

Woodie Flowers Submission 2013

FIRST in NorCal wouldn't exist without Mark Edelman. As an invaluable FIRST advocate, Mark co-founded the non-profit Playing@Learning, (now the FLL and FTC affiliate for NorCal) promoting gracious professionalism and coopertition all over NorCal. In the last season alone, Mark helped found 63 FIRST teams through Playing@Learning (P@L). This season, Mark dreamed even bigger. P@L established PlaySpace, a 13,000 ft² haven for NorCal students who use FRC, FTC, and FLL fields and host workshops to raise funds. Located in Fremont, PlaySpace provides FIRST lovers a platform to excel and to spread the FIRST message. Moreover, PlaySpace is the second building in the world (following FIRST HQ) solely dedicated to FIRST.

Not only is Mark devoted to FIRST through P@L, but he's also a dedicated volunteer at FIRST events. He is a member of FTC's game design committee, and the head referee for FRC SVR, FRC Sacramento Regional, and Franklin Field for FTC at World's. He hosts FTC and FLL competitions, planning events for countless hours. For these efforts, Mark won the FTC 2012 Volunteer of the Year.

Mark still finds time to aid students interested in FIRST. He has run summer classes at Ohlone College for K-8 students, teaching fundamentals of robotics with LEGO machine kits. Many of these kids, such as Former Build Lead Apoorva, "graduate" into FIRST programs. Now a senior, she says, "When I joined the team, I realized how prominent Mark is in NorCal robotics. He's the epitome of service for society. He seems to know all the answers but accepts that he has a lot to learn."

As head mentor for FRC Team 2489, Mark shares nonprofit status with us when we apply for grants and fundraisers, helping immensely with funding. He encourages us to take initiative, allowing us to develop while providing support. Mr. E's extensive knowledge aids with electronics and power tools as well.

"When I started CAD, I had trouble designing a shooter. Mr. E showed me how to use a truss plate to make pieces of aluminum attach at angles. This is now a major part of my designs," said Design Lead Rohit.

Although Mark maintains professionalism, our students and parents see him as a friend. His knowledge ranges from robotics to life advice, and he has profoundly changed members' perspectives on problem solving, teamwork, and communication. He inspired us to expand to all of Fremont instead of just one high school, and always reminds us, "To be inclusive, you must first stop being exclusive." Without Mr. E, we would only reach 2,000 students instead of over 10,000. Mark convinced the team to create an Outreach Division and challenged us to a volunteer hour competition. "I look up to him; I learn all the time, and I've become a better, kinder person," said Former Outreach Lead Leah.

Mark's reach has grown and continues to expand as his non-profit Playing@Learning founds FIRST teams in NorCal. Mark inspires the community with his enthusiasm and dedication, fostering a generation of leaders.

