Chairman's Award 2011

The FIRST program pollinates every aspect of the Killer Bees' lives, and spreading the FIRST message is our main goal. We develop relationships in all aspects of our program, emphasizing that "It's great to be a 33 Killer Bee."

This past summer we faced the biggest obstacle in team history when we lost major funding from a key sponsor. Instead of paralyzing us, losing half of our budget caused our team to bond. We scrutinized our business plan and reevaluated the way we acquire money for our team. Our parents and school administrators graciously helped us contact companies for potential sponsorship. We created a student marketing committee, who wrote a sales-pitch and set up demonstrations for CEOs of companies, personalizing our sponsorship process. We surpassed our budget expectations by over $5,000, giving our team sustainability and allowing us to set up an endowment fund. Overall, this experience helped us acquire new skills and become even more resourceful.

The Killer Bees strive to develop strong relationships, allowing more opportunities to bring new contacts into the FIRST experience. This year we brought in Laurie Johnson, the Economic Development Coordinator of Auburn Hills, to discuss our team and how we are creating the next generation of engineers. She was extremely impressed by the business, engineering, and marketing skills that our team members acquire. This relationship is a great way to publicize the entire FIRST program and create new business contacts to give more students the opportunity to participate in FIRST.

Our relationships with our sponsors continue to blossom. This year we hosted a Kickoff event at the Chrysler Museum where we invited our sponsors to watch the game reveal with us and participate in an initial strategy session. We followed up 6 weeks later with a Bag Day party, showcasing Buzz XVI, our 2011 robot. We also invited our parents and faculty from our school to the party. In addition, we try to keep our sponsors as updated as possible: informing them of events we are involved in within the local community and our progress throughout the season. Our sponsors are not just monetary donors. We have a very close relationship with our founding sponsor, Chrysler, who provides us with shop space at the Chrysler Tech Center, a computer room and access to conference rooms, a water jet machine, and welding equipment. We are very fortunate to have 5 Chrysler employees as mentors. Our sponsor relationships give us financial assurance, our work facilities are reliable, and our mentors are intelligent, dedicated, and passionate.

Our team is run like a business with students and mentors forming peer relationships. To join the team students must fill out an application and be interviewed by mentors, giving them valuable experience for future college and job applications. Once on the team, students work side-by-side with mentors and learn to approach problems with open-minded excitement while gaining team building and leadership skills. Once students graduate, they have many contacts in the business world due to the multitude of companies who support the FIRST program and our team. Former students, many now mentors of FIRST teams, found jobs they love because of their experiences in FIRST. In addition, they help our team prosper by introducing sponsors to us. This year we doubled our mentor-team by acquiring new mentors who heard about the buzz of the Killer Bees and the impact we are making through FIRST.

Another key to our success as a team is our dedicated parent committee. Parents provide us with support at competitions, supply us with team meals, assist in organizing community outreach events, send e-mail updates, and help build our practice field. Parents are actively involved throughout build season and are our number one fans at competitions.

Our visibility and reputation of success contribute to our growing popularity at our school, Notre Dame Preparatory, and feed us a constant supply of new students. We have a trophy case and bulletin board located in the main hallway of school, keeping the student body up to date on upcoming events. We demonstrate robots at school pep rallies, science and math classes and lunch to inspire new students. Our school considers us a varsity sport, so outstanding contribution to the team earn us varsity letters and jackets. With our increasing buzz in school, students and teachers come cheer us on at our local competitions via fan bus. This past year, during our financial crisis, our school was unbelievably supportive, contacting alumni and current financial-backers of the school to help find potential sponsors. We are extremely grateful for our awesome school community.

Team 33 constantly looks for ways to reach out to our local community. Our main project is raising money for and participating in the Walk for Hunger. We collect food and money in our classes to get our school involved, and we invite other FIRST teams to join us. Partnering with a local KinderCare, we collect food to donate four times a year to local food pantries. We also collect blankets and pet food for animals at the Humane Society. We participated in North Hills church's Work-Bee, doing landscaping and refurbishing playground equipment. At Christmastime we volunteer at K-mart, wrapping presents for disabled children. This year our team raised money for the Children's Leukemia Foundation of Michigan.

Wearing our team shirts, we volunteered at the Foundation's main fundraising event, a 12-hour movie marathon. We plan on making this a yearly team project.

The Killer Bees are always trying to come up with creative ways to spread the FIRST message. We give robot demonstrations to students of all age-groups, from KinderCare childcare centers to colleges such as Oakland University. At KinderCare we bring tools and robot parts and teach the preschool children about basic tool safety during their Tools and Machine themed weeks. We love sitting down and playing "robot" with them, and they love meeting Buzz, our mascot, coloring pictures of our robots and wearing antennae. We hold similar demonstrations at elementary, middle and high schools and libraries throughout the Detroit metro area. This year at Oakland University, we collaborated with FRC teams 201 and 245 to demonstrate past year's robots, teaching Boy Scouts ways that they can earn the new BSA Robotics Merit Badge. We provided current pictures of our 2011 robot for use in the Robotics Merit Badge pamphlet and created a special team 33/BSA button to hand-out at competitions to promote this new merit badge.

Other Innovative ways we spread the FIRST message include gas station advertisements that appear on the little televisions by gas pumps and show a short description of what FIRST is and when local events are held. At our local Apple store, Killer Bees tested iAM driver, from AndyMark and Robolytics, an app that allows robots to be driven via iPhone. While at the store we talked to employees and mall customers about FIRST. This year the Killer Bees organized collaboration between three other local FRC teams (1, 201 and 245) to create a candy-themed float for the Rochester Christmas Parade. Some students carried FIRST and team banners while other mentors and students interacted with the crowd conveying the message of FIRST; we won the award for Best College/High School Float.

Team 33 mentors many other teams, immersing ourselves in the world of FIRST Lego League, embracing 10 FLL and Jr. FLL teams. During the summer, we run an FLL camp where students learn the basics of FLL and tackle thought-provoking challenges. Every year we adopt a rookie FRC team (last year 3333 and this year 3772 and 3450). We also assist veteran teams like 494/70 who came to our shop to use our lathe; 1528 with software issues; 3176, 1675 and 469 with Chairman's submissions and mentoring strategy sessions at the Michigan Engineering Zone, where 9 FRC teams share a shop in Detroit. Often we collaborate with Teams 1, 51, 201, 245, and others to do community outreach projects.

Communication is vital to the Killer Bees success. Our website has a calendar of events, resources for other teams to utilize and copies of release papers and permission slips. Our Facebook page has over 500 fans and is updated with pictures, daily happenings and upcoming events. Our Twitter is updated during travel, keeping followers informed of our whereabouts and competition results. Wrap-up sessions end every meeting and keep the entire team informed of progress made. Prior to build season, we meet once a week to acquaint new team members with power tools, safety protocol, and team etiquette. Every Tuesday our mentors meet to discuss team issues and finalize design plans. Our most invaluable communication tool is our Google.docs page called BeeHive, where we share documents like team rosters, e-mail lists, sponsorship packets and team budget.

Imagery is one of the most important aspects of the Killer Bees, resulting in us winning the Imagery Award twice at the World Championship level. We make thousands of our signature antennae, sported by judges, referees, mentors, and other students at competitions. We even have an inner-team game to see who can distribute the most antennae. After events we wear our team shirts and medals to school and talk about FIRST in all of our classes. Image expands past appearance: it includes spirit. We are proud of our team, and the entire student body knows what we do. The Killer Bee's love of FIRST and desire to get students involved is directly connected to our distinctive and fun image.

With the help of our sponsors, parents, and mentors, the Killer Bees inspire people to further expand ideas in science and technology. We are an established team with a successful business plan that ensures our sustainability for endless years to come. Sponsor rallying and community service keep our team going, and at the end of the day we know, "Teamwork Keeps the Hive Alive."