

Engineering, Innovation Drive Paul Rodi's Volunteer Legacy

Retiree **Paul Rodi** has used his expertise and experience as an engineer, innovator, and educator, adding a life-saving dimension to his longstanding volunteering legacy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rodi serves on the board and is a founding member of the non-profit Institute for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (I4STEM), whose mission is encouraging people to transform the world positively around them with technology. In March and April 2020, when COVID-19 began to shut down the country, through I4STEM, Rodi secured funding and materials, working with Build RVA to design, prototype and create a fully functional ventilator. Rodi participated on a team made up of engineers, medical professionals, and other volunteers, to create a ventilator design that could easily be replicated and produced in case hospitals became overrun.

In 2020 Rodi volunteered more than 500 hours, with most of that time spent participating as a Lead Mentor and Coach to three teams in *FIRST Robotics*, an organization, with whom he has volunteered since 2000. He uses a robot as a teaching tool to help young people learn valuable life skills including time management, problem solving and teamwork.

In the first two months of 2020 he was mentoring as he had done in the past – working one on one teaching skills, attending build sessions, taking the students to competitions. As Covid-19 restrictions started, Rodi quickly acted to mentor students virtually to continue to be there for them and keep them excited and interested in technology, even though they were isolated from their peers.

He used *First Virtual Robotics*, a platform he founded, which allows students to participate on robotics teams virtually, via Skype, Google Hangout, and other programs. With social distancing measures in place, students used this platform to stay connected.

In 2020, to enhance virtual learning of his students, Paul Rodi signed his teams up to participate in *FIRST at Home*, a robotics competition enabling students to compete against other teams from all around the world. To further his commitment to ensuring that students have access to education tools, he volunteered on the FIRST Chesapeake Advisory Board, which is now focused on keeping students from Maryland, Washington DC and Virginia, involved in the FIRST program, even with the challenges of schools being virtual and social distancing.

Paul's actions are speaking louder and will make positive impacts for generations to come. He has directed his \$5,000 in grant funding from the Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation to the Institute for Science Technology Engineering and Math, Inc.