Robotics group offers unique underwater challenge

By Melissa Cataldo
Contributing Writer

Artificial intelligence is one of the technologies that could shape our society during the next century as profoundly as the advent of computers during the 20th century. It’s exciting to be at a school where AI research is happening all the time. Underwater robots can fix sea floor oil pipelines, locate and safely detonate underwater landmines, or explore the deep ocean floor. Autonomous exploration of the seafloor would have many important applications underwater, an environment

where it is costly and often dangerous for humans and to venture. Surprisingly, the sole club at Tech dealing with underwater robotics was founded just during this school year.

The Marine Robotics Group (MRG) got off the ground mostly through the efforts of friends Lucas Garza, Rick Uhlman and Daniel Cooksey, all in their third year studying Aerospace Engineering.

They are also working with Jack Griffin, a Computer Science graduate student who serves as the lead AI programmer for the team.

John Parish, a third-year Electrical Engineering major who is currently co-oping in Washington D.C., was also one of the founding members of the group. Each of the team members has taken on different roles in the design and management of the robot.

“It’s still low-speed aerodynamics, just with a different density.”

Lucas Garza
Third-year AE major

Garza serves as Club Coordinator, Uhlman specializes in controls, and Cooksey in structures. The club advisor is Dr. Tucker Balch, a College of Computing professor whose research focuses on artificial intelligence.

“I’m very excited to advise the Marine Robotics Group…My hope is that this effort will continue to grow and that Georgia Tech will become one of the few places involved in underwater robotics research,” Dr. Balch wrote in an email.

The MRG is working on a robot for the 2005 Autonomous Underwater Vehicle Competition in San Diego this August. They will be competing against schools such as MIT, Duke, Cornell and international schools such as Ecole De Technologie Superieure.

As a new organization, they also want to raise their profile on campus by putting their robot on show for Skirt Appreciation Day.

Making campus look nicer, one dress shirt at a time

For Skirt Appreciation Day founders, skirts and ties are just another way of spreading the love

By Kristin Noell
Senior Staff Writer

Since women are such a minority at Tech, one might think that most men on campus appreciate them. However, fourth-year Industrial Design majors John Chin and Andrew Mosby would disagree with you.

Chin and Mosby thought that they could show their appreciation a little more visibly. So they decided to create a holiday of sorts: Skirt Appreciation Day.

During the second semester of sophomore year, Chin and Mosby had physics together and “realized that we wanted to dress up, maybe once a week,” Mosby, known to friends as ‘Mobs’, said.

“We noticed that a) girls dressed up more. Or they dress up, [while] guys don’t. And b) that girls seem like they’re unappreciated at Tech, and they get the ‘TBS’ crap.”

Andrew Mosby
Fourth-year ID major

“We noticed that…girls seem like they’re unappreciated at Tech, and they get the ‘TBS’ crap.”

Monday. Men are encouraged to dress up in a shirt and tie, although the definition of "dressed up" is generally left as a matter of personal preference.

Chin and Mosby say they just wanted to make Tech a happier place, because they feel there are just too many students walking around with their heads down.

They have also noticed some women dressing up on Skirt Appreciation Day, which they feel makes more men dress up, which makes a big circle of love,” Chin said.

Although it is now on Mondays, Skirt Appreciation Day was originally on Thursday or “Th-here-day,” as they call it. To spread the word about the day that first year, Chin and Mosby, both peer leaders at the time, started by telling their residents about it. In addition, people would ask them why they were dressing up, and that helped spread the word also.

Now in its third year, Skirt Appreciation Day has a small but loyal following, which is evident in T-shirt sales last year, Chin and Mosby sold 171 shirts, which they designed themselves and sold at Brittain and around campus.

By Emily Tame / STUDENT PUBLICATIONS

The competition is a big deal at many of the schools—Duke alone procures about $65,000 a year to build their robot.

The MRG was able to get a sponsorship from the Georgia Tech Student Foundation of several thousand dollars last semester, but the team is still looking for additional funding through corporate sponsorships.

As a new organization, they also want to raise their profile on campus by putting their robot on show for Skirt Appreciation Day.

“We’d like to have the robot displayed publicly…we’re looking into getting some time at the CRC pool,” said Uhlman.

At the competition, the robot will have to demonstrate its autonomy by completing a rendezvous with a docking station, inspecting a pipeline, finding and marking a break in the pipeline, and homing in on an acoustic beacon at the proper surface zone.

All these tasks must be completed within a 15-minute period. Add to these objectives the general...
Lively, geeky history carried on in newsgroup threads of git.talk.flame

By Joshua Cuneo
Senior Staff Writer

POST: Thunderstorms rock, by the way. Anyone who says otherwise is a commie—ing oprah loving fascist anti-american terrorist supporting axl and new age conservative—swat p—you scared little momma's boy.

REPLY: You're a wannabe EAS major, aren't you?

Such is life in the volatile world of git.talk.flame, the semi-obscure newsgroup where students can talk about anything and everything without consequence or fear of reprisal from the administration.

Read a funny news story that you'd like to share? Angry about the latest dent in your car? Think your new professor is a hardass? Post about it here. But be warned: this is a no-censorship zone, so prepare yourself for a near-certain volley of vicious, obscene replies.

"I can say things there that I couldn't otherwise say in public situations without fear of consequences," said Kelly Lyons, a third-year Discrete Math major and a frequent poster to .flame.

"You are able to let go and destroy creatures that do not compute," said Alan Fay, a spring 2004 graduate in Computer Science.

.flame is an exercise in utter passion and impulsiveness. Posts range from profane name-calling to serious discussions to random quips. (One thread reads: "spoiler: darth vader is lake skywalker's father!!"

Another: "Caution: the iPod shuffle is NOT candy."

Complaints on a variety of issues are also popular. "This can be anything, from the parking office, to professor's grading policies, to the quality of pot, or even to the nature of .flame itself," Fay said. "These people are often far, wear glasses and never leave their room."

Some topics are technical, which, at an institute ruled by science and technology can become just as controversial as sociopolitical issues.

"[If] someone posts 'Linux sucks' or something, they'll get 10,000 people descending on them to tell them why they're wrong," said David Hilley, a Computer Science graduate student. "But...traditionally, people would rant about classes and the Tech shaft and you know how some professor was screwing them or some TA was an idit or whatever."

Many threads include links to a variety of interesting websites, and some posts can garner hundreds of responses. Other topics vary wildly.

"A random user will occasionally burst onto the scene and proclaim some sort of opinion or viewpoint about the world," Fay said. "Of late, we've been getting lots of traffic from self-proclaimed Libertarians that advocate killing poor people."

Skirts from page 13

members—even including a Tech staff member or two.

Participants in Skirt Appreciation Day have various reasons for taking the time out to dress nicely. Rafael Corrales, a second-year International Affairs and Spanish major, said he participates "because I understand the preparation a girl sometimes goes through in looking just right for a guy," he said.

Skirt Appreciation Day "is a good way to show the girls at Tech how much we appreciate them wearing skirts, and we reciprocate by dressing up too," said Vineet Chhangani, a third-year Mechanical Engineering major.

"A more fun reason would be because I love hearing compliments for you. We're appreciating you,'" Corrales said. It also makes for a charming response when girls ask why they are dressed up. "You can say, 'It's for you. We're appreciating you,'" Mosby said.

However, some people have responded negatively to Skirt Appreciation Day. For instance, they were once informed that "skirt" was a derogatory name for females many decades ago. In addition, some people feel they are promoting the idea of dressing revealingly.

"It's...really about female appreciation and not all about showing your legs. You can even wear a long skirt!"

John Chin
Fourth-year ID major

Naysayers are a little more open to the idea when Chin and Mosby reassure them that the point is not intended to be sexist.

"It's...really about female appreciation and not all about showing your legs," Chin said. "You can even wear a long skirt!"

Skirt Appreciation Day is also spreading to other campuses as well, thanks to the two's relentless publicity efforts.

For example, Mosby attended a bible class in Texas that brought in people from around the nation. He received shirt orders from Indiana, Virginia, Florida and Seattle.

In addition, both Chin and Mosby have siblings in high school, whom they recruited to spread the word. Their siblings have sold shirts to friends, and those that have graduated have carried them to UGA, Clemson and other schools.

Increasing participation at Tech, however, is still a long-term goal. Chin has two more years before graduation, and Mosby has one. The two hope to pass down leadership to "the next generation of Skirt Appreciators," Chin said.

They hope to turn Skirt Appreciation into a Tech tradition. After all, as Chin put it, "Everyone looks better dressed up."
Such controversial political and social issues are always hot. During the 2004 election season, the newsgroup erupted into a red vs. blue flame war.

The .flame newsgroup dates back several years to the era of Jim Greenlee, an instructor in the College of Computing reputed for offering some of the most difficult courses at Tech. In addition to homework, labs and other important class-specific newsgroups, Greenlee offered his students a .flame group as a venting forum.

“Flame wars happen on all kinds of newsgroups,” Hilley said. “I guess Greenlee created it to keep people from saying that stuff on the regular [class] newsgroups.”

The class-oriented flame sites were eventually shut down, but the concept had grown in popularity among the student body, particularly CS majors. To carry on the trend, Bryan Kennedy, then a computer science TA, requested the creation of git.talk.flame.

The group’s popularity has remained steady ever since. .flame’s fan base consists largely of Computer Science, Electrical Engineering and Computer Engineering majors, but others—including faculty and employees from departments such as OIT and GTRI—frequent the group as well. According to longtime users, even Greenlee himself was notorious for posting to the group.

Over time, freshmen and sophomores discover the group and replace the graduating seniors who leave.

“I don’t think many incoming freshmen learn about it directly,” Hilley said. “Usually it’s haphazardly or something...a reference on another newsgroup or something like that.” Users are expected to follow basic netiquette rules, regardless of the content of their posts. And any user who forgets and leaves himself logged into his terminal may find himself the victim of baggy pantsing.

“When someone leaves the terminal unlocked and walks away from it, you’re supposed to go up and make a creative post using their account, talking about how they’re wearing such baggy pants,” Hilley said.

However, some users insist that .flame used to have a quality that is dying. Some point to lulls in posting while others cite the frequent degeneration of the discussion threads into insult wars.

“The respectable people that post on it... have graduated or moved on,” Lyons said. “And the people that have been [replacing them]—I suppose I would be in that pool—are mostly just whiny little brats that just like to berate each other more than discuss like issues.”

Others disagree, arguing that .flame is just as lively as it used to be, and it’s a matter of perspective of the users. Ben Garrison, a first-year Computer Science graduate student, pointed out that many older users read the posts of inexperienced freshmen.

“They don’t realize [that] they were the stupid people four years ago,” Garrison said.

But most users agree that git.talk.flame is likely to persevere in some form or another, simply because it provides an entertaining outlet for the student body.

“I think that for a lot of people, especially CS majors, typing into a newsreader removes their inhibitions,” Garrison said. “Some people act like jerks on the newsgroup, and you meet them in person, and they’re really nice people.”
Better buildings: Van Leer electrical and computer engineering building

Basic repairs hinder student-oriented improvements

By Narendra Seshadri
Contributing Writer

Have you ever studied in the “fishbowl” or taken a circuits laboratory? Regardless of your major, you probably have had a class in the Van Leer building, home to the School of Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE).

The ECE building moved its home from the Savant building to its present site in 1961. At that point, there were around 500 ECE students and only 20 ECE faculty members. “The building also was home to the campus’s computer center,” noted Dr. Roger Webb, Chair of the School of ECE.

Dr. W. Marshall Leach, Jr., an ECE professor, has had the same office in Van Leer since he became ECE professor, has had the same office in Van Leer since he became ECE professor, has had the same office in Van Leer since he became ECE professor. Roger Webb, Chair of the School of Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE).

“Every body hates it,” Leach said. However, he noted that while he was doing his undergraduate work at the University of South Carolina, his dormitory had a similar facade.

But to most students, Van Leer’s aesthetic is overdue for an update. Gaurav Tuteja, a Computer Engineering senior, said, “[Van Leer] has not been modified from its original old design; it should be more stylish from the interior.”

Van Leer’s main lecture hall also serves as a classroom for many other majors as well, inviting comparison, especially to some of the newer buildings on campus. “Look to lounges in the awesome Management building for ideas,” said ECE graduate student, Gunvir Mamik.

Many students add that a little remodeling would go a long way, especially when it comes to the study lounge on the basement floor that students not-so-affectionately call the “fishbowl.”

“The carpet is ancient; almost all the tables are unstable; the couches look and feel like hand-me-downs,” Mamik said. “There is no clock in the lounge!”

David Loefler, an ECE graduate student, offered another suggestion for overall improvement. “I would like to see professors posting useful information outside their offices, on the walls in the hallway, because I still do not know what [kind of research] each professor is involved in,” he said. “This would help greatly in better understanding and knowing faculty...and making the walls a bit less barren!”

“Students practically live in Van Leer,” Penn Environmental Engineering graduate Nisha Javia said. “The building could also house a coffee place or eatery, similar to the one in the CoC.”

Another major complaint of many ECE majors who often spend countless hours in Van Leer for classes and labs is the need for a better computer lab. One of the largest major schools, ECE is spread out over three buildings, but there is currently only one open-use computer lab in Van Leer. Other ECE computer clusters are located in the College of Computing and Bunger Hall, but for many students who just want to print out notes before a class, going to another building may be too much of a hassle.

“If it weren’t for the acoustic tile and the asbestos work, it would be a snap to put this building back in good shape.”

Dr. W. Marshall Leach

ECE professor

ECE students is that the need for a computer lab, unlike the one on the second floor, with more up-to-date computers,” said Michelle Deal, an ECE graduate student.

Electronics labs were also a common complaint, despite the fact that many of the labs have received new electronic and computer equipment over the past few years. “The microelectronics lab is like the furnace of hell,” Mamik said.

“Van Leer needs” a real computer lab, unlike the one on the second floor, with more up-to-date computers,” said Michelle Deal, an ECE graduate student.

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difficulties associated with working underwater, and it’s apparent that the group has a challenging mission. The robots currently have thrusters, and depending on funding, the team wants to have several thrusters on the robot.

Most of the robot will be built from plastic due to weight and monetary considerations. The group is still recruiting and needs members to fill several kinds of roles. They want some non-engineering types to manage public relations, talk to companies about sponsorships and perform administrative tasks. Currently, a management student is handling these tasks.

They also need website designers, since the group website is an important part of the team. Currently, a management student is handling these tasks.

Garza joked, “We were thinking of adding a sting ray outer shell to make it intimidating to all the other robots.”

Lucas Garza
Third-year AE major

“We were thinking of adding a sting ray outer shell to make it intimidating to all the other robots.”

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“The air conditioning, the uncomfortable stools and the monitors one has to stare up at make the experience nearly unbearable, especially since students spend up to four to six hours in these labs at a stretch.”

On the other hand, some students say it’s important to keep in mind that Van Leer is in remarkably good shape for such an old building. James Holland, a fourth-year Computer Engineering major, said, “Van Leer may not look like much on the outside, but the classrooms are spacious and get the job done. While new buildings like those at Technology Square may be nice… LCD screens in front of each classroom are just a waste of money.”

Still others feel a certain nostalgia for the building, especially the architecture.

Another ’50s aspect of the building that remains is the south wall, which is dotted with blue, orange and white tiles. According to Leach, each untiled wall of the building used to be painted in one of the three colors to match the tile. Nowadays, the walls have been painted white, and Leach joked, “I liked the coloring myself… [my wall was blue],” Leach said.

“Van Leer could house a coffeeeplace or eatery, similar to the one in the CoC.”

Nisha Javia
Recent EE graduate

Ph.D. student.

“The main problem is the exposure to asbestos, especially when there are problems such as a roof leak, or breaking of floor tiles,” Mohammed said.

Some students expressed concern about other structural problems as well.

“Personally, I am not too worried about Van Leer’s facade,” Loeffler said. However, he was worried about the roof. “When there are rainy days, the fourth floor is lined with buckets placed under the leaks. This is not only unhygienic, but also detrimental to the structure of the building,” he said.

“[Van Leer] would be a snap to put this building back in good shape,” Leach said. “The asbestos has been a major, major problem.”

Holland, who also serves as the student chair of the ECE Student Faculty Committee, pointed out that there probably would not be any big changes for Van Leer any time soon. “The money along with the administration’s focus is placed on the new Klaus building and the newly inherited Bunger-Henry building,” he said. “[But] Van Leer is really not that bad.”