

Oklahoma City selected as regional site for robotics competition

BY JEFF PACKHAM
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OKLAHOMA CITY - The crowd cheers wildly as the mascot encourages the team on to victory. However, it's not a football or basketball game but instead a competition involving the engineers and scientists of the future.

Former University of Tulsa quarterback Tad Jones - now a state legislator from Claremore - said a trip earlier this year to Kansas City opened his eyes to the environment that exists with the Science and Technology Robotics Competition.

"The atmosphere for this competition was like a football game," Jones, a Republican who chairs the House Education Committee, said on Wednesday during a press conference announcing

Oklahoma City as a site for the 2008 Oklahoma regional competition.

Bank of Oklahoma Vice Chairman Burr Hargis said he had been pitching the idea of having the regional be held at the Cox Convention Center in Oklahoma City as a way to encourage Oklahoma students to become more interested in science and technology. Hargis said the competitions show the "vast examples of creative energy" that exist in today's students in an environment that combines academics with teamwork.

"It will change the attitude of our kids about science and technology," Hargis said.

Oklahoma teams initially began competing in the For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) Robotics Competition several years ago, and the state's 12 teams have showed well

in recent years.

The competitions involve the design and creation of remote-controlled robots from a common set of basic parts. Regional contests are held in 37 locations - including the Oklahoma City event March 20-22 - leading up to the 2008 FIRST Championship at the Georgia Dome in Atlanta April 17-19.

Twenty grants of \$5,000 were provided to the Oklahoma State Board of Education by the Legislature this year to be used for the competitions. House Speaker Lance Cargill, R-Harrah, was on hand at the press conference held at Southeast High School to promote the announcement and to encourage Oklahoma students to engage in what he foresees as a "knowledge-based economy" in the 21st century.

"Not only do we want to be a part of that, we want to be a leader in that," Cargill said.

Students from Ponca City were among the participants who showed off their robots, including seniors Dana Fjare, Greg Forton, and Austin Vaughn. Fjare said she initially joined to do something her friends were doing, but found it to be much more than that once she became more involved.

"You learn so much about what it's like to be an engineer," Fjare said.

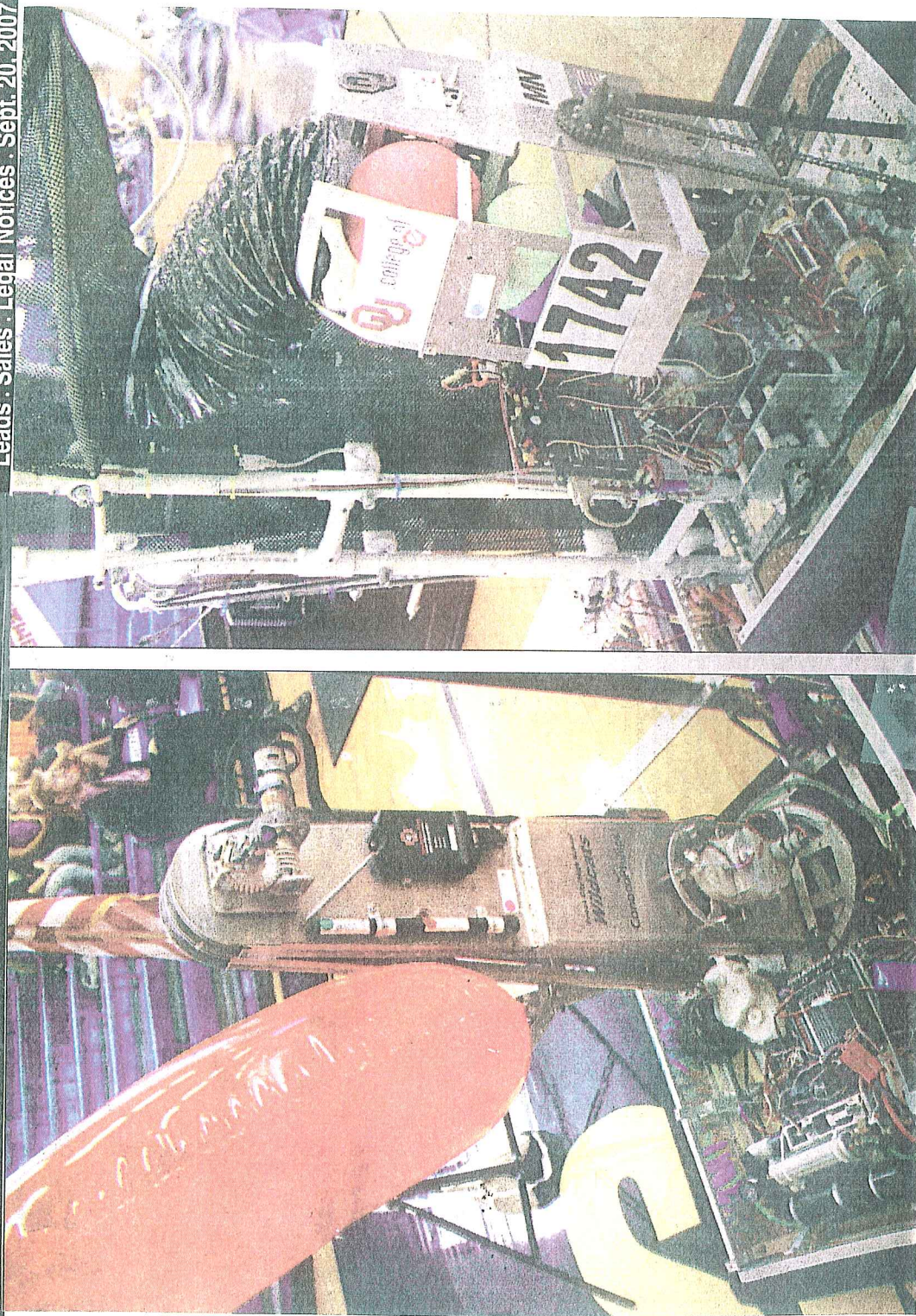
Ponca City science teacher Tonya Scott said her interest in the competition began with an opportunity to have NASA sponsor a team from the school. She said that offer was made in 1999, and the school has fielded a team every year since 2000.

The deadline for applying for the grants is Oct. 17. More than 40 teams of 15 to 25 high-school students are expected to compete in the regional event in Oklahoma City.

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