

# UCF earns first place in software competition at engineering conference

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Students and professionals in the engineering field found a new place to call home last weekend, courtesy of the Institute for Electrical and Electronic Engineers.

Researchers, professionals and students in the field of engineering from all across the United States descended upon Orlando last weekend for the IEEE SoutheastCon 2012. The conference was hosted by UCF, the IEEE Orlando Section and the IEEE Florida Council.

The conference is held annually to promote all aspects of the theories and applications of the engineering disciplines. The event was held at the Wyndham Orlando Resort from March 15-18. The event drew 484 students and more than 650 total participants, conference registration chair Blerina Aliaj said.

The event was composed of two portions: The technical program and the student program. The technical program consisted of a variety of tutorial sessions and workshops related to the topics were nanotechnology and materials, software engineering, and robotics and computer vision.

The student program consisted of a series of competitions related to the field of engineering. UCF claimed victory in the software competition, taking first place at this event.

Patrick Fenelon, member of the UCF programming team, said his team was given four hours to solve eight programming problems by creating algorithms. Judges reviewed the algorithms, which were submitted on paper, to determine who the winner was. He said his team practices regularly for events such as this one.

"We practice year-round. We spend about seven hours practicing, and that is more or less every Saturday in the year," Fenelon said. "In addition to that, we spend a large amount of time during the week practicing."

He also added that his team took first place in this event last year as well.

A conference highlight was the hardware competition. The event was hosted by the UCF student branch of the IEEE and the Robotics Club at UCF.



Andy Ceballos/Central Florida Future

Students test out their robots on practice courses before the hardware competition on Saturday. IEEE SoutheastCon 2012, a yearly engineering conference, brought students and professionals together this past weekend in Orlando.

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“It was our opportunity to kind of give back and show what kind of a competition we can put on,” Scherer said. “Just even the idea of us being able to host such a competition was a very exciting proposition to us, and so we jumped on the opportunity immediately.”

People participating in this event practiced long and hard, straight through the entire conference, sometimes sleeping on couches in the lobby or curled up underneath a table in the competition room. Scherer said this is not unusual to find and that it is a sign of how hard people work for this event.

For this competition, student teams created their own robots that ran autonomously through a course designed for the competition. The robots were required to perform a series of tasks, such as measuring a temperature and determining whether it was 10 degrees above or below ambient temperature. This would determine whether the robot would move left or right along the course. Contestants had a time limit, and they were scored based upon their performance. First place went to the Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University-Florida State University College of Engineering, second place went to the University of Alabama and third place went to University of South Alabama.

Jamaica also forms part of the Southeast region of the IEEE and was represented by the University of Technology, Jamaica. Its team took third place in the open hardware competition, which was open to any team or individual that wanted to participate. It also took third place in the technical paper competition and first place for the T-shirt competition.

Kimroy Bailey, team leader for the UTech Robotics Team, said the design of his T-shirt was meant to be eco-friendly.

“We designed a totally green Jamaica,” Bailey said. “We had hydropower, we had solar power, wind power, geothermal and ethanol from animals.”

He also said his shirt had a switch that could turn on light-emitting diode lights.

The talk of the evening, however, was Davis Fortenberry, a 10-year-old student from the Tennessee Virtual Academy.

Fortenberry won the open hardware competition, which was open to anyone who wanted to participate as teams or individuals. He beat out the Georgia Institute of Technology, which finished second, and the University of Technology, Jamaica, which finished third. He was happy with the win as well as with how his robot performed.

“It felt great,” Fortenberry said. “It had the right amount of speed and didn’t get caught on the hills in the course.”

His father, Robert Fortenberry, was proud of what his son had accomplished.

“It’s indescribable what it feels like to have your kids do well, and for people to recognize their effort,” he said.

The next conference, IEEE SoutheastCon 2013, will be from April 4-7 next year at the Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront in Jacksonville.