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## CAJUNBOT ACCEPTS CHALLENGE, RECEIVES NATIONAL PRESS

The university received some national press from CNN in its quest to build an autonomous vehicle for the Department of Defense's Grand Challenge on March 13.

Team CajunBot representing UL Lafayette was filmed and interviewed for a Grand Challenge special to run on Next@CNN March 6 at 2 p.m. and again March 7 at 4 p.m.

CNN producer Marsha Walton said the crew decided on CajunBot as a subject because of its uniqueness and freshness to the contest.

" We wanted to focus on a team that wasn't a usual character for this Challenge," said Walton. The crew was on campus Feb. 17 and 18 interviewing team members and filming test runs of the vehicle.

Twenty-five teams from across the nation will compete for a $1 million prize. Each team is to prepare a vehicle that can navigate a designated route using only GPS signals for direction and laser sensors which detect upcoming obstacles. Using artificial intelligence, each vehicle will have to react to obstacles and other vehicles along the path.

The corridor with which the vehicles must remain will vary in width from miles wide to tens of feet. It includes open terrain, winding trails and paved roads between Los Angeles and Las Vegas. A winner will be declared when the first vehicle crosses the finish line within 10 hours.

" We are cautiously optimistic," said Dr. Arun Lakhotia, who with Dr. Charles Cavanaugh, is heading up Team CajunBot. Both are faculty members in the Center for Advanced Computer Studies. "We've come a long way and we can't wait for the opportunity to set this vehicle on the track."

With help from the university community as well as the private sector, Team CajunBot put together the university's entry in a matter of months.

" It all came together so fast," said Cavanaugh. "We've got a great group of students, scientists, engineers and members of the community who are working tirelessly to make this happen. I consider this project to be an important step towards a future in embedded systems and robotics in the Center for Advanced Computer Studies."

Though the university may be new to this specific challenge, it is definitely

no stranger to the worlds of artificial intelligence, robotics, mechanical engineering, machine learning, software engineering and embedded systems.

For years now, the Computer Science Department has ranked among the top 10 programs in the nation with the Center for Advanced Computer Studies ranked in the top 35 in quality of research and in the top 50 in external research funds.

Faculty members have been studying the application of artificial intelligence in the fields of BioInformatics, intelligent computers and medical diagnosis. In addition, the university operates a Laboratory for Intelligent Systems and an Intelligent Robotic Systems Laboratory where space automation and automated factories are two areas of research.

In engineering, research is being conducted in computer-aided design and computer integrated manufacturing. One lab is home to two industrial robots which help in ongoing research.

" This Grand Challenge project is the like the coming together of one whole from many different parts," said Dr. Magdy Bayoumi, director for the Center of Advanced Computer Studies. "And the recognition we are getting is worth more than millions of dollars. It is like March madness in basketball. The Cajuns are in the big dance and make no mistake we are here to win. Everyone on the project is combining their areas of expertise to make this work. It can't happen any other way."

Dr. William E. Simon, professor and head of Mechanical Engineering, agreed. "It's always great when people from different areas can come together in an interdisciplinary project such as this one. It provides invaluable experience and training for our students," said Simon.

Mechanical engineering modified the vehicle's controls to make is easier to steer with a computer and they also designed the structure to house the computers and other electronics.

Team CajunBot arrives in Los Angeles in early March to begin readying for the race. Vehicles will be traveling to Las Vegas. If no vehicle crosses the finish line in the specified 10-hour time limit, the DOD is expected to hold the Grand Challenge each year until a winner is named.



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