

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

Contact: Olivia Adams, **Byrum & Fisk Communications**, [517\) 333-1606, ext. 1](tel:5173331606)

Chatterton Middle School robotics team wins first place in state championship semifinals

Robotics team headed to super-regional competition in Iowa in March

WARREN, Mich. — The ChatterBolts, a **Chatterton Middle School** robotics team, has its eyes on being the best of the Midwest when it competes at the North Super Regional Championship in Iowa next week. This is the first time a Fitzgerald team has advanced to the super-regional level.

“Robotics allows students to learn STEM concepts in a fun and engaging way, and these skills can be applied across multiple disciplines,” said Fitzgerald science and robotics teacher **Sharon Sylvester**, who advises the robotics club and teaches the robotics classes that were added at the middle school this year. “The robotics projects encourage hard work, innovation and idea sharing, and expose students to the excitement of real-world engineering while helping them hone the creative problem-solving skills needed for the high-tech jobs of the future.”

The ChatterBolts won first place in the state semifinals at the *FIRST* Tech Challenge state championship in Battle Creek in the fall. Next, they took second place in the state finals, which was high enough to advance to the super regionals. The **Fitzgerald Public Schools** students are now preparing to compete in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, March 29-April 1 against the champions from 10 other Midwestern states.

The *FIRST* robotics program helps students strengthen their skills in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, or STEM. It also reinforces what *FIRST* refers to as “gracious professionalism” whereby participants offer assistance, display positive attitudes toward their competitors and extend their skills, knowledge and kindness toward everyone.

“The success of the Fitzgerald Public Schools robotics teams speaks to the strength of our robotics program, Ms. Sylvester’s dedication to the robotics class, and students’ enthusiasm for learning and innovation,” said Superintendent **Barbara VanSweden**. “Fitzgerald Public Schools produces powerhouse teams at both the middle and high school levels, thanks to our diverse STEM offerings. This program continues to grow in popularity.”

The middle school fielded two teams this year, each with about 10 members. The teams have climbed the ranks quickly since the program’s inception almost three years ago.

The *FIRST* Tech Challenge is sponsored by *FIRST* (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology), an international youth organization that was founded in 1989 by the inventor of the Segway Human Transporter. The competition was launched to motivate young people to pursue educational experiences and career opportunities related to STEM. *FIRST* also provides \$18 million in college scholarships to support more than 900 students.

Each year, *FIRST* creates a new challenge for teams. The challenge is revealed in September, and teams have about eight weeks to design and build their robot. The teams enter their robot in local and regional competitions, and the competition eventually culminates in the *FIRST* Super Regional Championship. Teams that win this championship round then advance to the world competition.

For the competitions, students use robots that they have designed and programmed to complete a designated set of challenges that earn points for the team. This year, teams had to design robots that could lift a yoga ball over 60 inches to cap a center vortex, shoot softball-sized whiffle balls into the same center vortex, and press a button that will change the light color on a beacon to the team’s corresponding color, red or blue.

In addition to preparing for the competition, team members have been raising funds for the trip. Individuals and local businesses are encouraged to join the growing list of sponsors who are supporting the robotics teams. Those interested in donating may contact Sylvester at shasyl@myfitz.net.

###