

## SeaBenders (HS-327)

***Describe how your team is giving back to the community and why do you think it is important?***

Upon reflection, one of the best parts of our work in the STEM program at our high school has been the hundreds of volunteer hours we've been able to contribute to the community. Every time a VEX or FLL competition rolled around, we couldn't resist volunteering for set-up or competition day. We find offering volunteer hours as a way to give back to the STEM community that's been a huge part of us.

Through our club we've had opportunities to reach out to our community and present Seaperch, a lesser known organization in our area. These events are particularly special to us because we get to show the ROV's to young students at local STEM Nights or regional STEM events and watch that creative spark ignite in their eyes as we open the door to something they didn't even know existed. Of course, we're just enjoying showing off our ROV, but we like to think that we might have been lucky enough to shape the academic careers of some of these young students, which we recognize as a tremendous privilege.

On a different note, this year the pandemic made it impossible to hold events due to a large number of people required to be in a building, risking the chance of a large spread. In the STEM field, many of these events include the VEX Robotics and Seaperch Competitions that are typically held throughout the year. Near the beginning of 2021 was when these competitions started to start up once again. With all the volunteers and competitors following regulations, the county was able to hold VEX and Seaperch Competitions for the 2020-2021 season. This was exciting news to many students because a lot have been wishing to compete again this year. All three of us found this opportunity to be so great that we volunteered to help set up and run the competitions. With that each of us either volunteered on one of the days or even both of them and we got to see so many enlightened students compete in the sport they love to do.

Most recently, we were asked by our regional STEM coordinator, Mrs. Carroll, to present to a local elementary FLL robotics team about Seaperch over Zoom. She came to our high school with the meeting on her laptop and introduced us to the kids. We explained to them how our club deals with underwater robots instead of regular robots and how the club provides for the most creativity of all robotics clubs in the region below the college level. Instead of being given set pieces to build with, we have unlimited freedom in designing our ROVs. We even got to show them our ROV operating in a large water tub we have at school.

In the end, we've done a lot of community outreach regarding STEM throughout the years. We find each event we volunteer at so much fun, a great way to teach others about STEM, and to learn new things as well.

