

2008 Woodie Flowers Nomination Ken Velzy



"London Bridge is falling down, falling down, falling down..." On a FIRST team, there are many "London Bridges" that fall down, and if there is one individual who could fix the proverbial 'London Bridges,' it would be Ken Velzy. An engineering mentor for the Heroes Of Tomorrow (Team 67), Ken goes above and beyond what other mentors may be willing to do to help our team be successful. The attributes that enable him to fix the broken 'London Bridges' are his positive attitude, his leadership skills in and out of the shop, his diligence to his responsibilities, his knowledge of safety and engineering, and his effective communication skills. Ken motivates both the students and his fellow mentors to work harder and to have a more positive attitude. Even when a problem arises, like a gushing eye wash station, Ken is able to diffuse tension with humor and patience. He is a constant source of advice and wisdom to those on and off the field and serves as a grounding force to everyone around him. Ken is unique in that he has a gruff demeanor – a real no-nonsense guy. But in working with him, one will quickly realize that he is really a large teddybear. Though we have all come to know Ken as a genuine individual, we were all surprised to see him crying last year at the banquet when we announced his Mentor-Of-The-Year status. Not only does Ken's personality make him a leader, but he is very dedicated to our team. One of his responsibilities as a mentor and as an employee is to supervise the machine shop. He makes sure that everyone is busy participating and that they are being safe and productive. Another one of his responsibilities is to be the coach for the drive team. The drive team never worries about Ken disappointing them or getting upset when they make mistakes. He always offers constructive criticism, even after a particularly devastating match. Last year, after a bad losing streak, Ken was able to up morale and keep the drive team focused on the task at hand.

Ken's knowledge of safety and engineering helps to accomplish his goals as a mentor. Ken strives to guide students, not take control of the operation. He is consistently able to communicate principles of engineering in an understandable fashion. Even though he might be able to build a part better than a sophomore, he instead shows the student what to do, so they learn how to make the part instead of just watching. This occurred earlier this year with our new wheel designs. He could have easily made them all himself quicker, but instead he took the time to teach students how to make them themselves. His experience also means that safety is his top priority. He volunteers every year to guide the students through a safety tour of our machine shop, and also enforces rules throughout the build season. Ken's knowledge in the engineering field has helped keep our team accident free since we became a FIRST team.

It is a tradition on the HOT Team to select a new Woodie Flowers candidate every build season. However, this year we decided that this tradition needed to be broken because Ken deserved another shot at the award that he has earned in so many ways. We are convinced that his personality, communication skills, knowledge in his field, and dedication to the team make Ken Velzy the mechanic for Team 67's broken 'London Bridges,' and the ideal nominee for the Woodie Flowers Award.