

Paul Slaby

At first glance, Mr. Paul Slaby's humorous personality doesn't fit that of other winners of the Woodie Flowers Award. After being around Mr. Slaby, or Paul as we all call him, I have learned a lot more about his character and realized why he is such a great mentor. His ability to make parts, teach students, problem solve, stress safety, and have fun all at the same time has inspired me to write this essay on why his work should be acknowledged.

US FIRST Team 245, the Rochester Adams High School AdamBots, was founded eleven years ago and Paul joined as a mentor right at the start. Many teachers and other mentors have come and gone but Mr. Slaby has remained with us through the years.

Every year, during the FIRST season, Paul puts in long hours in the workshop, helping us build the best robot we can. His 80 mile round-trip drive from home doesn't stop him from coming every weekend, often from nine to five, and occasionally on week nights. I witnessed an example of Paul's dedication during the build season this year. Paul was getting ready to leave because we thought we were all done. However, since we hadn't assembled the bumpers yet, Paul stayed the extra two hours to help me staple together our six bumpers. This year, his persistence and leadership helped us finish our robot a week early, the earliest it's ever been completed.

Paul is also a strong advocate for safety. I experienced Paul's concern for safety first-hand in 2007, during my first trip into the workshop. Paul caught me without eye protection and joked, "Hey kid! Who do you think you are? Superman? Let me get you some glasses." Paul humorously made his point, and I've always remembered to wear my safety glasses.

The workshop, however, is not where Mr. Slaby's involvement stops. In May, Paul hosts our end-of-the-year picnic and helps cook lots of great food. Additionally, he coordinates our Tech Days, during summer vacation, where we work on ambitious projects that we don't have time for during the school year. Even in fall, when we

participate in the Oakland County Competitive Robotics Association league, Paul takes the time to attend our competitions to cheer on the team.

Since our beginning, Paul's employer, Siemens VDO, gave us funding and provided us with a place to build the robot. Unfortunately, Continental acquired Siemens and, due to company consolidation, stopped the funding for robotics, closed the machine shop and Paul lost his job. With no relatives on the team and such a long distance to drive it would have been easy to just leave the team. But that is not the way Paul Slaby acts or thinks. His passion for helping others and the realization that the team wants and needs him was all it took for him to sign up for another year.

As a mentor and friend, Paul's style is to be a great listener. He tries to understand various points of view before he acts, regardless of whether it is another adult or a student. He is also one who lets the students do the work so they can learn more about how to make and assemble components with his knowledgeable oversight.

It doesn't surprise us that Paul has recently taken a new job with FEMA, where he will again be helping other people with his skills.

He has contributed greatly to the fun and success of our team, and we feel strongly that his unselfish, humble, amusing, and dedicated character is something that should be recognized.