

# Statesman

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## Westlake High robot to run Austin Marathon

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Those who come to the Austin Marathon on Feb. 16 will have an opportunity to see a rather unusual participant cross the finish line.

Marathon Bot, built by the Westlake High School Robotics Team, runs 12 mph, said Robotics teacher Norman Morgan. It won't run the whole marathon this year, instead rolling a couple hundred yards before the finish line. But Morgan said he and his team hope to build one that can handle at least a half-marathon next year.

The marathon, which is open for seven hours, and half-marathon, which is open for four hours, both start at 7 a.m.

The Robotics Team got the opportunity through its partnership with Freescale Semiconductor Ltd., where the team's mentor Joyce Witowski works. The company is sponsoring the Austin Marathon and offered to fund a robot for the club.

"The tie-in is getting young people excited about pursuing careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields," said Rick Morales, with Freescale.

The team unveiled the bot to Freescale employees Feb. 10 during a ceremony that included speeches from Austin Mayor Lee Leffingwell and marathon winner Gilbert Tuhabonye.

In total, 22 students built the robot. They started it in December in the midst of working on a robot for an upcoming competition, Morgan said.

Compared to the competition robots — which must sometimes be able to climb and throw things, for example — this robot isn't as complex, said senior Lynnea Hernandez.

“All it needs to do is run,” Hernandez said.

Still, building a device that can travel such a long route has its challenges, namely, battery life and the ability to stay in contact with it, students said. The bot includes a GoPro camera, which will be shooting a live video stream of the race.

The presentation wasn't the only recent recognition the high school's Robotics Team received. Earlier this month, the ninth and 10th-grade teams qualified for the regional tournament at the Alamo Regional FIRST Tech Challenge, Morgan said. They were among 60 teams who qualified for the tournament from more than 150 teams eligible throughout Central and South Texas.