

New robotics lab unveiled at New Horizons



Instructor Joanne Talmage speaks Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2009, during student orientation in the robotics lab at the New Horizons Regional Education Center in Hampton. The robotics lab is new for this school year. (Diane Cebula, Daily Press / September 2, 2009)

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Education

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HAMPTON

— Drenched in the royal blue and silver of the NASA Knights Team 122, the space looks more like a high-tech nerve center than a vocational and technical training facility.

Robotics students and club members at New Horizons Regional Education Center got a first look at their gleaming new lab and classroom during Wednesday evening's student orientation at the Butler Farm Road campus.

A large classroom and touch-screen computer lab are adjacent to the lab, which will be used for building robots. Just inside the entrance are a locker area, trophy cases and office space.

For the past 12 years, students on the center's FIRST Robotics competition team used smaller and far less modern facilities to build their contest entries. FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics is an organization that hosts annual robot-building competitions.

In the past, electronics classes and club activities took place in five different parts of New Horizons.

Joanne Talmage is the instructor who has headed the center's robotics team for its entire existence.

"You mean we can just stay here? It still hasn't hit us completely," Talmage said Wednesday, as students from various departments popped in to see the facility.

David Creamer, principal at the Butler Farm campus, said money saved by having New Horizons students from various areas of specialty work on the renovation project freed up funds for more equipment to be purchased.

The project cost so far is \$415,000, according to New Horizons Executive Director Joe Johnson. It was funded by all six local school divisions that share vocational and technical training at New Horizons — Newport News, Hampton, Poquoson, York, Williamsburg/James City and Gloucester.

This school year, the new area will be used for both classroom instruction and after-hours work on the robots. New Horizons' electronics program has been renamed to include robotics, electronics and fiber optics.

The half of the classroom that is carpeted can be used to run robots.

There are two mobile interactive white boards, at 77 and 95 inches, respectively. Multiple wall-mounted projectors and screens will soon be in place.

Glass windows in adjacent rooms will allow Talmage to see every bit of the space from inside her office.

"Everything was made movable," Talmage said. "So we can move it and change the connotation of the room at any time. That's what I love the most."

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