech Invitational

A World-Class International Robotics Competition Hosted by FIRST Chesapeake

The Ninth Annual Maryland Tech Invitational (MTI) was a resounding success!

Held June 27–29, 2025, at the Kossiakoff Center at Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory in Laurel, Maryland, this prestigious event marked the first year that FIRST Chesapeake officially hosted MTI—a proud step forward in our mission to elevate robotics excellence on a global scale.



The event brought together **40 of the world's top-performing FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC) teams**, representing powerhouse U.S. states such as California, Texas, Florida, Michigan, Tennessee, Illinois, and Colorado, alongside international teams from Moldova, the United Kingdom, Romania, and Brazil. These elite teams showcased cutting-edge designs and strategy in a competitive environment that celebrated innovation and technical mastery.

Local Representation and Global Achievement

Five local teams—**FTC 6417, 15167, 18442, 19343, and 23928**—represented our district with pride and distinction. One of these teams advanced into the elimination rounds, engaging in fierce head-to-head matches with top-ranked alliances and further demonstrating the caliber of talent in our community.

A standout moment of the tournament came when a match shattered previous records, with both alliances **scoring over 1,000 points combined—a world record in FTC competition** and a testament to the extraordinary capabilities of the students and mentors involved.

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Dragonfly Expo for Saturn Exploration

In parallel with the MTI event, attendees had the opportunity to explore the Dragonfly Expo, an engaging satellite exhibition highlighting **NASA's Dragonfly mission to Saturn's moon Titan**. This expo offered a rare window into planetary exploration and cutting-edge aerospace research, sparking curiosity and connecting the next generation of engineers and scientists with the vast frontiers of space.

Featuring hands-on exhibits and interactive briefings led by scientists from the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory (APL), the Dragonfly Expo demonstrated the real-world applications of STEM education and provided inspiration to students envisioning careers in planetary science and robotics.

Internship Networking and Alumni Connection Event

FIRST Chesapeake also partnered with APL to host a dedicated Internship Networking and Alumni Connection Event, designed to connect high school seniors and alumni with meaningful career and mentorship opportunities. **Students engaged with APL professionals, recruiters, and program managers to learn about internships, co-ops, and research paths available to young talent.**

The event fostered powerful connections between current FIRST participants and alumni now working in STEM fields, creating a vibrant network of support and aspiration that extended far beyond the competition arena.



FIRST CHESAPEAKE



Virginia FIRST Robotics Day: A Statewide Milestone

On March 31, 2025, nearly 150 students, educators, legislators, and industry leaders gathered at the VCU College of Engineering to celebrate the **inaugural FIRST Robotics Day in Virginia**—a newly designated statewide observance championed by students and signed into law by the Virginia General Assembly.



“So much of Virginia’s future, whether it’s discovering new renewable energy technology, maximizing the capabilities of artificial intelligence, protecting our most crucial data through cybersecurity or revolutionizing healthcare science, is going to be reliant on the passion, drive and determination of young people interested in STEM”

— **June Laffey, Chief of Staff, Senator Ghazala Hashmi**

The event highlighted VCU’s 26-year commitment to advancing STEM education through robotics and celebrated its pivotal role in bringing FIRST Robotics to Virginia since the launch of the NASA/VCU FIRST Robotics Competition 26 years ago. The program was created through a partnership between then-VCU President Eugene Trani, Motorola, NASA Langley and FIRST.

“It’s not just a few people programming and building a robot. They’ve got people advocating at the General Assembly for funding, raising funds to build the robots,” Owen said. “The passion, the teamwork and the life lessons will stick with every one of you throughout your professional careers. I think it’s fabulous.”

— **Del. David Owen from the 57th District**



STEM Access for All

Impactful Demographics

At FIRST Chesapeake, access isn't an initiative—it's a commitment that defines who we are. Our teams reflect the richness and diversity of the communities we serve across DC, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia.

- **Total Teams:** 478 across the district
- **Gender Distribution:** 32% female (+2%), 68% male participants
- **Socioeconomic Diversity:** 16% of participants qualify for free and reduced lunch (+2%)
- **Racial/Ethnic Diversity:** 46% White, 31% Asian, 9% African American, 7% Hispanic/Latinx, 5% Multiracial, <1% Pacific Islander/Native American

We are proud of the strides we've made, but we know the work continues. With each season, we're expanding our reach—opening doors for students historically excluded from STEM and ensuring that opportunity and innovation remain within reach for all.

Women in STEM



This season, our community celebrated bold, brilliant young women who are not only changing the face of STEM—but expanding the table to make room for others.

From over 50 applicants across the district, four remarkable students were selected as Women in STEM scholarship recipients. These scholars aren't just builders and coders; they're role models and changemakers, each leading initiatives that have directly impacted hundreds of students across our region.

Research tells us that the investment is working: **girls in FIRST are 3.2 times more likely to engage in STEM activities, 2.2 times more likely to develop strong STEM interests, and 3.7 times more likely to major in computer science** than their peers. The ripple effect is unmistakable—and these four leaders are living proof.

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Thanks to the generous support of Qualcomm, we funded more than 30 majority-female teams this year, investing directly in the next generation of engineers, programmers, and problem-solvers. And through five student-led webinars on gender equity in STEM, young leaders shared powerful strategies, hard-earned wisdom, and honest stories—creating brave spaces where belonging and ambition grow together.



MENTORSHIP & COMMUNITY

Geared Up: New Mentor Cohort

Geared Up began as an experiment—a bold response to the very real gaps in mentorship and technical capacity across our region. This year, it became a movement.

In FY25, we launched 16 new FTC teams and 3 new FRC teams through the program, each one supported with training, equipment, and year-long mentorship. These weren't just numbers—they were middle schoolers in Southside Virginia getting their first taste of coding, high schoolers in D.C. finally joining the robotics community, and educators stepping into coaching roles for the first time with the full backing of a team behind them.

The results speak volumes. Over 90% of new mentors reported greater confidence in their technical and team management skills. And we're proud to share that we achieved **100% retention of both teams and mentors from our first Geared Up Cohort**. Early signs suggest Cohort 2 will match this milestone—and Cohort 3, launching Fall 2025, will be our largest and most ambitious yet.

Geared Up isn't just closing gaps; it's opening doors. And every student who walks through them is better for it.

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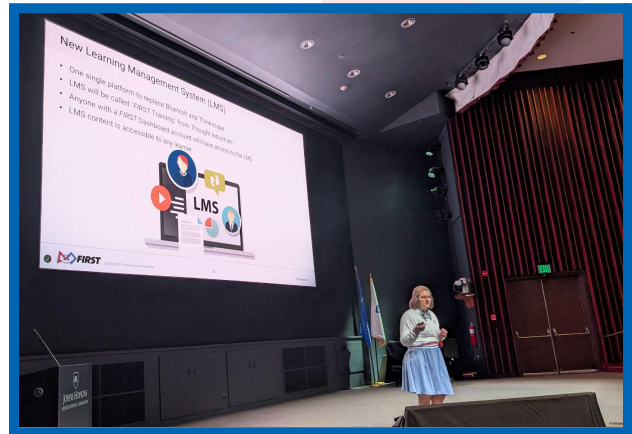


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Geared Up Mentor Conference

Each spring, the Geared Up Mentor Conference brings together the heart of our programs—our mentors. This year, 154 attendees from across the district joined us for a day of inspiration, professional development, and community-building.

With 45 sessions led by experts from Booz Allen Hamilton, West Coast Products, FIRST Inspires, and veteran coaches from our own community, the 2025 conference covered everything from neurodiversity in coaching to mastering the grant-writing process. Our most popular sessions were as practical as they were transformative: Judging, Event Hosting, and Building Inclusive Teams.



Held at the Kossiakoff Center at Johns Hopkins APL, the conference was intentionally designed to offer something for every mentor—rookies and veterans alike. Attendees built their own schedules, connected with peers, and walked away with new strategies, deeper confidence, and a renewed sense of purpose.

When we invest in mentors, we invest in the students they lead—and the communities they inspire.



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WHY IT MATTERS

Skill Development and STEM Pursuit

Students who participate in FIRST are 2.4 times more likely to develop interest in STEM, 2.1 times more likely to pursue STEM careers, and 2.0 times more likely to build a strong STEM identity compared to their peers. They gain critical experience in communication, conflict resolution, problem-solving, and time management—skills that 90–95% of FIRST students report improving through their participation.

College and Career Readiness

According to a decade-long longitudinal study, FIRST alumni are significantly more likely to major in STEM—83% overall—and 61% go on to major specifically in engineering or computer science, more than double the national average. Female FIRST alumni are more than three times as likely to pursue engineering compared to peers, and report earning significantly higher salaries in early careers.

Community Engagement

From mentoring younger teams to leading advocacy campaigns and local outreach efforts, our students carry the spirit of FIRST beyond the competition field. They build relationships, serve their communities, and use robotics as a platform for social good.

Representation and Belonging

Our Women in STEM program showcased four exceptional young leaders who are changing what leadership in STEM looks like. Panelists from Leidos, Dominion Energy, and the Department of Energy shared their journeys—from students to national STEM professionals—modeling success, vulnerability, and authenticity.

Two of our Women in STEM semi finalists presented on equity at the FIRST World Championship, offering strategies to increase female participation across programs. These aren't just students. They are change agents. And the world is better for it.

When students see themselves in STEM, they believe they belong in STEM. And that belief changes everything.

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WHAT'S NEXT

The horizon is bright—and we're building it together.

This coming year, we're taking bold steps to expand opportunity, deepen community engagement, and strengthen our infrastructure for long-term growth across the region.

- A **DC Task Force** will bring together educators, engineers, policymakers, and local advocates to co-design a blueprint for expanding FIRST programs at every level across Washington, D.C.—ensuring alignment with schools, community-based programs, and city-wide access goals.
- The **Chesapeake Senior Mentor Corps** will formalize a network of experienced mentors and volunteers who will serve as regional anchors—supporting rookie coaches, troubleshooting technical issues, and mentoring new adult leaders in the field.
- We're expanding direct programming support for **military families and rural communities**, ensuring FIRST access in all zip codes.
- We're continuing our advocacy efforts to **include robotics funding in Virginia's 2026–2028 Biennial Budget**, working with legislators and education leaders to recognize STEM enrichment as essential learning.

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Paired with these initiatives, our landmark event schedule is growing:

- The **96-team FTC District Championship at Meadow Event Park** will be the second-largest FTC event in the world.
- The **FRC District Championship returns to Virginia State University**, reaffirming our deep partnership with Virginia State University's College of Engineering.
- We're also working on **exciting new partnerships** that will bring robotics and STEM innovation to public stages across the region.

Together, we're not just responding to need—we're architecting a system where every student in every zip code can rise.

Thank you for diving deep with us.

Alex Bryant, Shelly Stoddard, Anne Shade, Amber Driesman, Kaitlin Ilnitzki, Rose Young
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