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LAURENTIAN ENGINEERING TEAM WINS NASA CHAMPIONSHIP

Sudbury Students Show the World How to Build a Better Lunabot

SUDBURY, ON (May 30, 2011) - A team of mechanical engineering students from Sudbury's Laurentian University claimed victory at the international NASA Lunabotics competition in Florida on Saturday.

The eight students designed, built and operated a remote-controlled excavating unit or lunabot that easily clinched the title and set a world record for the competition, digging up more than 243 kilograms of simulated moon rock in 15 minutes. The second place team dug up and deposited just over 172 kilograms.

"This is a Cinderella story," said mechanical engineering program co-ordinator Markus Timusk, en route back to Canada from the Kennedy Space Centre. "Our program is only four years old, and these students have won one of the most prestigious competitions in engineering."

The Laurentian team wins a scholarship award of \$5,000.00 and an invitation to Cape Canaveral to view a Shuttle launch.

This was the first year the NASA Lunabotics event was opened to international competitors. Montreal's McGill University was the only other Canadian entry among the 40 universities competing.

All of the robotic units were designed with the same purpose: to scoop up and deposit large volumes of a dusty synthetic material that is meant to simulate the lunar surface. The teams have to wear protective gear when handling the simulant, and otherwise operate the machine remotely via laptop, from inside a trailer.

NASA says it directly benefits from the competition by encouraging the development of innovative lunar excavation concepts.

Faculty advisor Markus Timusk says the 8-person team "practised hard" and, because their lunabot had a flexible design, they were able to troubleshoot and adapt their module after every practise run.

Timusk says the Sudbury students also brought a natural advantage to the competition. "Just about everybody in the group knows how to do high-level computer code," he said, "but being Northern Ontario boys, they also know how to repair a snowmobile engine at minus 20 degrees."

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The winning team members are: Samuel Carriere, Patrick Chartrand, Stephane Chiasson, Myles Chisholm, Drew Dewit, Greg Lakanen, Jeffrey Pagnutti, and Jean-Sebastien Sonier.

Timusk added that the victory is sweet not only for the mechanical engineering program, but for the whole university community.

“At the start of the competition, they (event organizers) didn’t know how to pronounce Laurentian. By the end of it, they knew who we were.”

“We’re thrilled for the team and for our mechanical engineering program,” said Laurentian University President Dominic Giroux. “To achieve such a resounding success at this level of international competition is a great credit to the students and to the faculty. We’re all applauding.”

This win adds to the list of victories for Laurentian engineering students, Giroux added. “We have won the last two Ontario competitions, the most recent Canadian competition, and now the NASA international competition.”

About Laurentian University

Laurentian University is one of the fastest growing universities in Canada in the past decade, with an increase of 53% in international students over the last two years alone. With its main campus in Sudbury, it now offers a growing number of programs in Barrie to the 1,200 students located on that campus. Laurentian is a bilingual university with a tricultural mandate to support Aboriginal students. The University was ranked first in Canada among primarily undergraduate universities for its sponsored research income for two years in a row.

Laurentian is the first school outside the US accredited for its forensic science program. All of the graduates from its School of Medicine were matched in the first round of the Canadian Resident Matching Service – a first in Canada in ten years...twice. Laurentian has one of the highest post-graduation employment rates in Ontario and receives high recognition for its enviable class sizes which offers the lowest faculty-to-student ratios in Canada. For more information on Laurentian University visit www.laurentian.ca

You can also find a copy of the Annual Report by visiting www.laurentian.ca/2011report

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