



Jeff Vollmar

## Chamber Awards 'Pitch-in Guy' Jeff Vollmar

The Sterling Heights Regional Chamber of Commerce is honoring Jeff Vollmar as its Ambassador of the Year for 2012.

Linda Colton, the chamber's ambassador coordinator, said Vollmar will be honored at the Chamber's Annual Membership and Business Award Breakfast on Feb. 21.

The Ambassador program sends out volunteers to meet with chamber members and potential members. Vollmar described it as a volunteer program that focuses on businesses the Chamber serves.

They go to ribbon-cuttings and welcome new members and work on business retention for the chamber.

Vollmar, who owns and operates A-1 Handyman out of Shelby Township, has been a chamber member since 2005 and a participant in its Ambassador program since 2007.

"I will go out and visit three to five businesses a month," Vollmar said. "I see if we at the chamber can be of any assistance to them. We do everything networking with different groups through the chamber. We are just real active in the business community."

Colton called Vollmar a great guy. "Jeff is a 'pitch-in' guy," Colton said. "He volunteers his time and he's the first one to say, 'I'll be there when you need me. I'll give two hours of my time to the chamber during the day and call it a long lunch.'"

Vollmar said that being an ambassador for the chamber has paid off for his business, demonstrating the value of belonging to the chamber.

"All the volunteer time I put in for the chamber pays off," Vollmar said. "I get it back in terms of business for my business. But most importantly, it's the ambassadors who get the chamber out before the community, out to the businesses."

Vollmar has been on the chamber's board of directors for two years and was recently elected chairman of the board for 2014.

"I know it's only 2013, but we have to look ahead," Vollmar said. "When I heard that I was named as Ambassador of the Year for 2012, I was honored and I continue to look forward to being a part of the chamber and what it does."

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# Chrysler Grant Helps WCS Students Ready FIRST ROBOTICS

by Irena Granaas

Under the watchful eye and encouragement of two teachers and a couple of volunteer adult mentors, about 45 area high school students have been hard at work at Warren Consolidated Schools' Career Prep Center to start on their entry for the 2013 FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Robotics competition.

Following the state and regional level contests, surviving teams and their robots will head to the national championship match April 24-27, held in St. Louis, Mo.

The WCS district is one of 19 area schools and/or school districts to receive a \$6,400 grant toward the robotics contest from the Chrysler Foundation. The grants are intended to help schools offset the costs of participating in the competition, such as parts, materials, registration fees and team apparel.

Dr. Catherine Neuhoof, administrator of the FIRST Robotics programs for WCS, said right now the team is in the build phase of the project. The Warren Consolidated district includes Sterling Heights, Cousino and Warren Mott high schools. Neuhoof noted many of the students on the team are also part of the Macomb Mathematics Science Technical Center, which is a program Neuhoof oversees.

"We started in September and the kids work twice a week. They went through a sequence of lessons that taught them to design, problem solve and then build a robot or moving object that can perform specific tasks," she explained. "We taught it to roll over using hydraulics, which are really hypodermic needles. We taught it to shoot things using rubber bands and tongue depressors."

Nationally, students received their game package on Jan. 5, which includes a game book, rules, and a description of what they have to have their robot do in order to score points.

"In a nutshell, the robot has to somehow get up a tower, which looks like a pyramid built out of poles, and get discs – which are frisbees – into a basket. It can also shoot, or sling frisbees into goals that are set up on a playing field," she said.

The team must complete the build of their robot by a cutoff date in mid-February, at which point the robot must be bagged and the team can no longer work on it, Neuhoof noted.

She explained students are divided into teams:

- a power team, which does the base;
- a manipulation team, which does the driving;
- a programming team to write the program for the robot to move autonomously; and
- an electronics team, which wires the robot.

Harry Van Uden, toolmaker who serves as the WCM (World Class Manufacturing) specialist at Chrysler LLC's Mack Engine

plant in Detroit, is a volunteer adult mentor working with the WCS students to help them prepare their robot at WCS' Career Prep Center at Maple Lane and 15 Mile. He said the WCS team includes students from Lakeshore, Centerline, East Detroit and Saint Clair Shores.

"We accept anyone who wants to be on our team, let's put it that way," he said, adding that, at about 45 students it's WCS' largest team so far. Van Uden's daughter, Kelsey, a senior at Cousino, is the 2013 team captain.

Van Uden said the team is presently into the prototyping and build phase of the competition. At press time, the team had completed their tower, and were training the robot to climb the tower and also figuring out how to get the robot to throw a frisbee. He noted that General Motors Co. also sponsors the team, paying the entry fees at the various levels of competition which range from \$5,000 up to as much as \$10,000 for the state contest. Chrysler picks up the tab to send teams that win their state competition to the national championship event.

The Chrysler grant helps buy supplies, T-shirts, team trinkets and parts needed to build the robot, which is always constructed from scratch for each year's competition, Van Uden explained. The team also receives a sponsorship from Ray Latham Chrysler Dodge in Detroit for \$250.

Asked why he donates his time and effort to work with these students for FIRST Robotics, Van Uden explained, "I think it's important for these kids to learn about engineering and machining, and how to team-build. I never had anything like that when I was in high school."

Mastering these kinds of valuable skills can pay off big time for these students. Van Uden said one of the team members last year actually got a job in a machine shop thanks to what he'd learned working with Van Uden, who had mentored another high school in the past but is now into his third year as a FIRST Robotics mentor for Warren Consolidated Schools.

"I think it's important to pay it forward and return the favor so that these kids can have a career choice," he commented, adding that there are a lot of opportunities for participating students to get scholarships sponsored by some of the companies that supply parts for the robots.



Kelsey Van Uden running the lathe.



Sean Prasky running a bridgeport.

Van Uden went on to comment on why the FIRST Robotics program is so beneficial.

"It's important because we don't have enough engineers in our country, and I think by having something like this, it really intrigues the minds of these young kids," he said.

Van Uden noted there are quite a few who would never have a chance to letter in a sport.

"We talked our superintendent into making this a letter-able sport so these kids can get jack-

ets and all that stuff . . . This is a sport of the mind," he said. "My daughter is on a tennis team and does track, but this is her most important letter – she's most proud of this one."

Participation in FIRST Robotics is also a great way for college-bound students to get noticed. Van Uden noted last year, three of his FIRST students went on to the University of Michigan, several to Michigan State, one to Oakland University and another to Kettering.

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