Building Tomorrow’s Innovators, One Robot at a Time

October 06, 2026

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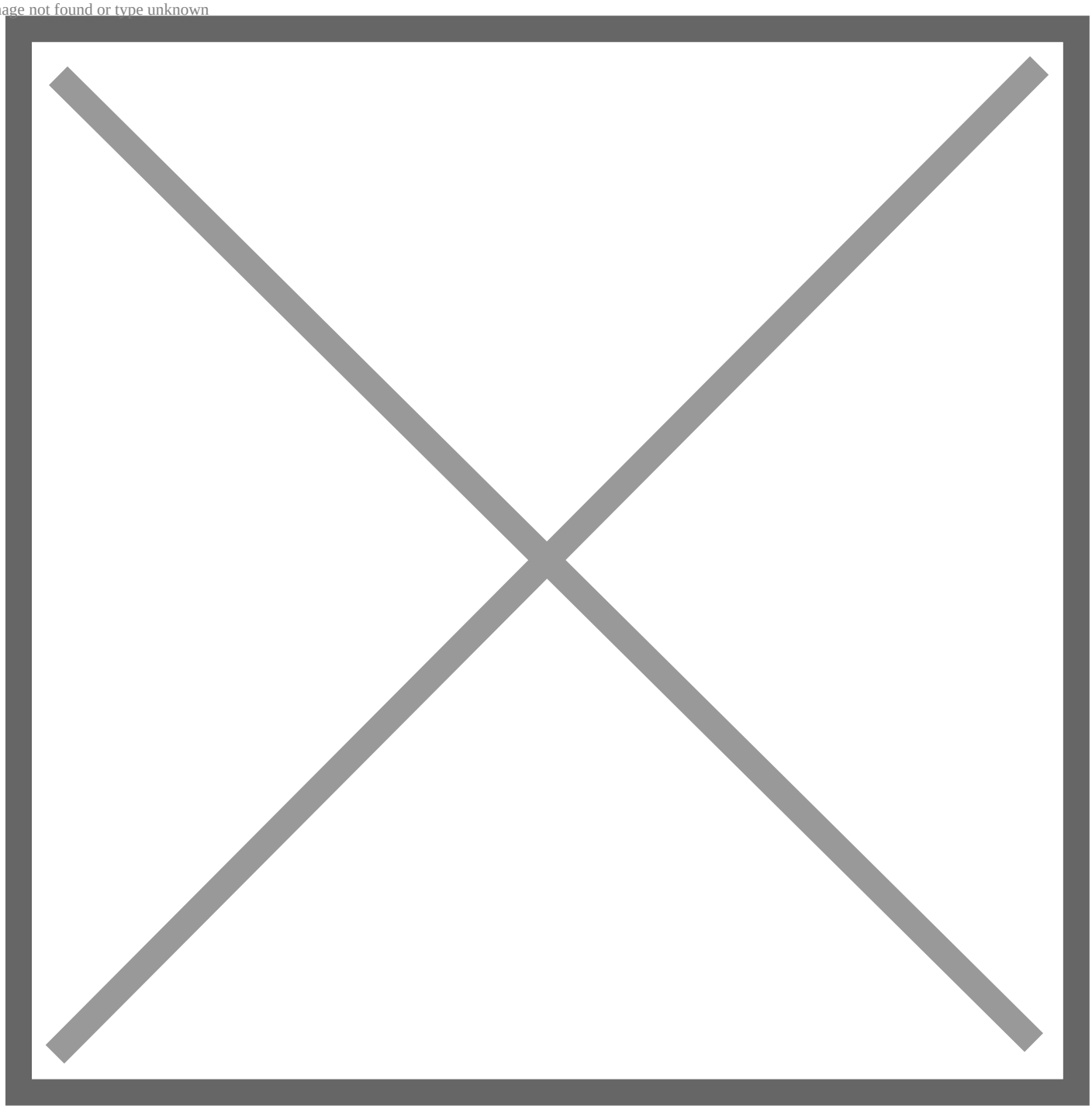
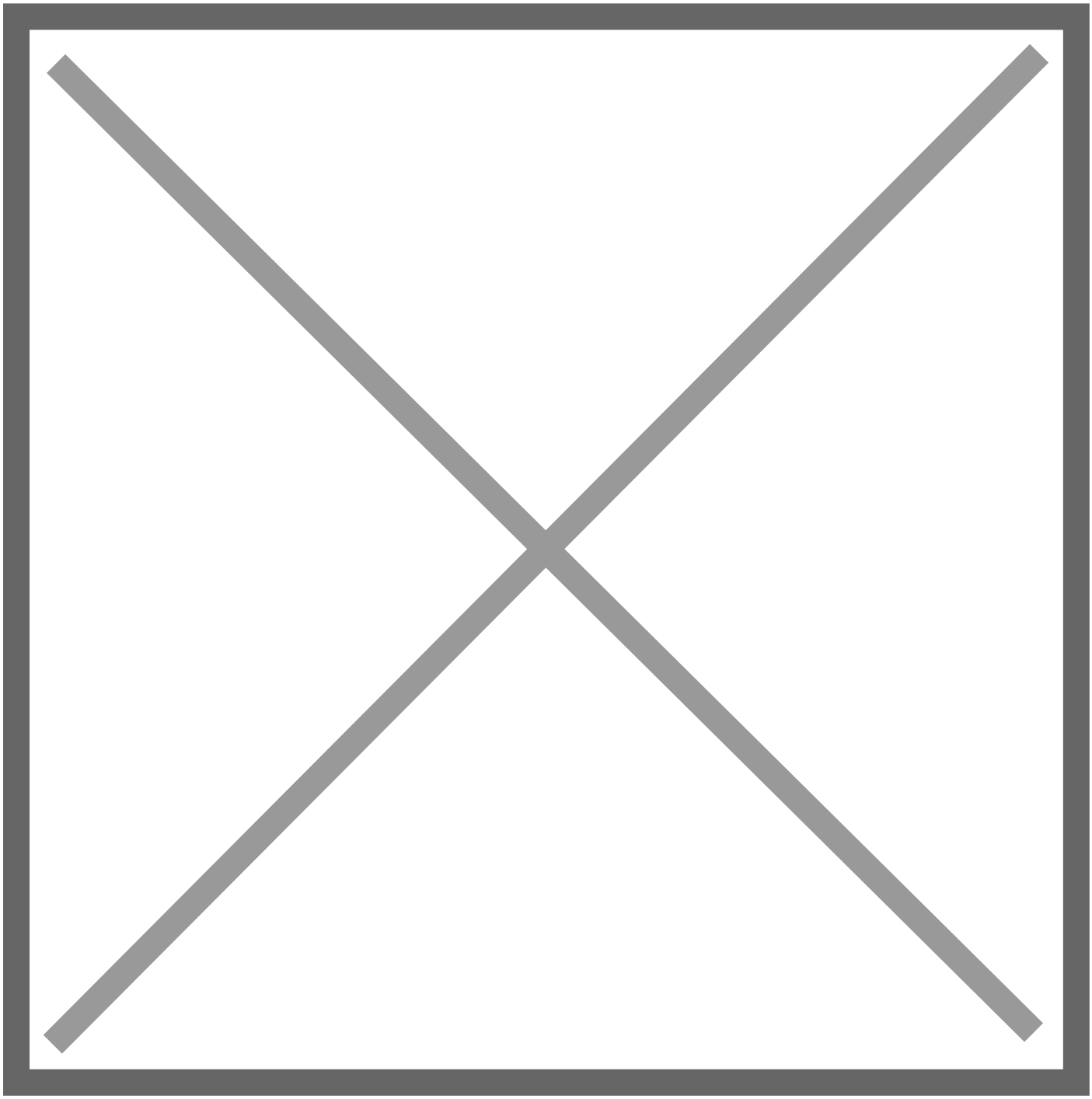


Toyota Kentucky puts the next generation at the heart of its community investments, helping students build the skills they need to succeed in tomorrow's careers.

FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology), a worldwide youth robotics organization, provides hands-on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) learning experiences that inspire innovation, build confidence and prepare students for future careers. Through programs including *FIRST* LEGO League®, *FIRST* Tech Challenge and *FIRST* Robotics Competition, students develop valuable skills in engineering, programming, problem solving, teamwork, and leadership.

Each year, *FIRST* introduces a new game with unique challenges and obstacles that require teams to rethink their robot designs, strategies, and robot capabilities from scratch.

On Saturday, Sept. 12, students from across Kentucky gathered at Toyota Kentucky for a special kickoff event hosted by Kentucky *FIRST* Robotics, where they got their first look at this year's competition game – CANOPY.



Students, coaches and mentors get their first glimpse of this year’s competition game and theme

Following a livestream reveal of the new game, students, coaches and mentors teamed up with Toyota employees to brainstorm ideas, discuss strategies and begin sketching out their robot designs for the upcoming season.

“We love any opportunity to support students in our community, especially when it involves sharing our technical expertise and knowledge,” said Brandon Barach, general manager at Toyota Kentucky and a KY *FIRST* Robotics board member. “Seeing the students’ excitement and creativity as they tackled this year’s challenge was inspiring.”

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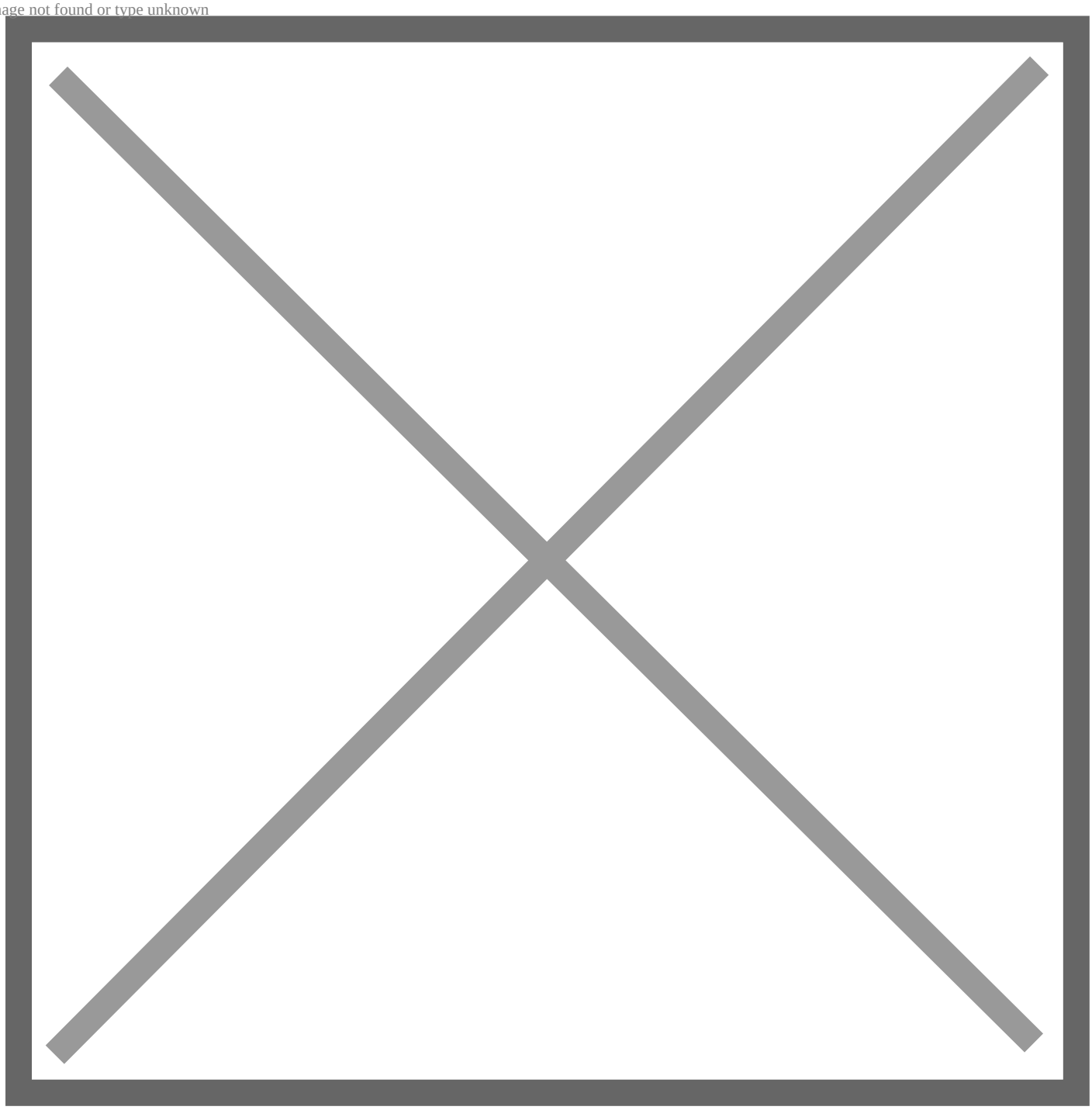
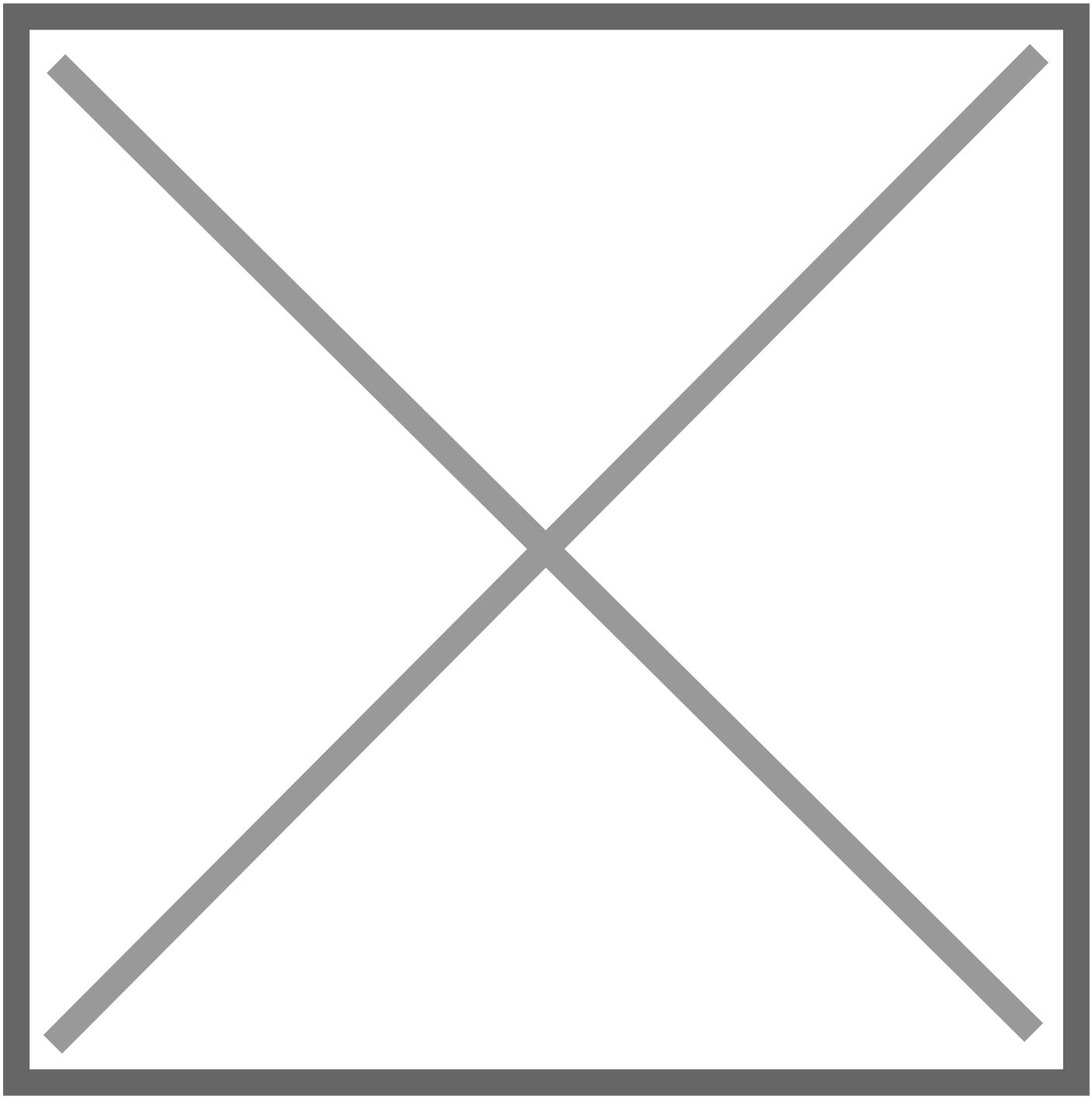


Teams inspect a replica competition field to better understand the game and how to design their robots

Throughout the school year, teams will put their robots to the test at local and regional events. Top teams will advance to national and international competitions where they will face robotics teams from around the world.

Toyota Kentucky's support extends beyond hosting events. Through grants for new and returning KY *FIRST* teams and unique mentoring opportunities, the company helps offset participation costs and expand access to STEM education opportunities across the Commonwealth.

"Having a great partner like Toyota helps KY *FIRST* Robotics elevate what we're able to offer students and teams throughout the state," said Kelli Gowan, executive director of KY *FIRST* Robotics. "Toyota is generous not only with financial support, but also by opening its facilities and connecting students with mentors who share their experience and expertise. They genuinely care about helping these students succeed."



Team #11275, the Defenders from Bryan Station High School in Lexington, received a Toyota Kentucky grant to help support their FIRST Robotics season

By sharing their expertise, Toyota Kentucky team members help students build workforce-ready skills and see themselves as future creators, builders and leaders.

As Toyota Kentucky celebrates its 40th anniversary, its philanthropic giving has eclipsed $166 million since 1986 – reflecting four decades of investment in Kentucky communities and young people.