



**POPULAR ROBOT BUILDING COMPETITION SUBJECT OF “GEARING UP”  
Documentary About Nationwide Competition For Teens  
Airs on Public Television in Fall 2009, Celebrates Twenty Years of FIRST Robotics**

ST. LOUIS [August 25, 2009] — *Gearing Up*, a one-hour documentary from KETC St. Louis and Story House Productions, chronicles the behind-the-scenes drama and excitement of the 2008 FIRST Robotics competition. More than 37,500 students in 48 states took part in the competition, which is a popular annual event created by inventor Dean Kamen in 1989. Participation in FIRST Robotics has grown tremendously, increasing from 28 teams in its first year to almost 1,700 in 2008.

The film will air on public television stations in Fall 2009.

*Gearing Up* focuses on four teams heading for the 2008 FIRST Robotics Regional Competition: Miss Daisy, a seasoned team from Ambler, Pennsylvania; RoboDoves, a small, all-girl rookie team from Baltimore; Rambotics, a team of teenaged felons incarcerated at the Ridge View correctional facility for boys in Watkins, Colorado; and Ratchet Rockers, a group of suburban kids from Wentzville, Missouri. Each team raises money for a robot kit, issued by FIRST. Each kit has identical parts, but no real instructions. The idea is for each team to create a unique robot capable of performing the same, predetermined challenge. After that, the game is on!

The robots are remotely operated, and the 2008 competition required them to zip around a small track maneuvering 40-inch, 10-pound balls that had to be lifted off, over, and onto an elevated bridge. *Gearing Up* details the triumphs and disasters teams encounter as they share ideas, discuss their designs, and work out technical challenges while racing to complete their robots in time for the competition. The RoboDoves celebrate finishing their robot two weeks early, while the Rambotics get a slow start complicated by three students who escape from school. Students on the Ratchet Rockers express doubts that their robot will even work, while the Miss Daisy team contends with a robot that must lose five pounds overnight to meet eligibility requirements.

At the regional competitions in St. Louis, Philadelphia, Denver and Annapolis, teams get a first look at the designs and solutions of other students, including a fearsome group of robots capable of flinging the huge balls to the other side of the playing arena. They also get a taste of the real world as they struggle for the competitive edge with no money, no time, and no resources. Through round after round, the RoboDoves, Miss Daisy, Rambotics and Ratchet Rockers contend with broken wheels, welds, and electronics; illegal bumpers; stripped gears; reckless navigating and robots that simply fall over. And round after round the teams find the support they need from their mentors.

“This whole experience has really changed my life,” says Katelynn Burns, a member of the Ratchet Rockers. “I am seriously considering going into engineering and I would have [previously] thought that was the total geek thing to do....But you know what? I actually think it would be extremely fun.” Russell Burchill, adult coach for the Rambotics, says, “We walked away and thought to ourselves, this is probably the most powerful thing we had ever seen, as a group of teachers.”

The annual competition enjoys support from FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology), as well as from the STEM project, a national initiative supporting science, technology, engineering, and math education.

*Gearing Up* is funded by a grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and is co-produced by KETC/Channel 9 in St. Louis, Missouri, and Story House Productions in Washington, D.C. CPB has also funded a national community engagement pilot project, managed by KETC, that is designed to deepen youth engagement in STEM learning by building, strengthening and growing partnerships between public media and partner organizations in local communities across America. *Gearing Up* is presented and distributed by American Public Television.



**About KETC:** KETC is one of the most-watched PBS-member stations in the country. Since its inception in 1954, KETC has been known as an innovative, community-focused public media organization. On air, online and in the community, KETC is fulfilling its mission of connecting St. Louis to the world and the world to St. Louis. In 2008, KETC became a national leader in community engagement through its work with the mortgage crisis and STEM education. KETC currently broadcasts four digital stations: PBS, KETC Kids, PBS World and Create. Program guides and information about the station’s work in the community are available at [www.ketc.org](http://www.ketc.org).



**About American Public Television:** With more than 10,000 hours of programming in its library, American Public Television (APT) has been a prime source of programming for the nation’s public television stations for 48 years, distributing more than 300 new programs per year. In 2006, APT launched Create – the TV channel featuring the best of public television’s lifestyle programming. Known for its leadership in identifying innovative, worthwhile and viewer-friendly programming, APT has established a tradition of providing public television stations with program choices that strengthen and customize their schedules, such as Rick Steves’ Europe, Worldfocus, Globe Trekker, Simply Ming, Sara’s Weeknight Meals, America’s Test Kitchen From Cook’s Illustrated, Doc Martin, Lidia’s Family Table, Rosemary and Thyme, P. Allen Smith’s Garden Home, The Big Comfy Couch, Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison, Smothered: The Censorship Struggles of the Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour, Monarchy With David Starkey, Spain...on the road Again, and other prominent documentaries, dramatic series, how-to programs, children’s series and classic movies. For more information about APT’s programs and services, visit [APTonline.org](http://APTonline.org).



**About Corporation for Public Broadcasting:** The Corporation for Public Broadcasting is a private, nonprofit corporation created by Congress in 1967 and is steward of the federal government’s investment in public broadcasting. It helps support the operations of more than 1,100 locally-owned-and-operated public television and radio stations nationwide, and is the largest single source of funding for research, technology, and program development for public radio, television and related online services.

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