

2008 Woodie Flowers Nomination – Paul Slaby

A mentor who responds to “How are you?” with “Terrible, I'm here!” is probably not what you envision when you think of a Woodie Flowers nominee. In Paul Slaby's case, however, his actions speak louder than his words.

Nine years ago, Mr. Slaby and Mr. Gibson, a teacher at Rochester Adams High School, started the US FIRST team 245, the Adambots. Mr. Gibson has since left, and other mentors have come and gone, but Mr. Slaby has remained with us through the years. Every year, once January rolls around, he puts in long hours in the workshop, helping us build the best robot we can. His 40 mile drive doesn't keep him from coming in every weekend, Saturday and Sunday, from nine to five, and afterwards driving home and mentoring the local high school's FIRST team until ten o'clock at night. In the workshop, Paul's guidance is irreplaceable, and his unique personality is one of our major driving forces. I remember how intimidating the Bridgeport milling machine seemed the first time I saw it three years ago, but, even more vividly, I remember Paul's insistence that I learn how to use it myself with him by my side. Safety, too, is one of his main concerns, and his caution is proven by the fact that no one has ever been injured under his watch. Even more important is that it is impossible for one to spend more than a few minutes in Mr. Slaby's presence without feeling the effects of his contagiously good spirits. His frequent sarcastic remarks make sure that our building sessions are as entertaining as they are productive, and, outside of being a mentor, he is also a good friend to many team members, past and present.

The workshop, however, is not where Mr. Slaby's involvement stops. Since our beginnings, it was Mr. Slaby who provided us with a place to build the robot and most of the money to afford materials and the fees for the competitions. This year, however, our main sponsor was taken over by another company, and for months we were unsure about our future. During those months, Mr. Slaby restlessly fought for us and put together a presentation to convince the new company to sponsor our team and allow us to continue using their facilities. His efforts were not in vain, and now we have yet another thing we owe to Mr. Slaby's dedication to the Adambots.

When the FIRST season is over, Mr. Slaby continues to be an integral part of our team. Every summer, he hosts an end of year picnic at his own house, where all team members are invited to celebrate a year of hard work. During our vacation, we have the opportunity to go to the workshop for Tech Days, where we work on ambitious projects that we could not fit into our schedule during the year. Even in fall, when we participate in the county robotics league, OCCRA, Paul takes the time to attend our competitions as a team member. While he may not be our mentor for OCCRA, we often incorporate what he teaches us earlier in the year, during the FIRST season, into our design. Thanks to him, past team members have gotten internships with our sponsors and valuable letters of recommendation.

Paul Slaby is truly remarkable. Without him, not only would our team lose an indispensable source of information, but, in fact, it wouldn't even exist. More so than anyone else, Paul inspires us to strive for greatness, all the while showing us that one doesn't need to sacrifice light-heartedness for its sake.