

Wendy Holladay- This Is How I Work

This week we are looking into the life of Wendy Holladay, a very supportive member of her team, always helping and encouraging her students to get the energy to move forward. She is a dedicated founder to her team and doesn't let anything get in her way.

[Responses from Jun 4, 2014]

Name: Wendy Holladay

CD Username: Wendy Holladay

Current Gig/Job: Electrical Engineer

Alma Mater/Degree: BS Chemistry (1980), BSEE in Electrical Engineering (1981) both from the University of Miami

Current Team(s): FRC 1912 Combustion

Former Team(s): Various Jr. FLL teams

Location: Slidell, Louisiana

Hobbies: Cooking, Baking, Jigsaw Puzzles, Travel to National Parks



(2013 Bayou Regional: Wendy Holladay pictured with daughter Rachel, son Sam, husband Ken and long-time robotics friend, Curtis Craig, who is also a Woodie Flowers Award Winner at the Bayou Regional and who presented the award. Missing are the two older Holladay children, Ben and Annie.)

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

I had a BS in chemistry and I was marrying a math professor. I realized that having a PhD in chemistry would make it difficult to find a job in the same place as my husband. Chemistry requires a PhD. I was always better in engineering so in 1.5 years, I got my BS in electrical engineering degree.

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

Thirty-two years ago I answered an ad in the newspaper. I'm the Electrical lead on a rocket engine test stand at NASA's Stennis Space Center. We test developmental rockets, not production ones and many times we are surprised at the results.

What is your favorite story to tell about robotics?

Going into the 2010 season, our team's robot had been dead last two years in a row. I knew we couldn't continue like this. I had a vision of remaking our team so that instead of being centered only on the robot, that we would center our FIRST's vision and outreach. At that time, none of the other mentors on our team saw the importance of the Chairman's Award and what it stood for. I actually got a lot of pushback. Winning the Chairman's Award our first year (2010) was absolutely incredible but it was even better to watch the students as they won over and over again (2010-2013). It was after our first win that the entire team became incredible energized. There was a core group of students whose enthusiasm and dedication was not only contagious but inspiring. They all saw the importance of our outreach mission and went crazy with it. For me, it was awesome not only to watch the team transform but also to help the students as I saw them transform and grow.

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

I really like the clever ideas that make you say, "Who came up with that?"

- 148 in 2008. I remember watching it go round and round at the Bayou Regional. Such a simple strategy that was so effective. Nicknamed "what was that little octagon that went round and round and round"
- 469 in 2010. This idea was incredibly out of the box. It was fun to see it on Einstein. Nicknamed "those people who outsmarted everyone and just fed the balls through like boom-boom-boom"
- 33's stinger in 2012. I'm pretty sure they were the first to introduce the stinger. Our drivers, when balancing, would always rock back and forth and it was so nerve wracking to watch. Then this team comes with a simple, elegant solution.

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

The internet. I'm also especially attached to my Android phone and in terms of software I'm a fan of Google Apps, especially Gmail. With 4 children in college, it is the communication method for our family.

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

- Work: I use my NASA laptop with a docking station. In my office I have a couch, which I've had for most of my career. Also, as a gift from my daughters, near my computer sits a small WALL-E doll, which always reminds me that robotics should be fun.
- Home: Well lit, large two story living room, adjacent to my engineer designed kitchen, with granite countertops and my black Kitchen-Aid mixer (best countertop alliance ever). No single use item. Upstairs a large bonus room, where many, many robot functions have occurred, Beta testing, training, team meeting, and robot builds.
- Robotics: We moved a new build space this year at the high school, the company whose facility we used closed. We are still adjusting to as it is arguably not as good as our old one. I truly loved our old space and dislike our new one. .

What do you listen to while you work?

I do not usually listen to music while I work.

What's your schedule like during build season?

I go to work. Then I go home to make dinner. I cook every night. Then I go to build. A good meal is always worth making.

What everyday thing are you better at than anyone else?

Superb chef and baker. On numerous occasions I've cooked and baked for the team.

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

I actually more remember the advice I didn't take. Over the years I was often told I couldn't do something. That I couldn't have four kids, that I couldn't be an engineer, that I couldn't go part time, that I couldn't start a robotics team. Over and over again, I was told I couldn't do xyz and sometimes it was because women can't do it. As I said, I didn't take that advice and did it all anyway.

What is your favorite guilty pleasure?

I am at an age where I no longer feel guilty about these types of things

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

Fredi Lajvardi from FRC 842 Falcon Robotics (2013 Woodie Flowers Award Winner)

Anything else you want people to know about you?

-All 4 of my children were on our robotics team. My 2 eldest founded the team, my 2 youngest transformed the team. I now have 4 children in college, 2 in grad school, physics and robotics, 2 undergrad, 1 twin double majoring in computer science and robotics, other twin majoring in electrical engineering. 2 in California, 2 in Pennsylvania.

-The post was scribed by my daughter Rachel Holladay



2009 Bayou Regional: Ben (grad school UC San Diego Phd Physics), Annie (grad school Carnegie Mellon Robotics Institute Phd Robotics), Rachel (undergrad Carnegie Mellon, double major Robotics and Computer Science), and Sam Holladay (undergrad UC Berkeley Electrical Engineering)

"If you are going through hell, keep going" - Winston Churchill

"CREAM - Cash Rules Everything Around Me" - Wu Tang Clan