

NEWS RELEASE

Contact:

Marti Colwell

CMG Delivers

marti@cmgdelivers.com

(760) 438-3399

BRIAN P. GERKEY JOINS WILLOW GARAGE AS RESEARCH SCIENTIST

Leads software development for Personal Robotics Program

MENLO PARK, CA – June 26, 2008 – Willow Garage Inc., a privately-held research lab focused on delivering open source autonomous robotic platforms, today announced the addition of Brian P. Gerkey as a Research Scientist. A long time proponent and developer of open source software, Gerkey will lead software development for the Willow Garage Personal Robot 2 (PR2), and guide the design of ROS (Robot Operating System), a collaborative project between Willow Garage and Stanford University.

Immersed in robotics since his undergraduate work at Tulane and graduate work at USC, Gerkey continued his research at Stanford and then SRI. As a young graduate student challenged by deficiencies in the closed source software used to control the lab's robots, Gerkey decided to build an open source alternative. Called the "Player Project" and now in its 8th year, Gerkey's software is the most widely used open software package for controlling mobile robots. The Player Project creates free software that enables research and education with robots and sensor systems. The Player robot server and its 2D and 3D simulation back ends, Stage and Gazebo, are actively used in major academic, government and industrial research labs around the world.

As a computer scientist at SRI's Artificial Intelligence Center, Gerkey then worked on multi-robot systems and in planning and control for outdoor robots, with his team placing first in the time trials of DARPA's Learning Applied to Ground Robotics Program.

As part of Willow Garage's Personal Robotics Program, Gerkey will focus on the Robot Operating System (ROS), a flexible and modular software system designed to facilitate code reuse throughout the robotics community. The intention behind ROS is to enable researchers to develop robotic applications more quickly -- and to leverage one another's work. Gerkey will be guiding the design of the system and leading the team that is building the application software. The Willow Garage team will work closely with Morgan Quigley of Stanford, who will lead development of ROS. Key applications (controlling sensors and actuators, motion planning, mapping and object recognition, for example) will become the building blocks that academic researchers can subsequently leverage. Gerkey and Quigley's goal is to provide the software stacks necessary to demonstrate the capabilities of the PR2 when it ships to those universities selected as part of the initial deployment of the robotic platform.

"At this time of exponential growth for Willow Garage, we are happy to be able to attract someone with Brian's experience in both open source and multi-robot systems to lead our software team," stated Steve Cousins, President and CEO of Willow Garage. "Brian's expertise in robotics software and design will be a huge plus in the ongoing development of the software needed for PR2," he observed.

"I am privileged to be working with some of the best minds in the industry and appreciate the opportunity to be involved in developing the software that will drive PR2," said Gerkey. "In the academic world, one's success is measured solely by what one publishes. I find Willow Garage's mission, to develop systems that will truly help people, to be very rewarding. I relish the prospect of getting our hardware and software out of the lab and into the world, where we can have serious impact," Gerkey concluded.

About Willow Garage

Willow Garage is a research and development lab focused on delivering autonomous technology. The company is committed to collaboratively building open source platforms that enable other researchers to more easily replicate and build on results. Willow Garage is providing the tools and infrastructure that will facilitate the growth of a robotics business ecosystem. As a privately funded company, Willow Garage research is not influenced by military contracts, allowing us to focus solely on helping people and the environment. For more information about our ground breaking Personal Robotics Program, please visit us at www.willowgarage.com

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