

Encarta defines awesome as “so impressive or overwhelming as to inspire a strong feeling of admiration.” At the core of every human is the desire to be a part of something bigger than themselves, something “awesome.” Up Next, FRC team 3528, sees this as a challenge to rise above what is expected of us. We strive to meet and exceed that definition. To us, “awesome” is helping other teams, spreading FIRST, making meaningful partnerships in the community, and being a role model for other teams. Wilferd Peterson, a writer for [Science of Mind](#) magazine, said that “big thinking precedes great achievement.” We strive to think big and think awesome.

Three years ago, Up Next started with limited resources. We spent countless hours fundraising, developing a team image, building a robot, and preparing for competition. In our first year, we were awarded the Rookie All-Star Award and traveled to the World Championship. In our second year, we were blessed to earn the Excellence In Engineering Award in Kansas City and the Oklahoma Regional Website Award. We also won the Oklahoma Regional and finished as Curie Division semi-finalists at the World Championship.

Our team exists to revolutionize our community and our generation. As a team primarily comprised of homeschoolers, we’ve had a huge impact on those who wouldn’t have had the opportunity to experience FIRST. Our goal is to provide awesome leadership, life, and technical skill development opportunities for the homeschool community in the highly competitive environment of FIRST. Up Next has exposed students to local businesses, community leaders, and even State Legislators. As a result, we have a 100% graduation rate, and all of our seniors plan to pursue a STEM-related education. We are proud to claim Logan Fritts, a 2011 Dean’s List Finalist, as one of our own. Logan received a FIRST scholarship and is pursuing engineering at Missouri State University.

We believe that part of being “awesome” is planning for the future. To help us grow and sustain our team, we have developed a five-year business plan and have spearheaded the Up Next Leadership Foundation to ensure our team’s future. This provides the homeschool community with valuable STEM resources.

As a team dedicated to diligence and excellence, we emphasize giving 110% in all we do. Each member of our team is a full-time participant, so everyone gets the full FIRST experience. However, because we are not associated with a high school, our team must actively seek out members. Due to strong community involvement, our team has grown 23% this year.

In addition, Up Next is determined to spark a passion for FIRST throughout our national, local, and homeschool communities. For the past three years, we have been actively involved in over 24 outreach events, ranging from festivals and fairs to workshops and food drives.

The Liberty Fall Festival and the Trunk’r Treat events are two such examples. Collectively, we were able to showcase our robot to tens of thousands of people and spread the word about FIRST. Our outreach efforts were an immediate success, especially after we allowed the children to drive the robot. We have also competed with several FRC teams in the area for the past two

years at an event known as the Kansas City Maker's Faire. Here, entrepreneurs from the area come to showcase their inventions. In addition, Up Next promotes excitement about STEM and FIRST at an annual homeschool curriculum fair which brings in around 5,000 people.

Searching for a unique way to spread FIRST, Up Next arranged to set up a booth at the Independence Center Mall. Both our FLL and FRC teams demonstrated their robots and handed out brochures to countless shoppers. Children of all ages were fascinated by the robots and their parents were impressed with the awesome educational opportunities offered through FIRST.

When it comes to spreading FIRST, our team sees no limits. We have been featured in five newspapers and have reached an international audience through our YouTube channel, which now has over 16,600 views. We have also developed relationships with two radio stations, K-Love and Air1, which have promoted Up Next and FIRST throughout the nation. They have broadcasted interviews of our team members on their radio stations and affiliates. They also featured our team and posted information about FIRST on their website. Up Next, K-Love, and Air1 are now working with the KC STEM Alliance in hope of promoting and broadcasting all FRC events throughout the country.

Our team got our State Representative, T.J. Berry, and District Commissioner, Luann Ridgeway, involved and excited about FIRST Robotics. Originally, Representative Berry wasn't excited about attending the robotics competition we invited him to. After attending, he fell in love with FIRST and now supports us regularly at competitions. In the same way, our infectious enthusiasm has spread to our friends and family.

Given our diverse pool of resources and talent, we found ourselves in a unique position to benefit others. For example, Ron Guileck is a quadriplegic who wanted to leash his service dog. We took this problem as our own and developed a device that would allow him to overcome his situation. We are also in the fabrication process of a device that will enable him to open his refrigerator independently. We plan to make our inventions available to others in need. Inspired by this endeavor, we have partnered with the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) to find American heroes whose lives we can impact with technology designed for them. We title this *The Hero Project*.

Keeping with the theme of serving our community, we created and organized the "Take A Byte Out Of Hunger" event. We recruited six FRC teams to sort and package food for Harvesters, a Kansas City food pantry. This event was so wildly successful, bringing in over a hundred volunteers, that we are now planning on making this an annual event.

In addition, we're involved with Samaritan's Purse and their program Operation Christmas Child. This awesome program is designed to benefit impoverished children around the world. Each year, we assemble and pack shoe boxes filled with small gifts for the children. We then inventory, pack, and load them into shipping boxes to be delivered around the world.

We enjoy serving the community via mentoring. In 2012 and 2013 we co-hosted the Kansas City Quickbuild, where we sent home six teams with a basic working robot. At Massive Mini, where teams learned about drive systems, team branding, and various awards available to FIRST, our team led Java Programming seminars.

At a pre-season FLL coach's training event, Up Next mentored 80+ FLL coaches. We explained the role of a coach and gave advice on how to coach their teams in ways that lead to successful learning experiences. For the last two seasons we volunteered as judges, runners, and timers at seven FLL competitions.

Although 4-H and Civil Air Patrol haven't always been associated with robotics, our team viewed it as an awesome opportunity to spread the FIRST experience. We were able to give kids and cadets the opportunity to participate in a multitude of educational activities that fostered team-building skills and a heightened interest in STEM-related fields.

We love Gracious Professionalism and seek to show it in every way possible. For example, when we were the first to pass inspection at the OKC regional, we helped the other teams with their inspection checklists to help them pass as well. Off the field, we applied to beta test FIRST software and are even developing a code library that catalyzes other team's programming efforts. Additionally, we publish all of our robot's code on GitHub and Google Code.

As a student-led team, Up Next places nearly half of its members in leadership roles. This develops character and initiative in our students while teaching them how to manage responsibilities and maintain respect for authority. For example, our entire team meets 40+ hours a week during build season. This rigorous schedule allows constant communication between team members with updates and progress reports. Our team uses many other methods of communication as well, such as Dropbox, team email aliases, our website, YouTube, Chief Delphi, Twitter, Google+ and Facebook.

We recognize the importance of our awesome sponsors, mentors, and families by hosting an annual Appreciation Dinner. A slideshow and video summarize our build season, and each sponsor is given a gift of appreciation. Some of our sponsors have asked us to be involved in their events as well. Knights of Columbus Ladies Auxiliary, for example, invited us to take part in their annual craft show and allowed us to sell FIRST light bulbs. At both our local JCPenney's and Laird Plastics' stores, we set up information booths and greeted customers as they came in the door, benefiting our sponsors, team, and FIRST.

Metropolitan Community College Business and Technology Campus, an awesome supporter of our team, has donated two classrooms and allowed us the use of their FAB-Lab. They have promoted FIRST and our team in their newsletters and honored our team by asking us to lead the graduation ceremony with our robot and speak at many business breakfasts and luncheons on behalf of the college and FIRST.

Without our sponsors, Up Next would not exist. Their support has kept us in the game. Our thanks go out to NASA Marshall Space Flight Center, Metropolitan Community College, JCPenney, Imaging For Women LLC, The KC STEM Alliance, ScriptPro, Knights Of Columbus Ladies Auxiliary 8915, PKM and Associates, Tailor Made Exteriors, and Laird Plastics.

Three years ago, we started with a vision: a vision to change our community, to show that engineering and science aren't just things you study in school. They're fun. They're applicable. They're life changing. Up Next makes them a lifestyle of excellence, diligence, and service. And, it's awesome.