

A teacher for over fifteen years, a coach to Team 871 for three, and an avid learner forever, this mentor truly embodies the ideals of FIRST Inspires at heart.

After developing a passion for STEAM in college, this mentor was given a special travel opportunity based on his merits. For two years, he taught fourth and fifth grade math and science in Guatemala. He went on to teach sixth through eighth grade, having such a large impact on them that they were inspired to learn more. Our mentor started a program called “Inventor’s Workshop” to create a place where students could learn through creation, converting an unused room into a robotics shop. Students brainstormed ways to help their community, with one idea being to reuse scrap metal and other discarded items to create art. This mentor additionally taught the ideas of STEAM at the International School of Lumpur in Malaysia, implementing his idea of the Inventors Workshop there as well.

In his free time, he taught himself how to code using outside research and software books in the hopes of one day being able to teach coding to his future students. He loves to discuss the intricacies of STEAM and is devoted to sharing his knowledge in innovative ways. Our mentor has been posting educational resources on various platforms for over eleven years to engage with not only his students, but also with others online who are interested in learning about physics and STEAM related topics.

After returning to his roots in Long Island, our mentor became a physics teacher, believing that the creative aspects of learning are often overlooked in education. He proposed the idea of an engineering course for the school; designing a closet-sized workspace to test run the class for a year. The course became highly popular among students, so this mentor along with architects and the school board created classrooms which became known as the Innovation Center.

Finally, this mentor moved onto his current teaching position here at West Islip High School, where he teaches various levels of Physics and STEM Academy classes. After learning about Team 871, he came down to a meeting and was hooked. Once becoming our coach, he was excited to pass along his knowledge, new ideas, and inspiration based on his experiences to create a more passionate and involved team. Breaking down tough concepts and slowly introducing the bigger picture is one of this mentor’s greatest gifts which he has demonstrated by designing and creating 3D printing prototypes. This year, he even taught the students how to manufacture rope to use on the robot.

His passion and love of learning has brought out the best in all of us on the team. For all that he offers, whether it be explaining innovative robotic concepts to newer students or encouraging us to reach new depths, Team 871 proudly nominates Mr. Dan Varney for the prestigious Woodie Flowers Award.