



Jenny Beatty – This Is How I Work

Jenny Beatty has been working in public service for a very long time. She started directing her efforts to FIRST over 14 years ago. She is the co-founder of NEMO (Non-Engineering Mentor Organization) and a critical volunteer in the Baltimore area. Let's hear more about how she works and how she got involved in FIRST.

[Responses from September 15, 2013]

Name: Jenny Beatty

CD Username: [RoboMom](#)

Current Gig/Job: Volunteer Maryland Coordinator

Alma Mater/Degree: BSN - BS in Nursing from Syracuse University; MPH-Masters in Public Health from The Johns Hopkins University

Current Team(s): They are all my teams

Former Team(s): [Team 007](#)

Location: Baltimore, Maryland

Hobbies: Hiking, Cooking, Yoga, Reading – a lot!



What inspired you to do what you do? Tell us a story.

I have been committed to public service and giving back since I was a teen. I was in the [National Health Service Corps](#) - sort of a Peace Corps for health workers in the US. I am a big fan of [AmeriCorps](#). I think this country would be well served by having mandatory national service. I've been a life-long volunteer.

I know there are some people who know from an early age what they want to do, but I think most evolve in the journey. I believe figuring out what you don't want to do is just as important. I've learned to trust my gut and be willing to take a chance.

I actually dropped out of college with only a few credits to go to take a less than minimum wage job washing dishes in a [place](#) I fell in love with. This ended up being a very smart decision, but no one thought so at the time. Because I was in the mountains and working with different agencies, I got trained as an [EMT](#) for search and rescue. This training led me to thinking about other careers. I did end up going back to college, but into a different major (nursing) because I wanted the flexibility to be able to travel, to work and live different places and with different types of people. I then discovered I really didn't like the hospital environment, but I did like public health and research. One experience usually opened doors to another.

I've been fortunate to have a life filled with interesting work experiences and have experienced different cultures. I have been a commissioned officer in the [USPHS](#) and an RN in various settings – [tiny/remote](#) and huge/urban. I've worked as a [forest ranger](#), as a [park ranger](#), at a [weather observatory](#), as an official taste tester for a large corporation, with [medical students](#), and as a program coordinator for many research projects at large universities and [agencies](#). I have also spent a bit of time on evaluating various organizations and services.

The road map is a little winding, but sometimes that's the way life is. It's a big world out there.

When I was introduced to FIRST in 2001, I thought, “Wow – look at the opportunities here for lots of kids.” What I was not expecting was to get sucked in from the mentoring and volunteering perspective. The robotics competition world has introduced me to hundreds of fascinating and passionate people.

In robotics as in life, I am usually rooting for the quiet teams and the little guys. I am fascinated by the different types of people who are drawn to this program. I get the attraction for the engineering types, but I have also seen the lives changed of students who have gone on to other fields like psychology, special ed teachers, graphic designers, communications, and even lawyers. The teamwork and problem solving skills introduced in FIRST were the hook for me.

Robotics should be hard work, but it also should be fun, especially for the mentors. As soon as the hard work really outweighs the fun, it is time to step back. Let’s just say I’ve met my fair share of burned out mentors!

What is your day job, and how’d you get there?

I was just hired by [Volunteer Maryland](#) as a Volunteer Maryland Coordinator. Volunteer Maryland is an AmeriCorps program through the Governor’s Office. I have been placed in a new nonprofit –[STEMaction](#) -where I will be helping develop infrastructure and recruit, coordinate, and train event volunteers and mentors across all four FIRST programs.

How I got here is a story involving more than a decade of volunteering for FIRST and VEX Robotics.

The robotics timeline:

2001: Discovered FRC as a team parent when oldest son joined a team.

2003: Team 007, out of pure desperation, asked me to “help” as a key mentor. I was clueless as to what I was getting into.

2004: Invited to join the [original class](#) of [FIRST Senior Mentors](#) I retired my Senior Mentor business card in 2009, but still stayed involved. Started [NEMO](#) with [Kathie Kentfield](#) and joined the Chesapeake Regional Planning Committee.

2005: Joined the FLL Planning Committee and continued to serve as a judge advisor and event advisor in Maryland.

2006: Helped create the [Baltimore Area Alliance](#). I am a co-facilitator for the BAA this year.

I continue to be involved with all the committees listed above after all these years. Event roles over the years for FRC include Volunteer Coordinator, Inspection Manager, Judge, Ambassador, and mostly “Other” and behind the scenes. I will be adding FTC to the menu this year.

Since 2009 I have also been involved with VEX. I have been an Event Partner and advisor locally for event planning for the past 5 years. I have been the Robotics Events Director for Baltimore City Summer Schools using the VEX platform. I spent 3 fun years as a National Judge Advisor for the VEX World Championship and somehow found my way into the [STEM Hall of Fame](#).

What is your favorite story to tell about robotics?

There are so many! Swapping stories, especially over adult beverages after a long day of volunteering, has got to be one of my favorite parts of being involved with FIRST and robotics programs. So many student, mentor, and event stories! Some of them are inspiring and many

are stories of lessons learned. Many of these stories are very, very funny. I am a fortunate girl to have so many belly laughs.

But here is one of the important stories for me.

Back in 2003-2004 there really was no such word as non-engineering. I was searching the CD forums and the FIRST website and trying to figure out where the advice was to help with the stuff I was doing with teams. I started communicating with a mentor in California and another one in Connecticut who seemed to be asking the same kinds of questions I was on the forums. During a discussion on the phone one day with Kathie (we had never met) we decided what was needed was a support group for outsiders like us and jokingly named it with a made-up word – the “non-engineering” mentor organization. NEMO. We had no idea where this would go.

NEMO now has hundreds of registered members, and thousands of downloads of [mentor written papers](#) off the website. It is grassroots at its finest. But I believe many NEMs don't get the recognition and respect they deserve for the contributions they make in the FIRST community.

Another favorite story which is much shorter:

Having Woodie's wife Margaret say to me, “Of course I remember you. You are the only person who has ever asked me for my autograph. “

What's your favorite robot that you didn't help build?

I know this is **shocking!**, but I have never really helped build a robot. I have driven one a couple of times. But I can still answer this.

The wood robot Team 007 built in 2003. The team had a really really tough year with lots of cards stacked against them. This robot kept falling over on the ramp at the grueling off season at the [Maryland State Fair](#) (2 days of competition, but with corn dogs, funnel cake, floods in the NASA tent, and hundreds of people wandering in trying to figure out what the heck was going on next to the Tilt-A-Whirl and Exhibition Hall.) Next thing I know there is the sound of sawing wood in the pits, the students chop the robot in half and the team goes on to be on the winning alliance. Problem solved.

What apps/software/tools can't you live without? (Work/Robotics/Home)

Gmail, dropbox, Iphone, sharpies on a lanyard.

What's your workspace setup like? (Work/Robotics/Home)

I have a lovely office – it feels like a tree house.



I also have a work bench in a basement with the tools of my trade.



In this photo I spy - my fishing vest with 13 pockets, event crate with all sorts of supplies, my O's and Raven's silly hats, NEMO buttons, and all my old business cards from when I was a Senior Mentor. And lots of hand sanitizer.

What do you listen to while you work?

I am usually listening to WTMD an independent radio station in Towson MD. <http://wtmd.org/radio/> or <http://www.mvyradio.com/> on Martha's Vineyard.

What's your schedule like during build season?

Mostly the same as the rest of the FIRST season – which is pretty much 11 months/year. This year with my new job I will likely have some involvement with 30+ events for FIRST programs in Maryland and more than 700 volunteers. Lots of emails, outreach events, recruiting and networking events. And driving. I have a Prius, with the tags "ROBOMOM." I often have people waving and honking at me when I am driving. Do they know me or do my tags just crack them up?

What everyday thing are you better at than anyone else?

Don't tell anyone but getting people to agree to do stuff before they realize what they actually committed to. I also have a reputation for asking the really hard questions which often make people uncomfortable.

What's the best advice you've ever received?

Pick your battles carefully.

Don't do anything when the babies are asleep that you can do when they are awake.

What is your favorite guilty pleasure?

Spending a couple of days by myself. If there is a casino nearby - even better.

Fill in the blank. I'd love to see _____ answer these same questions.

Mark McLeod, head mentor for 358

Things I seem to say a lot:

You can't make this stuff up.

How did I get here?

My life is a Venn diagram.

Getting stuff done.

Really???

Anything else you want people to know about you?

I have two terrific sons who are a lot of fun to be around, and a patient amazing husband who puts up with me as long as I don't talk robotics at the dinner table.

During competition season I don't do high fives or shake hands. It's not that I don't like you. It's just I learned by eliminating these friendly gestures at events I caught a lot less infectious diseases. Remember I have a graduate degree that included a lot of [epidemiology!](#)

"Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans."

- John Lennon