

West Monroe students head to national robotics competition

May 19, 2011
thenewsstar.com

The West Monroe High School Robotics team will be one of 10 from across the country competing for a national championship this weekend.

Eight team members left Monroe on Friday headed to Washington to compete at the Smithsonian Institution on Saturday.

WMHS's robotics team was formed during the 2009-10 school year. The school introduced a computer programming class during the 2010-11 school year.

Since the beginning of the year, students have constructed and programmed a robot. During competition, they will begin a specific task to program the robot to accomplish. Robots must be able to navigate through a simulated city and make designated stops. Students will be judged on their accuracy as well as their 30-minute judges presentation where they will present to the judges as an engineering firm would present to a client.

Faculty sponsor Tammy Whitlock said preparing for the competition encourages students to think differently.

"The students are what it's all about," she said. "Sometimes sponsors step in and may suggest another way to approach a problem, but they have to solve it themselves."

WMHS teacher Cody Lewis is also a team sponsor.

More than 500 students from 50 high schools competed in five regional competitions held in Louisiana, Florida, California, Washington, D.C., and Ohio.

First and second place winners at those competitions were invited to participate in the national competition.

Sponsored by the Institute of Navigation and the Air Force Research Laboratory, the 2011 ION Mini-Urban Challenge is a national event that challenges high school students to work in teams to design and operate a robotic car, built from a LEGO Mindstorms NXT kit, that can accurately navigate.

The competition is intended to expose students to the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Winners will be announced late Saturday.