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Smithsonian Adds to Robotics Collection and Invites Public to National Robotics Week Activities in Spark!Lab

The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History today accepted donations relating to the development of autonomous mobile robots in the United States, and its Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation unveiled National Robotics Week activities taking place in Spark!Lab, the center's hands-on invention space in the museum, April 9 through April 16.

Sandia National Laboratories donated objects such as its first minirobot, the Miniature Autonomous Robotic Vehicle. About 1 cubic inch in size, MARV is one of the first miniature robots developed in the United States. Other acquisitions from Sandia include descendants of MARV—including one named the 2001 robotics invention of the year by *Time* magazine—hopping robots and “Dixie,” one of the earliest battlefield scout robots.

Velodyne donated an improved laser vision system that was invented for use in robot vehicle races held by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, including the 2005 Grand Challenge and the 2007 Urban Challenge. The laser vision system allows terrain mapping in three dimensions. Also included in the acquisition is a competition robot developed in 2000.

“Technological advancement has always been a strong theme running through American history,” said Brent D. Glass, director of the museum. “The donations made today not only reflect the historical record of robotic development, but offer a glimpse of—and inspiration for—the future.”

These donations join objects already in the museum's permanent robotics collection, such as “Stanley,” a modified blue Volkswagen Touareg that won the 2005 DARPA Grand Challenge.

The Lemelson Center is participating in National Robotics Week—an initiative of the Congressional Robotics Caucus that aims to educate the public about how robotics technology affects

society, past, present and future—for the second year. Featured in Spark!Lab through May is Robbie, an Autonomous Robotic Manipulator (ARM) from DARPA. Robbie is designed as a tool for researchers at leading U.S. universities and research labs to find ways to enhance the types of tasks robots can perform while minimizing the amount of human input necessary. While in Spark!Lab, Robbie will play games, such as a memory game similar to Simon, with visitors and facilitate discussions about how robots process information.

“Spark!Lab has always been a place for our young visitors to ignite their imaginations and creativity,” said Arthur Molella, director of the center. “The activities offered for National Robotics Week are an exciting new way to pique their interest in science, technology, engineering and math.”

Other robotics activities in Spark!Lab April 9 through April 16 allow visitors to invent a robot arm, take an Invention Challenge to earn a special Spark!Lab patent, build and test-drive remote-controlled (teleoperated) robots and experiment with the electronics that comprise robots. Spark!Lab will also feature Survivor Buddy, an innovative search-and-rescue robot operated by engineering students from Texas A&M and Stanford Universities; an ornithopter robot that flies by flapping its wings designed and built by students from the University of Maryland Robotics Center; and ELECTRO, Spark!Lab’s autonomous robot dog.

The Smithsonian’s Lemelson Center is dedicated to exploring invention in history and encouraging inventive creativity in young people. The center is supported by The Lemelson Foundation, a private philanthropy established by one of the country’s most prolific inventors, Jerome Lemelson, and his family. The Lemelson Center is located in the National Museum of American History. For more information, visit <http://invention.smithsonian.org>.

The National Museum of American History collects, preserves and displays American heritage in the areas of social, political, cultural, scientific and military history. To learn more about the museum, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu>. For Smithsonian information, the public may call (202) 633-1000, (202) 633-5285 (TTY).

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