Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence
445 Burgess Drive
Menlo Park, CA 94025
(650) 328-3123
www.aaai.org

For press inquiries only, contact:
Sara Hedberg
(425) 444-7272

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2008 Robot Workshop and Exhibition
July 14-16, 2008   Hyatt Regency McCormick Place, Chicago, Illinois
In conjunction with the AAAI-08 Conference

Menlo Park, CA – July 1, 2008. For the seventeenth consecutive year, the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AAAI) will sponsor a robot event as part of its annual conference. This year's Robot Workshop and Exhibition will focus on workshops to explore and define the research agenda, as well as an exhibition of robots that demonstrate **"Robots and Creativity"** and **"Mobility and Manipulation"**.

Distinguished researchers from 15 leading U.S. universities (e.g., Stanford, MIT, University of Illinois at Chicago, Carnegie Mellon), three companies (Microsoft Research, Boeing Phantom Works, Hanson Robotics), as well as Program Directors from DARPA and NSF will present current cutting-edge robotics research as well as their visions for the future of robots. A wide range of experimental robots pushing the envelope in various directions will be presented, such as:

- Humanoid robot that dances to music
- Haile, the first improvisational percussionist robot
- Music-making machine that takes 5 seconds of input melody from a human and generates a musical piece using rubber balls to play the custom instrument
- Children's creature-like robot used so far to study social development and for therapeutic practices
- Wumpus Hunter
- Upper-torso humanoid robot that is learning how to learn on its own
- Walking, talking social robot that talks about AI and robotics issues
- Robot that can open doors and elevators it has never seen before
- Experimental seeing-eye guide robot
- Autonomous robotic golf cart

The Robot Workshops will take place on Monday, July 14, 2008 and the Exhibitions will be presented Tuesday and Wednesday, July 15-16, 2008. All will take place at the Hyatt Regency McCormick Place, Chicago in conjunction with the AAAI-08 Conference.

AAAI robot event is historically a focal point for research

This a significant departure from previous years when the robot event has centered on mobile robots competing in various challenges that have pushed the envelope of research and development. The difficulty of the AAAI competition has evolved through the years from the early days of robots shaped like small trash cans simply trying to navigate from one office to another; to groups of miniature robots racing the clock to pick up tennis balls; to more advanced robots navigating the simulated rubble of a bombed building to search for and rescue victims; to robots actually registering for the conference, navigating to the room where they were scheduled to give a talk, presenting the talk and fielding questions from human attendees.

The AAAI Robot Competition has thus become a gestational medium for a number of the world's leading robotic researchers. For example, Sebastian Thrun, now professor of computer science and director of the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at Stanford University, first competed in the AAAI Mobile Robot Competition in 1992. Thrun competed again in 1994, this time on the first European team (University of Bonn), winning 2nd place for the "clean up the office" event. Two years later, with his own team from CMU, he shared 1st place for the "clean up the tennis court" event. After these seminal years, Thrun continued to advance the field of robotics. In the Fall of 2005, he led the Stanford University robotics team that won the $2 million DARPA Grand Challenge, a milestone in robotics and AI history (http://www.darpa.mil/grandchallenge05/). Two years later, his team won second place in the follow-on DARPA Urban Grand Challenge with a $1 million purse.

In addition to the annual Competition, the AAAI robot event has traditionally included a robot exhibition, a venue for some intriguing robots through the years – from an experimental wheelchair that could climb stairs, to an eerily human-like robot in the guise of Philip Dick, to cuddly educational robots for autistic children.

A change in the event this year

2008 marks a change in the AAAI robot event. For the first time, there will not be a competition. "The change reflects dialogs held with past (AAAI Robot Competition and Exhibition) chairs in late 2007 and early 2008," explains Paul Oh, Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Drexel University, and this year's volunteer chair of the **Robot Workshop and Exhibition**. "Roboticists from the AI community are at an interesting point in time where the role of competitions is not very clear. Traditionally, competitions served to showcase cutting-edge research," continues Oh. "However, there are many competitions (e.g. Robocup, Botball, etc). As such, it made sense to organize Workshops to help identify research roadmaps for the AI and Robotics communities.

"DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Project Agency www.darpa.mil) will sponsor a half-day Workshop on *Mobility and Manipulation*," Oh continues. "NSF (National Science Foundation www.nsf.org will sponsor another half-day workshop on *Creativity and Robotics*. Distinguished panelists and Program Directors will share their vision of future directions. Faculty will have opportunities to inject their thoughts too. The envisioned outcome is white papers that can be shared with agencies and with the (robotics) communities. The Exhibits serve to underscore points made at the Workshops." Technical Prizes and Blue Ribbons will be awarded during the Exhibitions.

The complete list of universities and companies represented includes:

> Boeing Phantom Works
> Canisius College
> Carnegie Mellon University
> Drexel University
> Georgia Institute of Technology
> Hanson Robotics
> Harvey Mudd College
> Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Media Lab)
> Microsoft Research
> Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
> Stanford University
> University of California at Berkeley
> University of Colorado
> University of Illinois at Chicago
> University of Massachusetts Amherst
> Western Washington University

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About AAAI
Founded in 1979, the Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (formerly the American Association for Artificial Intelligence) (www.aaai.org) is a nonprofit scientific membership society devoted to advancing the science and practice of AI. Its mission is to: (1) advance the scientific understanding of the mechanisms underlying intelligent thought and behavior, (2) facilitate their embodiment in machines, (3) serve as an information resource for research planners and the general public concerning trends in AI, and (4) offer training for the current and coming generations of AI researchers and practitioners. AAAI sponsors numerous conference, workshops, and symposia each year.