**Autism In Our Midst**

by Julie Petersen

 I’m not interested in robots, so why am I on a robotics team? My mom and brother are in it for the robots, but I’m in it for the people. When I was in 10th grade, I heard that the next year, my mom’s robotics team would have autistic kids, so I decided to join. This interested me because I have a mild case of autism myself, and I wished to see how autism on a Vex robotics team would play out. I am the battery charger, journalist, and photographer on Team 438, Metal Gear.

 Having kids with autism on our team has not been a problem--they get along with everybody and make significant contributions to the team, such as building and driving. The autistic kids are sometimes alone for brief periods of time at tournaments, but they always have the other kids nearby if they need anything. We all have something to contribute, even me, a non-technical team member. Developing relationships with the other people on my team means that I have been able to talk about meaningful things, such as my Christian faith, with them. Although the religious views of the members differ, we’ve been able to talk civilly and understandingly.

Adam Lanza (the Newtown, CT shooter) was reported to be socially isolated, but technically gifted. Ignoring the needs of people like him can have devastating consequences. Thankfully, this is not a problem on our team because we have each others’ backs.