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ROBOT RALLY CAPS 5-DAY IT ACADEMY FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

(**RICHMOND, Va.**) — A robot rally June 30 will cap a five-day robotics and cyber academy for high school students with disabilities seeking to learn skills and earn certification that could lead to jobs in high-demand fields in Virginia’s IT and manufacturing fields.

Beginning June 26 at the [Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired](#) in Richmond, 26 high school students and new graduates will work with instructors from the National Integrated Cyber Education and Resource Center. Students will learn to assemble, program and code their own robots and learn about cyber ethics and safety, as well as hear about training and career opportunities from local IT professionals.

The robot rally will begin at 11 a.m. in the center’s recreation center, 401 Azalea Ave., Richmond. It is among the activities designed to demonstrate the students’ achievements to their families during a showcase lunch and certificate ceremony. Elizabeth Creamer, vice president of workforce development and credential attainment with the Community College Workforce Alliance, will speak at the ceremony.

The students are consumers of the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services and the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired, which have a five-year, \$4.3 million federal grant to fund a Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities program and its participation in “Dream It. Do It. Virginia.” academies, such as the robotics and cyber academy. CPID, a collaboration between DARS and DBVI, seeks to open pathways to careers for Virginians with disabilities, including young adults and veterans.

These job skills academies are part of the Commonwealth’s efforts to help industry close the skills gaps and create a pipeline of young adults, including those with disabilities, interested in working in advanced manufacturing and technology fields. As part of that effort, the robotics

and cyber academy students will take their robots and laptops home with them to continue developing their interest in the field.

“These career training opportunities are a great way for our young people with disabilities learn about and prepare for technology jobs,” said DARS Commissioner Jim Rothrock. “We want to provide every avenue possible for young people to learn job skills so they can compete for good jobs and fully integrate into the Virginia workforce.”

“Through this robotics and cyber academy, our department and DARS support the Governor’s “New Virginia Economy Workforce Initiative” which places emphasis on the importance of credentialing in the midst of growth in the manufacturing arena in the 21st century,” said DBVI Commissioner Ray Hopkins. “Not only will these young Virginians gain a better sense of career possibilities in STEM related fields, they also have the opportunity to demonstrate that with some modifications and personal drive, individuals with disabilities can acquire the types of skills that the IT and manufacturing industries seek.”

CPID officials plan to hold similar robotics academies as well as programs focused on other fields across Virginia in the future. In July, a group of DARS and DBVI consumers will attend an academy to gain training in CNC machining, in which computers control tools such as lathes, mills and grinders, at the Valley Career and Technical Center in Augusta County.

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