



Chairman's Essay

For The Highlanders, team #4499, "It's not about the game, it's about the Journey." While this is our team motto, we are truly on a journey that has taken our team on many adventures to grow and assist our community, to pursue engineering and find out who we are. This drive allows 4499 to find ways to share our love for FIRST and to chase after our mission of finding new and unique ways of spreading the word of FIRST, engineering and robotics in our community, throughout Colorado and the nation. The story of our journey of where we have been, where we are, and where we will go can be described in 7 words: family, legacy, passion, community, synergy, inspiration and aspiration, and all of these are necessary for our journey.

We are more than just a team, we are a family. Our community-based team meets year-round in a family-like environment. Our team began 12 years ago as 2 different FLL teams began that then transitioned to FTC. These two teams decided to come together and start 4499. We came from different schools, backgrounds and friends, but we all shared the same passion: FIRST and robotics. Our mentors created a 501(c)(3) non-profit company, Neaera Robotics, to assist our team and other teams. With this we have been able to help 4 FIRST teams sustain funding by local and nation-wide businesses, growing our family. At our practices we enjoy home cooked meals, provided from our parent support, while we talk about our daily progress. Our alumni are a strong part of our team and help teach, guide and coach us. When you're a Highlander, you're family.

Our team leaves a legacy on team members, alumni, our community and FIRST family. We have had over 7 different schools and 4 different cities represented on our team. Today we have 9 members, significantly less than past years, but that just means we all have more responsibility and leadership roles. We may be small, but we are mighty. 4499 has had 24 alumni, 96% attending college, all of them majoring in STEM subjects. We have had their support in teaching specific skills, assisting in strategy and filling our drive coach role. Some of our alumni are even spreading the word of FIRST in their college community by starting an FLL camp and encouraging their college peers to volunteer as well. Our legacy spreads throughout our community through participating in events put on by different schools, clubs and our city. Due to the skills learned during their time as Highlanders, our alumni are able to make changes in their own communities, continuing our legacy.

The Highlanders have a passion for STEM, robotics and our team. We show our passion through many different ways, but always showing our interest in pursuing stem and robotics year-round. For the past 4 years we have helped run our local FLL tournament, run multiple summer camps for the past 5 years and continued starting and creating FIRST teams. Our summer camps have had 91 kids that participated in FLL Jr. and FLL camps, and we had 25 more in our Water Robotics camp, inspired by the Waterbotics program. All the kids involved were so passionate about the program; it was different than any other program offered in our city. We adapted water-proof cases for the NXT bricks and modeled our next FLL camp after the structure of the Water Robotics camp because it was such a hit. In our FRC community,

we have assisted many FRC teams. Our team helped raise funds for 4944 registration fees to attend the World Championships and helped 4388 make their own carbon fiber electronics board. We have a passion to give back a fun experience most of us had when we were in FLL by working as referees, judges and scorekeepers.

We connect with our community, forming partnerships with local businesses that lead to friendships and innovation, giving back to the community we grew up in by volunteering. We invite local engineers to our shop and a few have joined the team as mentors. Jacob Darling, one of our mentors, participated in FRC as a teen in California. After meeting us, he was excited to give back to the FIRST community and work with 4499 students. During holiday times, we participate in Toys for Tots, Operation Christmas Child, and wrap presents at Barnes & Noble. We also support our community during times of need. When flooding hit our community in 2013, we aided the flood relief program with food donations. We helped run a kid's triathlon for three years; the kids are happily greeted by our robots at the finish line (and they miraculously get their energy back). The way that we engage with the community around us that is not directly part of FIRST leaves a lasting impact on all those involved.

We create an environment of synergy with local and nationwide FRC teams. By mentoring and teaching, we share our knowledge, becoming friends in the process. Throughout the years, 4499 has enjoyed friendship with other local teams like team 159 and 4388. Our team has particularly found opportunities to encourage synergy at tournaments. We pass out rookie survival kits, as we recall difficulties we faced as rookies because of the essentials we tended to forget, with supplies such as files, clamps, rulers, and (lots of) duct tape. 4499 is excited to continue our Lunch Ambassador outreach at the Colorado Regional for the 4th year in a row - we invite traveling teams to join us in our lunch plans and in the process make friends and create synergy. This year we once again plan reach out to a few traveling team to join us. We have a friendship with 1138 over the years; they have attended the Colorado Regional for the past few years. In 2016 we had a terrible snow storm hit the day they were traveling to the competition. 4499 and 2 of the 1138 alumni from a local university jumped in, unpacked their robot and started the inspection process so that 1138 could compete as soon as they arrived. Creating synergy with other teams produces a more positive atmosphere at FIRST events and allows for partnerships and new learning opportunities. Plus, it is fun to work with others on something you love!

We work to inspire others, from our local community to kids who will join FIRST programs; we are invested in them because they become our future. Many students do not realize the numerous possibilities that exist within STEM, whether it is mechanical, electrical, or programming. In an effort to remedy this, 4499 creates fun and innovative ways to inspire children and share opportunities in FIRST. We have written and published two children's books about the adventures of a young boy and his best friend, a robot. We give demos at many different locations, ranging from local high schools to maker-fairs. We hope that exposing people from different backgrounds to STEM will inspire new people to join FIRST who had not considered it as a possibility for themselves before. Lastly, our team wants to let our community know about our accomplishments and opportunities found in FIRST and STEM. For 2 years we participated in the Fort Collin's 4th of July parade, exposing approximately 2000 people to FIRST. It was great to hear the crowds cheer as we had the robots kicking and catapulting balls down the parade route. We hope through sharing our love for FIRST in unique ways, we can inspire the next generation of engineers.

Our aspiration drives us to find new ways to innovate and spread our love of FIRST and to pursue our goals. We aspire to be a team that touches the hearts of many and encourages kids to go into STEM. We will accomplish this through support and assistance of other FIRST teams where we can, creating new outlets to join FIRST, and giving back our time to our community. We aspire to be a team that continues on our own individual journeys – learning more about being teammates, STEM, and communications. We aspire to grow the team, giving more students hands-on experience that can help them through college and beyond. The Highlanders look forward to future seasons and finding creative ways to increase the spread of FIRST.

The Highlanders' journey starts with FRC but does not end there. Although our team is small, we are mighty. We are a FAMILY that has a PASSION for FIRST, a drive to INSPIRE others, a connection to our COMMUNITY, and a goal to create SYNERGY. We will not forget where our team started and the LEGACY it leaves, nor will we every stop chasing our ASPIRATIONS. Each person, each experience, each lesson is just a step in the process. Our journey is about what we can achieve together as a team, because "It's not about the game, it's about the Journey."