

MEET HITCHBOT – A HITCHHIKING ROBOT TRAVELING FROM COAST TO COAST THIS SUMMER

Collaborative research project to explore if robots can trust humans with Canadian hitchhiking adventure

TORONTO, ON. July 16, 2014: A trivia-loving, wellington-wearing, tweeting robot will be hitchhiking across Canada this summer, one ride at a time. hitchBOT will be leaving from Halifax, N.S. on July 27th and its ultimate destination is Victoria, B.C., more than 6,000 km away.

hitchBOT will officially start its journey with a visit to the Institute for Applied Creativity (1061 Marginal Road) at NSCAD University Port Campus on Thursday, July 24th, 2014. Visitors to the Institute will have the opportunity to challenge the robot to a game of Canadian trivia and to interact with it on Twitter @hitchbot. On Sunday, July 27th, hitchBOT's family will bid it farewell near the Veterans Memorial Highway heading westbound, where it will begin its cross-country hitchhiking adventure.

hitchBOT was first conceived in 2013 as a collaborative art project between Dr. David Harris Smith, Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies and Multimedia at McMaster University, and Dr. Frauke Zeller, Assistant Professor in the School of Professional Communication at Ryerson University. Since then, hitchBOT's family has grown to include Dr. Ebrahim Bagheri, Assistant Professor in Electrical and Computer Engineering at Ryerson University, and Dr. Frank Rudzicz, Assistant Professor in Computer Science at the University of Toronto. Along with their Research Assistants in communication, multimedia, and mechatronics, this team has brought hitchBOT to life to explore topics in human-robot-interaction and to test technologies in artificial intelligence and speech recognition and processing. Developed as a sociable robot, hitchBOT's creators are encouraging Canadians to pick up this friendly stranger, should they see it on the roadside this summer.

"Usually, we are concerned with whether we can trust robots. This project asks: can robots trust human beings?" says Frauke Zeller.

hitchBOT will be able to communicate with those who pick it up; drivers can ask hitchBOT about its creation and personal history, and ask about hitchBOT's family.

"hitchBOT will have to rely on people to get around, including being strapped into a car seat belt," says David Harris Smith. "We expect hitchBOT to be charming and trustworthy enough in its conversation to secure rides across Canada."

hitchBOT's final destination is the Open Space artist-run centre in Victoria, British Columbia. Relying solely on hitchhiking to reach its destination, hitchBOT's family does not know how long the cross-country trip will take. However, the robot is equipped with GPS and a 3G wireless connection, should it go astray.

Fans can follow hitchBOT's journey online at www.hitchBOT.me and on social media at www.hitchBOT. and Instagram @hitchBOT.

Members of the media are invited to visit hitchBOT at NSCAD between July 24th and 27th. For more information, please contact Johanna VanderMaas, (contact details below).

Twitter: @hitchbot
Instagram: @hitchbot

Facebook: www.facebook.com/hitchbot

For more information, visit hitchBOT's website at www.hitchbot.me

About hitchBOT

hitchBOT is an outgoing and charismatic robot that will be hitchhiking across Canada starting July 2014. Using artificial intelligence (AI) and user interface (UI) design, including speech recognition, speech processing, and social media and Wikipedia APIs, hitchBOT will charm its way through rides across Canada.

Ryerson University is Canada's leader in innovative, career-oriented education and a university clearly on the move. With a mission to serve societal need, and a long-standing commitment to engaging its community, Ryerson offers more than 100 undergraduate and graduate programs. Distinctly urban, culturally diverse and inclusive, the university is home to more than 38,000 students, including 2,300 master's and PhD students, nearly 2,700 faculty and staff, and more than 155,000 alumni worldwide. Research at Ryerson is on a trajectory of success and growth: externally funded research has doubled in the past four years. The G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education is Canada's leading provider of university-based adult education. For more information, visit www.ryerson.ca

McMaster University, one of four Canadian universities listed among the Top 100 universities in the world, is renowned for its innovation in both learning and discovery. It has a student population of 23,000, and more than 160,000 alumni in 140 countries.

NSCAD University: Founded in 1887, NSCAD University offers instruction in fine and media arts, craft, design, art history and critical studies. Degrees granted include Master of Design, Master of Fine Arts, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Design, and Bachelor of Fine Arts. NSCAD is the only university wholly dedicated to visual art and design east of Toronto.

MEDIA CONTACT:

Johanna VanderMaas Public Affairs, Ryerson University Office: 416-979-5000 x 4630 johanna.vandermaas@ryerson.ca @RyersonNews

If you require this in another format, please contact Ryerson University Public Affairs at 416-979-5000 x 7134.