

Woodie Flowers Award 2008

Ron Kunicki

“Dedicated,” “resourceful,” “precise,” “compassionate,” “funny,” - who is this jolly ole mentor who never fails to show up to save the day? None other than engineer and “father of the team,” Ron Kunicki. Not only has his easygoing nature captured our hearts and minds, his dedication to FIRST has given him an essential role on our team. When asked why he was so committed, he replied, “With team 694, my mind continues to be entertained, and sometimes I even have to go home and research the problems the team asks me.” Whatever the reason, Ron's leadership and dedication have become a vital part of the team.

Ron brought more than his expertise as an architect to our team; he also brought knowledge that can only be acquired from years of experience. In our lab, Ron is considered the authority on everything related to machining, but his innate understanding of how machines function is what surprises us most. At a time when our team depended on the creation of a solid design for our 2006 robot's tower, Ron helped fabricate a spiral mechanism that pushed us to the finals in the 2006 New York Regional. Ron not only utilized his skills to benefit the entire team, but also worked to create a new generation of machinists by teaching anyone needing a helping hand.

“I have a fun job, I help people,” Ron said of his involvement in our team. “Teachers like Mr. Colón [our faculty advisor], do not necessarily have the time to work on everything, so I come in.” Almost everyone on the team has a story to tell about how Ron helped them, and when he's in the lab, he's usually seen patiently teaching new members. Said one freshman, “He focuses on us individually and treats us like people, not projects.” He also shows the most skilled members of our team how to make the leap between abstract concepts and concrete designs.

Ron is one of the most devoted members of our team. Despite working a full time job, he never fails to find time to help us. Since his daughter Theo joined the team four years ago, Ron has become a recognizable part of the team. Ron is the only mentor who we can count on to always be at lab meetings, fund-raising events, outreach events, competitions, etc. He even opens his own home to us as a meeting place for brainstorming sessions after kick-off every year. His station wagon becomes a shuttle for food, candy, and building materials during build season as well as parts, tools, and people during competitions. When our team was short on conduit piping needed to build arm prototypes, it was Ron who brought in piping so we could continue to test our designs. Ron's dedication and commitment to the team has inspired the team in ways that no other mentor ever had.

Ron Kunicki has guided the future of our team, provided us with enormous support, and sacrificed his free time, energy, money, and his house to support our team. His wife, Catherine Kunicki, complements him well, serving as a devoted volunteer to NYC/NJ FIRST and a dedicated team parent, even winning the Volunteer of the Year award at New York in 2007. Our team is deeply indebted to the Kunicki's and we are greatly honored that both of them will continue to support us and FIRST even after their daughter Theo Kunicki graduates from Stuyvesant. We hope that you, the judges, recognize the amazing work Ron Kunicki has done by awarding him this year's Woodie Flowers Award.