

2007 Woodie Flowers Award Nomination for Mr. H

When I discovered that I would have the opportunity to again write a submission for Mr. Warren Hildebrant (“H”, as we call him), I decided to go bigger and get input from the rest of the team.

As I asked team members about H, two things came up almost every time: “He has so much experience” and “He's always there”. I stopped and began to consider what these things really meant. As a student, you see *FIRST* in a four-year flash. As a freshman and sophomore, you are a junior member of the team and everything is flying by you. H takes the time to pause and explain to you what is happening. Matt Li, a sophomore on the team, told me, “You asked me for a '7/16th socket wrench. You might as well have asked me for a Wangdoodle. H tossed you the wrench and then gave me an explanation of all the different wrenches, names, uses everything.” As you become a more veteran member of the team, a junior or senior, the mentors take on a different role. Suddenly, it is your robotics team, you have all of the basics, you know what a robot looks like, and you have a room full of young eyes looking at you for answers. A mentor becomes a safety net, a seemingly endless font of information. To that end, I cite Emily Thomas, a build captain this year in charge of arm design and development. As a team, we participate in two competitions, a local competition, the Oakland County Competitive Robotics Association (OCCRA) in the fall, and *FIRST* in the spring. Throughout OCCRA, Emily started most days at H's desk, asking advice on how to build the best arm possible, what has worked in the past, what has failed, and why. Towards the end of OCCRA, however, something changed; she spent less and less time asking H for help, and more time making a successful and competitive arm. Our team was on the winning alliance in OCCRA. Emily was our arm captain for *FIRST* as well, and this time, she dove right in. She had an idea for what an arm could look like, sketched it out and became a valuable asset to the team. That's not to say she no longer had a need for mentoring, in fact, with a brief lesson on four-bars, our arm became one motor lighter and less complex, but she was no longer dependent on one. In that way, she learned not only about how to build a robot, but how to stand on her own two feet while she did it.

Where though, does all of this experience come from? This goes back to the other thing said about H, “He's always there”. Blitzing through four years of high school, it is very easy to lose sight of what that truly means. This is H's 10th year with *FIRST* and 8th year with OCCRA. That means that for ten years he's given up his after school time, his weekends, his free time, and spent it with our team. It is more than just six weeks of build he donates, OCCRA allows you to work between competitions, committing H daily from September through December. He's building our *FIRST* robot all of January and February. March and April, we are either in his room planning strategy, or out at a competition. May is his thirty-day respite from robotics, because come summer, he's back with the team working on development projects, including repair work on a local police robot, the Relay for Life Cancer Walk, and new development on our Universal-Joint steering being used on our robot this year.

In our short four years in high school, we fail to see what goes into attaining all that experience that we value so much. We fail to see how much H truly gives to this program each and every day, asking absolutely nothing in return. In a way, I suppose

that's his last lesson as a mentor. He shows us by example what it means to be a good mentor, in the hopes that someday we could be just as good a mentor to someone else as he is for us.