

Most FIRST teams would probably agree that there is an art to building robots. The members of Team 418, LASA Robotics, know that there is an even greater art to coaching a robotics team. It takes a very special person to dedicate most of their free time to teaching a group of nearly 50 teenagers how to work together to build confidence and self esteem while learning that effective communication is the only way to succeed. Our team coach, Tony “Bert” Bertucci, is that very special person. Bert, a high school teacher, founded our team in 1995 with the goal of motivating students to become more interested in science and technology. Bert is a unique mentor who has experience in everything from graphic design to furniture making, and as an artisan Bert helps us to see processes through the eyes of an artist. Through his leadership, and the FIRST Robotics competition, we are able to experience science and engineering in a way that binds our team together. As Bert shows us how to be artists as well as engineers, we grow both creatively and intellectually.

Bert is a true mentor at heart, as is apparent by his willingness to work with anyone willing to put the same devotion in their work as he does. As our team has exploded in size over the past several years, he has helped develop leaders on the team to manage its operations. Through open communication and process development lead by Bert, our team is able to successfully engage all team members while maintaining the quality and schedules required for *FIRST* Robotics, a feat originally thought impossible. Leaders on our team have become great leaders throughout their education and into their careers, and are a great testament to his impact and ability.

Some of the most valuable lessons we learn from Bert can't be found in any textbook. We learn what dedication truly means as Bert, despite being retired, still

teaches classes to ensure that our school doesn't shut down our shop and work area, as many schools in our district are doing to save money and reclaim space. We learn what it truly means to balance personal interests with helping our community. We learn how much teaching others can teach you, and this is why our team members are constantly learning from one another and work together so well. Finally, we learn to never be afraid to try because we might fail; "Bert encourages personal growth before immediate success, and he helps others realize that failure is just another opportunity for success," says lead technical mentor Danny Diaz. "Students who have had the privilege of working with Bert have referenced him as the influence that motivated them towards their engineering careers and achievements."

If at the end of the season our members have grown intellectually and discovered a love of science, then both Bert and our team feel that we have won. Although we are a robotics team, robotics is simply the instrument through which Bert inspires a life-long love of science in his students. "Bert's commitment to spreading the importance of science and technology in today's world reaches beyond LASA Robotics and into his classes, community work, and interactions with everyone he meets," says senior FIRST mentor Jane Young. "He is always available, and he does all of this with a great sense of humor and a passion that has helped develop robotics curriculums and the FRC program throughout Central Texas. He has impacted countless students and educators in both their professional and personal lives. He is a good person to know."