

FIRST Robotics is not just about building a robot or doing community service; FIRST offers participants so much more. FIRST is about creating connections; from alliances with other teams to partnerships within the community to life-long friendships, FIRST is the catalyst. Members of FIRST Team 2996, Cougars Gone Wired (CGW), have gained these things and much more through their involvement in the program.

Just 5 years ago as a rookie team, CGW floundered to make their simple vision of a robot come to life. Graciously, Team 662 stepped up to offer assistance to us throughout our novice endeavor. Due to guidance from other teams, CGW was able to make it to regionals with a working bot. Although we received support from other teams, like 399, CGW struggled throughout the competition. To our amazement, when the alliance selection began, we were chosen by Team 399 to join the first seed alliance. As a result of assistance from various teams, we were able to do the seemingly impossible, for a rookie team: attend nationals.

The generosity of other teams during our rookie year made us truly realize what FIRST represents. Their guidance inspired our team to branch out and connect with other teams to spread the spirit of FIRST. In 2011, we sent our business plan, now translated in Spanish and French, to teams 1717, 3510, and our former mentor team 662, to help them model their own business plans. In 2012, we paid forward the assistance that 662 gave us, by helping Team 4068 better prepare for competition and form a team structure during their rookie year.

In 2010, we traveled to the Kansas City Regional and became the first team in our area to go to multiple regionals. Since then, we have opened up seats on our bus to Kansas City every year to team 662, and as of this year team 2945. Partnering this way has allowed other teams in the area to attend multiple regionals alongside us, broadening the experience for local teams.

Starting in 2010, CGW began hosting an annual Strategy Conference based on our experience at the Kansas City Regional. We use this strategy conference to help local teams who cannot go to multiple regionals gain from our knowledge so that they are more prepared for the Colorado Regional. We also open our practice field, during build season, to give local teams the opportunity to get a feel for the field before venturing to competition.

In 2012, the local scrimmage-host team disbanded leaving Colorado without a Pre-Ship Date Scrimmage. CGW recognized the significance of such a loss and stepped up to fill this need. We built the field ourselves and have now hosted this event 2 years in a row.

At the 2012 Colorado Regional, we were granted the opportunity to repay the kindness team 399 showed us our rookie year. On the last day of the competition, to our astonishment, we were first seed for alliance selection. Given this occurrence, we chose 399, ranked second seed, for our alliance in the final matches in hopes that we could ensure their trip to the World Championships as they had ensured ours 3 years prior. Generous teams we have encountered through FIRST have inspired us to create new, and maintain former, relations with other robotics teams.

CGW has also made connections much closer to home. We stay very connected within our school and school district by participating in school events such as freshman orientation and the homecoming parade. We annually participate in our school's Fall Festival where children from nearby elementary schools come for a safe night of Halloween fun. Whatever our school is doing, CGW is there. We support our school by participating in school fundraisers, like the Save the Homecoming Parade Fundraiser, and volunteering at the school's Harvest of Love Food Drive benefit. CGW makes it a point to reach out to our school district by volunteering to exhibit our robot wherever there's an interest. We have been invited to demo at many elementary and middle schools as well as District School Board meetings. Additionally, as the only robotics team in the county's largest school district, we open our membership to all interested students both in and out of district.

In order to further connect with the student population at our school, CGW hosts a Welcome Back Barbecue every year as school begins. This allows us to make our name known in our school community and connect with students who have an interest in Robotics and STEM. By actively participating in our school and district, we have not only expanded our team to 61 students, but spread the name of FIRST while connecting with our home community.

With the aim of reaching out beyond our school to connect with our city, during our off-season, we actively participate in charity events. For the past 3 years, we have volunteered at

Care and Share's Stamp Out Hunger Food Drive by sorting incoming donations. This past year, we also participated in events such as local house renovation projects, volunteered at a local Christmas distribution for low-income families, and hosted our local Elk's Club benefit dinner for the The Candelighters, a children's cancer fundraising organization. Each year, we show our support of those in our community by forming a team to walk in the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure. This year we not only participated in, but volunteered at, the American Heart Association's Heart Walk.

This past summer, our local community was adversely affected by the Waldo Canyon fire. Many of our team members and students at our school lost their homes or were temporarily displaced due to this terrifying event. The reality of the effects of this fire on our team members and friends created the desire to help those who were affected by the experience. Over the summer, CGW actively partook in multiple fire relief programs such as food collections through Care and Share and local sand bag distributions to prevent landslides in the burn areas.

Although we strive to spend time giving back to our community, we make an effort to connect with and inspire children through our passion for STEM. Over the summer, we conduct robot demonstrations at various libraries and public venues, such as churches and schools. We also presented at the US Air Force Academy's STEM boot camp and for our governor John Hickenlooper. In addition to these demonstrations, we annually participate in the Cool Science and the Imagination Celebration's What If? Festivals, by letting children drive our robot, which allows them to gain an exposure to innovative science and technology. Starting in 2011, we began hosting the competition for local Sea Perch teams. This provides an opportunity for more students in the city to learn about engineering. CGW partakes in these events with the goal of reaching out to young minds and igniting within them the awakened passion for STEM.

Our stimulus for connecting with the community has grown from the ideals of FIRST. CGW has turned this inspiration into a passion and has used FIRST to connect with a wide-range of age groups. After our first year as a team, we launched an FTC team at our school so that students who cannot fully commit to FRC could still participate in FIRST. We also started 4 FLL teams at local middle schools, mentored 3 of them, and covered the financial needs for 1 of the

teams. From 2010-2012 we ran an FLL scrimmage for local teams to prepare for their regionals. We also annually volunteer at the Southern Colorado FLL Regional to support FIRST teams in the area, and in 2011, we built the field elements for the competition.

This year, we expanded our FIRST involvement by connecting with a younger age group by introducing Jr.FLL to the Colorado Springs area. We promoted the idea to the principal, staff, PTA and parents of Chipeta Elementary. Their enthusiastic response propelled us into action. Within a month, we had started 5 teams. We mentored all 5 teams weekly, designed their meeting layout and ran a Jr.FLL event at our school, and also presented a safety briefing for the kids. After our successful involvement with the Chipeta students, we have been asked by 3 other elementary schools in the area to bring Jr.FLL to their students. We are scheduled to meet with these schools and start 10 new teams in the spring of 2013.

CGW highly values making connections through FIRST and through the community, but we also recognize the importance of maintaining connections with our alumni. Every year at kickoff, we invite our alumni to join us as we head into another high-powered and exciting season. Meeting with our alumni not only maintains and fosters our friendships, but also inspires us to live up to the name that they worked hard to create for us. Our alumni motivate us through their support of our team throughout the entire year. It's not uncommon for alumni to show up at various community events throughout the year, and when they are able, attend our competitions.

Our alumni not only give us ample support, but they remain involved with FIRST. Our FTC team has been run by one of our dedicated alumnus who has an undying passion for FIRST and STEM. By mentoring FRC teams in other areas, returning regularly to offer assistance, and by helping current team members overcome stressful and challenging obstacles, our alumni are still an integral part of our team.

CGW would not be the team it is today without the support of FIRST, the community, and various individuals. 5 years ago, we almost gave up when our robot didn't work. However, when gracious teams stepped up to assist us, we realized the true spirit of FIRST. It's about believing in each other, tackling challenges together, and putting those differences that separate us aside. This has been our inspiration to develop lasting friendships with other teams, strong ties

to our community, and relationships with future FRC members. If FIRST has taught us one thing, it is to value relationships and connections, because, in the end, we are all on the same team.