

Woodie Flowers Award 2009  
Joe Ricci

Joe Ricci is a FIRST success story. He joined the team in its second year, and he hasn't left since. As previous Woodie Flowers Award winner Tom Ferguson has said, "Joe has been the spark plug for this team from the very beginning." He fosters in us the same sense of empathy, responsibility, and dedication FIRST instilled in him, working with us throughout build season, in the pits, and on the field in every match. Even though he's gained so much during his time on Team 694 and FIRST, Joe's contributions to the team go above and beyond anything we could ever give him.

Despite his many other obligations, Joe never hesitates to sacrifice his time and energy for the team. Training to become a surgeon at the Weil Cornell School of Medicine, he spends his days conducting hospital research and serving as a volunteer EMT. But when the build season starts, he puts in as many hours as any of us do. Alumnus Andrew Mandelbaum ('08) says, "He's studying for medical school, in his ambulance saving lives, and after all that, he still comes here. Watching him balance that and robotics and do all the things he does has convinced me that I can do the same."

Joe is unique because he is more than a mentor; he is our teacher, teammate, and peer. He understands what it's like to start as a bewildered newbie like he once used to be. "I'm in a unique position. I know what it was like to be a student, to be coached, and now it's flipped," Joe says. This empathy has made Joe one of the most approachable people on the team; even freshmen feel comfortable coming to Joe with outlandish thoughts. He regales us with stories about old team members and his experiences, urging us to do equally great things. Joe even puts his dignity on the line for the team. He's worn a deflated Rack and Roll ring as a skirt, a wrestling mask, and even put on a dance using tape measures as castanets, helping us win the safety award in 2007.

Joe teaches us invaluable skills that he first gained when he himself was on the team. Working on an FRC team for nearly a decade has given Joe a wealth of knowledge about every system and tool available to us. Joe has taught us that sometimes the best solution involves precise measurements and forethought, and sometimes it's grabbing a hand drill or a Saws-all to get the robot working just in time for a match. Regardless of the situation, we can rely on Joe to be level-headed and armed with an answer.

Not only does he build robots, Joe also builds people. As Malcolm Handte, team parent, says, "Joe does our human engineering." He teaches the team the management secrets that are crucial to any "team building"—organizing groups, keeping deadlines, and optimizing time. As a trained EMT, he also watches over us and makes sure we stay safe. When senior Josef Broder burned himself after touching a heated shaft, Joe quickly stepped in. Thanks to his meticulous attention to safety, we've never had another major incident since.

Joe Ricci's fusion of engineering ability, deep involvement, affable personality makes him one of our team's most valuable assets. A 694 team member for eight years, he's willing to share the same traits which have earned his team members' respect. Through mentoring, Joe brings back the same experiences that turned him into a Stuyvesant Robotics' FIRST success story— which makes him deserving of this year's Woodie Flowers Award.