

2006 Woodie Flowers Award Nomination for Mr. H

It is often said that the Chairman's award is the most prestigious award in all of FIRST. In a way, the Woodie Flowers award deserves that same amount of attention in celebrating effective communication in the art and science of engineering and design. Why? Because for a student to be so inspired by a certain mentor as to go out of their way and nominate them for the Woodie Flowers award, that is truly something special. I know one such mentor, who is worth a nomination, an essay, and perhaps a whole lot more. Mr. Warren Hildebrandt is that mentor.

Mr. Hildebrandt has been a part of FIRST since 1999, starting at Rochester High School with team 201. In 2002, he transferred to Rochester Adams High School, where he is currently the CAD teacher. I first met 'H' (as team members refer to him) in the fall of 2003 at the start of the Oakland County Competitive Robotics Association (OCCRA) competition. OCCRA is a local competition, spawned from FIRST, but it features a unique twist: mentors cannot touch the robot. The robot must be all student designed and student built. For someone who is such an integral part of our team during the FIRST season, his ability to hold back and let us make mistakes still amazes me. This year is a perfect example, the front of the robot had roller to pick balls up into a tube. After a cutting error, our tube turned ninety degrees, making the rollers vertical instead of the standard horizontal. As a team, we wondered why we had never seen it done that way before, so we decided to try it. By the end of the season, we had learned the hard way why no other team had built them that way. As we found out later, H knew all along the difficulties that we would have with the vertical rollers, but he was able to hold back, let us make the mistake, and learn from it. In this case, he effectively helped us understand the engineering by letting us learn from our mistake. I believe that speaks volumes for his character, having the courage to follow the rules and let us fail.

During the FIRST season, his wealth of experience is a resource available for us to tap. During FIRST, he could show any path we were taking before we did. I saw a side of him in FIRST that I literally was not allowed to see in OCCRA. I saw the wealth of knowledge and experience that he had to offer to our team. Even so, I still saw parts of the familiar H; when we presented designs, he would offer his endless supply of pros and cons, but ultimately, the decision was ours. Having participated in FIRST for three years, it is clear now that all of our adult mentors have just as much fun if not more than we do. Thus, it takes a certain kind of character to teach and not do. "H, I've got all the holes I need, but I need to make this square plate round. Sure thing, just use the lathe. The what? Here, I'll show you." The average person would have taken that plate and machined it himself; instead, H was willing to teach how to use the lathe; and for me, that has made all the difference. H also brings a unique perspective to our robotics team. Before coming to Adams, he taught auto mechanics. Last year, our forklift would back drive, drifting down while we drove. While trying to solve the problem, H suggested the brake band from an automatic transmission, something someone without his experience would never have known existed. In all aspects of our team, H has something to contribute. He helps us learn by doing, which has a much more lasting effect.

Our sponsor, Siemens VDO, presented H with a check and recognized him at our school board meeting because they also recognize his contributions. As a club, he

is not paid much for his efforts, so it was nice to see him recognized for his countless hours of work with us and his effect on all of our team. I hope that anyone can see now that Mr. Hildebrandt is the kind of person worth writing an essay for, worth writing ten essays for. He is a driving force on our team, and we certainly would not be the same without him.