

FIRST® WASHINGTON WIRE



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STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

From a small lakeside community in Washington, a young student named Hasti Rasuli begins an unexpected journey that reshapes her confidence, her sense of belonging, and her future in STEM.

This article explores how Hasti, who moved from Afghanistan with a curiosity for technology but little exposure to women in STEM, discovered her voice and purpose through her high school robotics team.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

To our incredible community,

Thank you for welcoming me so generously during my first season with *FIRST*® Washington.

From speaking at Bellevue STEAMNASIUM and Sammamish Tech Fest, to advocating in Olympia with eight FTC teams, to judging, setting up A/V, and loading trucks at FRC events, and ultimately cheering on PNW teams at Worlds in Houston: This past year has been nothing short of inspiring.

As we launch into the AGE 2025–2026 season, I'm deeply grateful to every student, mentor, volunteer, sponsor, educator, and family member who brings our *FIRST*® WA community to life. Your dedication fuels innovation, teamwork, and gracious professionalism at every level.

As we head into 2026, I'm excited to introduce this new quarterly newsletter. Each edition will share stories from our community, highlight the people who make our programs thrive, and bring more awareness to the impact *FIRST*® Washington has across the state. Every quarter, we will celebrate your hard work and keep our entire community connected and informed.

We have important work ahead in the upcoming year. The loss of state funding has created sustainability challenges for teams, especially those in underserved communities. To keep maintaining and growing the impact of *FIRST*® in Washington and ensure equity, we need everyone's continued support: new and existing corporate sponsorships, creative fundraising by teams and cities, and ongoing advocacy at the legislative level. Together, we're not just building robots; we're building future leaders and change-makers. The energy, creativity, and resilience of this community give me great hope for the season ahead.

Thank you for being the heart of *FIRST*® Washington. Let's make this year unforgettable.

With appreciation,
Fred Krug, President, *FIRST*® Washington



2024-2025 SEASON RECAP

Once again, the *FIRST*® Washington community came together to build, compete, and inspire on an incredible scale. Across the state, 75 events brought together over 3,000 volunteers and thousands of students who pushed the boundaries of what their imagination and innovation could create through teamwork, creativity, and engineering excellence.

In total, over 10,000 students on 868 teams, from *FIRST*® LEGO® League (496 teams) to *FIRST*® Tech Challenge (185 teams) and *FIRST*® Robotics Competition (132 teams), joined in the mission to explore, innovate, and make an impact.

The 2024-2025 global theme, *FIRST*® DIVESM, invited students to explore one of Earth's most dynamic frontiers—the ocean. Each program within *FIRST*® Washington took inspiration from the depths, challenging teams to think creatively about how technology can protect and enhance life beneath the surface. Through SUBMERGEDSM, INTO THE DEEPSM, and REEFSCAPESM, students learned that just like our underwater ecosystems, innovation thrives when every participant plays a vital role.

FIRST® ROBOTICS COMPETITION

Our FRC community achieved extraordinary success this season. Teams 2910, 2930, and 7034 were named PNW District Winners, while 2412 and 2976 earned the prestigious Impact Award, honoring their leadership in advancing the mission of *FIRST*®.

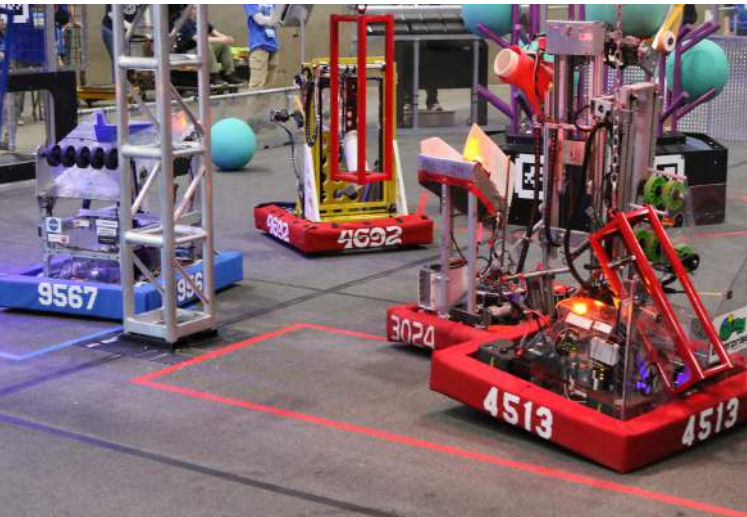
Mentors Stacy Kalthoff (2928) and Josephine Bolotski (4682) were recognized as Woodie Flowers Finalists, and students Owen G (2557), Emily R (4915), Logan S

75	events
3,000+	volunteers
10,000+	students
800+	teams

(5827), and Kira A (997) were celebrated as Dean's List Finalists. Jon Grimm was recognized as the FRC Volunteer of the Year.

Team 2910 led the way at Worlds with an impressive victory on the Einstein field. Overall, 22 teams represented the PNW at the World Championships in Houston, with nine bringing home awards. Owen G (2557) was named Dean's List Winner, and Thad House (4488) earned Volunteer of the Year—an incredible achievement that highlights the very best of the PNW FRC community.

2024-2025 SEASON RECAP



FIRST® TECH CHALLENGE

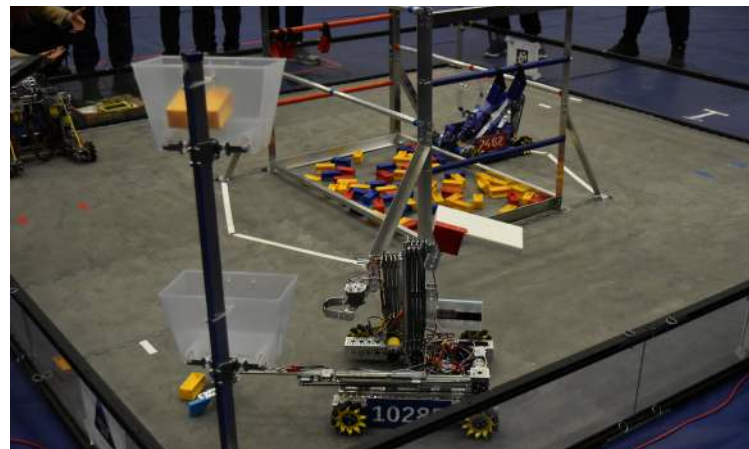
Our FTC teams showed the power of innovation and teamwork. Teams 14343 and 21336 were crowned Washington State Winners, with 21336 earning the coveted Inspire Award.

Mentor Aubrey Poggioli (18079) was honored with the Compass Award for outstanding guidance. Dean's List Award Finalists included Nishant V. (21229), Anarghya P. (23270), Kireeti K. (14343), and Brady P. (18079). We also extend a heartfelt thank you to our FTC Volunteers of the Year, Josh Klar and Kate Emery.

Teams 18225, 21336, 21229, and 14343 advanced to the World Championships in Houston with 18225 bringing home the Motivate Award and 2nd place and 21336 winning the Think Award. Brady P. went on to make history as a Dean's List Winner at the World Championships.

Team 46665 earned the Champion's Award and advanced to represent Washington at the World Festival in Houston, where they won the Championship Finalist award. Team 55142 was named Champion's Award Finalist and advanced to the Open Invitational, highlighting the exceptional talent emerging from our Eastern teams. We also extend our gratitude to Dr. David McKinnon, recognized as Volunteer of the Year for his outstanding dedication to the program.

On the west side of the state, Team 51539 claimed the Champion's Award at the Western Washington State Championship and also competed at the World Festival in Houston. Team 57637 earned the Champion's Award Finalist honor and an invitation to the Open Invitational, showcasing the strength and spirit of our western Washington community. Jason Cheng was celebrated as Volunteer of the Year for his commitment to inspiring the next generation of innovators.



FIRST® LEGO® LEAGUE

Our FIRST® LEGO® League teams demonstrated creativity, curiosity, and collaboration across Washington this season. At the Eastern Washington State Championship,

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

HOW ROBOTICS HELPED HASTI RASULI FIND CONFIDENCE, PURPOSE, & COMMUNITY

When Hasti Rasuli moved to Liberty Lake, Washington from Afghanistan before her sophomore year of high school, she brought with her a curiosity for technology but few opportunities to explore it. “Women in STEM is a very rare concept,” she explained. “I didn’t have any women in STEM around me; it was a foreign idea to me.”

That changed when a classmate in her physics course encouraged her to check out her school’s robotics team. “At the time, I was a very shy kid,” Hasti said. “You could not get two words out of me.” She walked into the robotics shop for the first time, and everything changed.

The team welcomed her with patience and encouragement. “Even though I didn’t know anything, they helped me learn... even the dumb questions were answered,” she remembered. Under the mentorship of people like Geoff Deane, she found a place where questions were welcomed, and mentors believed in her potential before she believed in it herself.

For Hasti, that sense of belonging became the foundation for something bigger. “The number one thing that kept me going was the mentor support,” she shared. “They made the resources available for me to learn, feel supported, and then feel like this is something I can do on my own.” As her confidence grew, she became a team leader and a *FIRST*® Like A Girl Ambassador, helping Falcons Robotics become the first FTC team in Washington to take on that role and invite more girls into robotics.

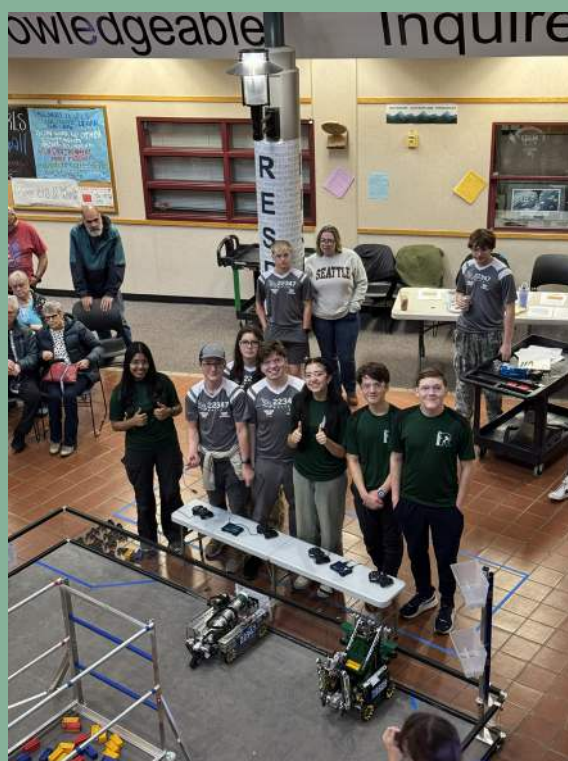


That inclusive spirit now lives on at Ridgeline High School, where Hasti's experience has helped shape the culture of Falcons Robotics. The program has grown rapidly under dedicated mentorship. When Ridgeline opened its doors in 2021, just seven students joined the *FIRST*® Tech Challenge program. Last year, 26 students participated across two teams, and through collaboration with other local schools, they helped launch at least four rookie FTC teams. Their outreach has more than doubled FTC participation across the region.

The momentum continues to grow. This fall, nine new *FIRST*® LEGO® League teams supported and mentored by students from Falcons Robotics will begin their season, bringing more than 60 new students into the *FIRST*® community and laying the foundation for the next generation of FTC and FRC participants. Four seniors graduated last year, and all seven graduates to date are pursuing technical degrees at four-year universities. The team expects to welcome a dozen or more new freshmen this fall, ensuring the momentum Hasti helped create continues to expand access to STEM opportunities.

Now a first-year Computer Science student at the University of Washington's Paul G. Allen School and a member of Husky Robotics, Hasti plans to return as a volunteer to help the next wave of students find their place in robotics. "I am who I am because of robotics," she reflected. "*FIRST*® has done a great job of creating a place where people can grow and become the best versions of themselves."

Hasti's journey reflects the heart of *FIRST*® Washington's mission: expanding access to robotics for every young person, no matter where they live.



2025-2026 SEASON PREVIEW

The 2025–2026 season, *FIRST*® AGE™ presented by Qualcomm, invites students to look back to move forward. Inspired by archaeology, this year's theme challenges teams to explore how the ideas and tools of the past can shape the technologies of the future.

FIRST® LEGO® LEAGUE: UNEARTHING BIG IDEAS

In UNEARTHED™, FLL students are learning how discovery fuels innovation. So far, 11 qualifiers have already taken place, with 10 more before semi-finals in Seattle and Covington (January 24–25), leading up to the Western Washington FLL Championship in Seattle on February 1 and the Easter Washington FLL Championship in Spokane on January 24. These events capture the spirit of exploration that defines *FIRST*®: Curiosity and creativity lead to big breakthroughs.

FIRST® TECH CHALLENGE: DECODING INNOVATION

The DECODE™ challenge, presented by RTX, asks students to examine how artifacts and ideas from the past can inspire modern solutions. With 30 league events already completed and five more league events to come, teams are preparing for the Asimov Super Qualifier (January 17) and Capek Super Qualifier (January 18) in Maple Valley, and the Washington Championship (January 31) in Seattle.

FIRST® Tech Challenge offers students a powerful way to develop engineering, programming, and leadership skills in a supportive, team-driven environment. Volunteers, mentors, and judges make these experiences possible and play a key role in helping students see what they can achieve.

FIRST® ROBOTICS COMPETITION: REBUILDING AND REIMAGINING

For high school students, REBUILT™ presented by Haas begins on January 10, 2026, and challenges teams to reimagine the past through the lens of engineering and innovation. Kickoff events will be held across the Pacific Northwest, including Auburn, Everett, Oregon State University, Skyview, Wapato, and West Valley High Schools.

The PNW competition season will run from March 7 through April 11, bringing together students, mentors, and volunteers to design, build, and compete with their robots. These events showcase not only technical skill, but also teamwork, creativity, and the shared excitement of bringing ideas to life.



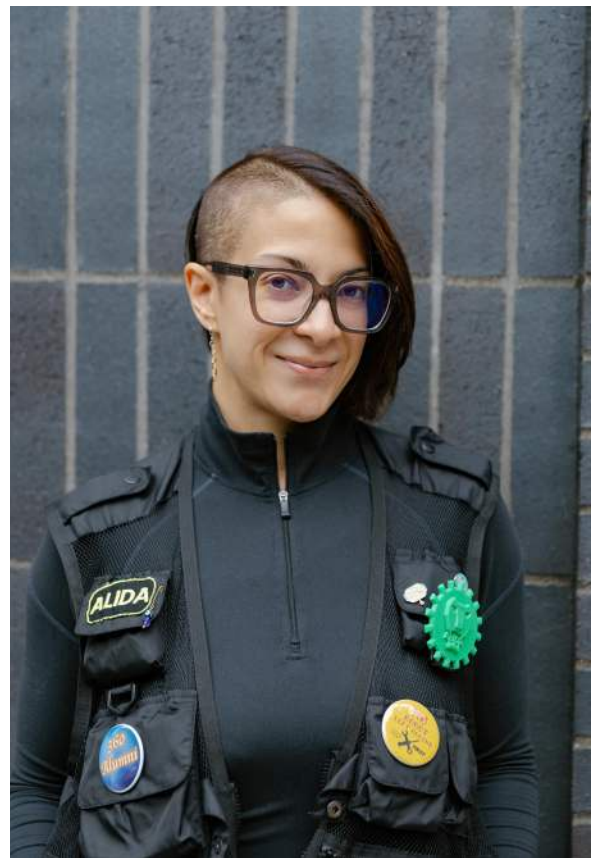
STAFF SPOTLIGHT

ALIDA MENDES MACCRACKEN

As both a *FIRST*® alum and a long-time volunteer, Alida Mendes MacCracken brings a deep understanding of the *FIRST*® experience, supporting FRC and FTC programs and mentors at *FIRST*® Washington. Her journey began on FRC Team 360 in Tacoma, where she first discovered what engineering could mean for her future. The mentorship she received as a student shaped her path into electrical engineering and inspired her to return as a volunteer, most recently becoming the new Co-Global Lead Robot Inspector.

Today, Alida works to strengthen the support systems that help teams thrive across the PNW. She leads efforts to gather real-time feedback at events, ensuring that *FIRST*® WA understands what teams need and how those needs differ across regions. She also helped launch a pilot partnership with the University of Washington that connects engineering students with teams seeking technical guidance; especially, in communities where mentors are harder to find.

Balancing her time between her family, her global volunteer role, and her work at *FIRST*® WA, Alida values the flexibility and teamwork that define the organization. For her, being part of *FIRST*® Washington means being part of a community that lifts students up, supports volunteers, and works together to expand access to meaningful STEM opportunities across the state.



GET INVOLVED



BUILDING TOGETHER

As the season approaches, thousands of volunteers are preparing to make these events possible. Whether you help with a single competition or throughout the season, your time and expertise directly support students as they learn, compete, and grow.

From judging and field reset to mentoring and refereeing, there's a role for everyone. If you're interested in joining us, please fill out the volunteer interest [form](#).

Your impact can go even further. Many employers match volunteer hours with corporate donations through platforms like Be-nevity. It's an easy way to turn your time into additional support for students statewide.

When we build a season together, we're not just creating competitions. We're building community, connection, and the foundation for future innovators and leaders.

END OF YEAR ANNUAL GIVE

As the year ends, we celebrate the students, mentors, and volunteers who make *FIRST*® Washington extraordinary. Every robot built, every skill learned, and every student discovering their potential is made possible by supporters like you.

As we head into 2026, we invite everyone to invest in the innovators of tomorrow with a year-end gift that supports the sustainability and success of *FIRST*® WA. Special thanks to the Kalispel Tribe and Novelis for ensuring Spokane-area teams have funding for a successful season. We've received support from many others, but we need everyone committed to creating more stories like Hasti's to step up as we enter the new year.

Students in *FIRST*® today are the engineers, technologists, and problem-solvers shaping the PNW's industries of tomorrow. Alumni have gone on to careers in aerospace, software, biotech, and manufacturing, often citing *FIRST*® as the spark that set them on their path.

Every dollar matters: \$200 supports one FLL student, \$300 supports one FTC student, and \$1,000 supports one FRC student. Each gift gives a young person hands-on STEM experiences that could inspire the next great innovation in the region. Your support fuels the talent pipeline keeping the PNW at the forefront of technology and engineering.

Make your tax-deductible gift before December 31 to invest in the future of our innovators. Questions? Contact our Director of Development & Community Relations, Lila Mowatt, at lilam@firstwa.org. Ready to donate? Donate [here](#).