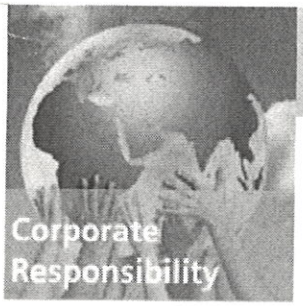

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Community Spotlight

FIRST Student's Talk to Michigan Congressman

The word about the FIRST Robotics program is spreading fast. Several thousand high school-level students across the globe wrote letters to their elected officials to tell them about FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology), a world-wide educational program, and how the program changes lives.

Each year at the FIRST Robotics kickoff in January, FIRST founder and inventor of the segway transport vehicle Dean Kamen gives the 1,300 FIRST team's a homework assignment – and this year he asked them to write to their elected officials to help them learn about FIRST, as well as to invite them to attend FIRST events. One such student, Tonya Das, from Rochester Adams High School in Rochester Hills, Mich. wrote to her district Congressman to make him aware of her high school's FIRST Robotics program and the importance it places on math, science and technology. Not only did Congressman Knollenberg respond to Tonya's letter, but he visited the Siemens VDO-sponsored FIRST team at Siemens VDO's facility in Auburn Hills, Mich. less than a month later.

The Rochester Adams FIRST Robotics Team 235 hosted a visit from Michigan Congressman Joe Knollenberg on Saturday, Feb. 3 in Auburn Hills to introduce him to the FIRST program and explain its incredible impact on their lives.

"Many prior FIRST Robotics students from our team have gone on to prestigious universities and colleges, like Stanford, Cambridge, MIT and Duke," Rochester Adams FIRST Team Captain Patrick Pannuto explained to the Congressman during the visit. "Most of the students pursue engineering and science degrees." They also presented him with an animation of this year's FIRST challenge, Rac and Roll and explained that the team scouts for strategic alliance partners during regional competitions because the alliances must work together to achieve a common goal – winning the competition.

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Once the Congressman was brought up to speed regarding the program, the team escorted him to Siemens VDO's fabrication facility to show him where they build the robot, as well as to show him their progress. The team also demonstrated the robot's capabilities and challenged the Congressman to take control of the joystick to maneuver it around the game floor.

"Mr. Knollenberg was impressed with the students, their enthusiasm for FIRST Robotics and the parents, teachers, schools and sponsors that help support the program," said Siemens VDO Technician and FIRST Team Mentor Paul Slaby. "The Congressman said it was impressive that companies and schools take the time and money to support the program and it demonstrates the program has an impact on academics."

According to Tonya Das who sent the letter, "It's pretty cool that Congressman Knollenberg responded to my letter. It shows that he's interested in what we're doing (the student's) and how programs, like FIRST make an impact on our lives."

2007 FIRST Challenge
As part of Siemens Corp.'s Caring Hands Initiative, employees at Siemens VDO locations in Auburn Hills and Huntsville, Ala. provide financial support, year-round mentors and access to their facilities to aid local high school students in their engineering challenges. Siemens VDO's Auburn Hills location has sponsored the Rochester Adams FIRST Robotics Team for nine consecutive years, while the company's Huntsville location has sponsored several different schools over the past 14 years.

In this year's game, "Rack 'N' Roll," students' robots must hang inflated colored tubes on pegs configured in rows and columns on a 10-foot high center "rack" structure. Extra points are scored by robots being in their home zone and lifted more than 4-inch off the floor by another robot before the end of the 2 minute and 15 second match.

At the 2007 FIRST season kicked-off in Manchester, NY on Jan. 6, all teams were shown this year's game field for the first time and received a common kit of parts and a manual of game rules and regulations. The students have a six-week period to build their innovative robot before they send it to FIRST headquarters to be inspected before the regional competition.

Since its beginning, FIRST has had a positive impact on students and academic communities. Research indicates FIRST students' attitudes about science, math, teamwork and the working world significantly improved after participating. Students' self image also improved, particularly in minority groups. In addition, interest in internship and employment opportunities with sponsoring companies increased.

These days, with global engineering competition from countries like India and China, more and more people, company's and institutions are placing an increasing emphasis on education – especially in the areas of math, science and technology. As Siemens is one of the world's largest engineering conglomerates, its future success is dependent upon education initiatives and programs like U.S. FIRST that encourage young students to be interested in subjects related to engineering. If