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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wired for Innovation: FIRST Robotics Competition Brings California Talent to the Port of Hueneme

1,200 high school students from around the state come together to demonstrate their engineering prowess at the California District Qualifying Event.

[PORT HUENEME, CA – March 9, 2025] – It was a weekend of gears, grit, and glory as the Port of Hueneme proudly welcomed the annual FIRST Robotics Competition for the fifth year in a row. This exciting two-day event is held inside the FATHOMWERX lab — a dynamic space for innovation and technology transfer between the Port of Hueneme, Naval Sea Systems Command (NAVSEA), Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command (NAVFAC), the Economic Development Collaborative, and Matter Labs.



Robotics in action at the FIRST Robotics CA District Hueneme Port Event 2026

The Hueneme Port qualifying event attracted hundreds of enthusiastic spectators cheering on high-energy teams of young people who build and program robots designed to maneuver objects, overcome obstacles, and compete in alliance-based challenges. This year's REBUILT motif celebrates archaeology-themed innovation and challenged students to reimagine the past



as they deployed STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education principles to build their robots.

“We’re excited to host FIRST Robotics as part of the work we do to bring people into the STEM and maritime fields,” said Oxnard Harbor District Board President Jason Hodge. “We know that this collaborative environment serves as a springboard to what is going to be a great future for these young people.”



A team from Calexico High School guides its robot in competition

Earlier this year, leaders from the Port of Hueneme presented a \$10,000 sponsorship to Hueneme High’s Thunder Vikes robotics team with an additional \$5,000 matching commitment if the team raises \$5,000 on its own.

The Vikes returned for their second year of competition led by Captain Miguel Rodriguez, who explained how the program has helped him develop new skills. “Participating in FIRST Robotics means you will be exposed to many different aspects of engineering, like CAD, manufacturing, building, coding, electronics, and many more hands-on experiences. It also means you get to work in a team and, in a way, be a part of a family.”

The event kicked off as a master of ceremonies welcomed participants and spectators to the FATHOMWERX lab where dignitaries from the Oxnard Harbor District and surrounding cities presented FIRST California Robotics a special certificate of recognition for their work to empower and inspire the next generation of innovators. Educators, elected officials, families, friends, judges, and mentors watched with excitement as 42 teams from around the state pitted their robot alliances against each other to win a spot at the FIRST California SoCal State Championship.



Oxnard Harbor District Board President Jason Hodge (center) and Commissioner Celina Zacarias (right) present a Certificate of Recognition to FIRST Robotics representative Aimee Beck

“The Port is deeply committed to empowering students and developing the future workforce, and hosting the FIRST Robotics competition goes hand-in-hand with this mission,” said Port of Hueneme CEO Kristin Decas. “Observing the competition and the students’ hard work in action stands out as one of the Port’s finest annual highlights.”

After two days of competition, the winning alliance consisted of Team 2637 (Phantom Catz from Palos Verdes Peninsula High School in Rolling Hills Estates), Team 3128 (Aluminum Narwhals from Canyon Crest Academy in San Diego), and Team 1138 (Eagle Engineering from Chaminade College Prep School in Canoga Park).

Several teams were also recognized for their achievements both on and off the field.

The FIRST Impact Award, FIRST Robotics Competition’s most prestigious honor recognizing teams that create the largest positive impact through STEM outreach and community engagement, was awarded to Team 5817 (Uni-Rex from Sanger West High School in Fresno). With this award, Team 5817 qualifies to advance to the SoCal District State Championship in Anaheim on April 10-12, 2026.

Teams competing in California’s district model earn District Points at their first two events based on their qualification ranking, playoff performance, and awards. At the end of the district event season, the top 60 Southern California teams by District Points advance to the Southern California District Championship, where they compete for a chance to qualify for the FIRST Championship in Houston.



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About FIRST®

FIRST® is a robotics community that prepares young people for the future through a suite of inclusive, team-based robotics programs for ages 4-18 (PreK-12) that can be facilitated in school or in structured afterschool programs. Boosted by a global support system of volunteers, educators, and sponsors that include over 200 of the Fortune 500 companies, teams operate under a signature set of FIRST Core Values to conduct research, fundraise, design, build, and showcase their achievements during annual challenges. An international not-for-profit organization founded by accomplished inventor Dean Kamen in 1989, FIRST has a proven impact on STEM learning, interest, and skill-building well beyond high school. Alumni of FIRST programs gain access to exclusive scholarships, internships, and other opportunities that create connections and open pathways to a wide variety of careers. Learn more at firstinspires.org

About FATHOMWERX

FATHOMWERX is a public-private laboratory, community, and resource for technological innovation that fuses small and non-traditional companies, academic institutions, and other Department of Defense stakeholders together to work on the most challenging problems in the port and maritime domains. FATHOMWERX's dynamic platform is designed to create a high rate of return for all participants. Through the promotion of divergent thought, neutral facilitation, and the use of a growing ecosystem, the goal of FATHOMWERX is to bring the right minds together to solve challenging problems. The Founding Partners of FATHOMWERX are the Ventura County Economic Development Collaborative, Port of Hueneme, Naval Surface Warfare Center, and Matter Labs.

About the Port of Hueneme

The Port of Hueneme is one of the most productive and efficient commercial trade gateways for niche cargo on the West Coast. Five locally elected Port Commissioners govern the Port. The Port consistently ranks among the top ten U.S. Ports for automobiles and fresh produce. Port operations support the community by bringing \$2.8 billion in economic activity and creating 25,000 trade-related jobs. Trade through the Port of Hueneme generates more than \$236 million in direct and related state and local taxes, which fund vital community services. In 2017, the Port of Hueneme became the first Port in California to become Green Marine certified and was voted the Greenest Port in the U.S. at the Green Shipping Summit. www.Portofh.org.