



YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN IN CHARGE
FOUNDATION, INC.

Volunteer Spotlight

Bill Allaire

My name is Bill Allaire, and I am a YMWIC STEM Educator who works with Scholars and Robotics. I am a Principal Engineer – Sr. Program Manager at Advanced Micro Devices (AMD), Xilinx, and have 40 years of work experience in software, hardware and semiconductors in a range of roles in software, board and system level development, and intellectual property.



I knew I wanted to be an Engineer when I was fortunate enough to have access to a computer and a computer programming class as a seventh grade student in 1973, five years before the Apple II personal computer even came out! Curiosity led me to explore the sciences and math to learn how different things worked. In high school I took as many advanced courses and extra classes as I could to help with improving my college entrance exams (SATs). I entered the University of Delaware in 1979, majoring in Electrical Engineering with a concentration on Computer Science – four long and very challenging years later I received my Bachelor's degree.

One additional aspect of my education was sports and athletics. Throughout my life I have always played and competed in sports – football, baseball, martial arts, marathon running, triathlon, and distance cycling. To this day, I compete multiple times per week in ice hockey, often against athletes half my age and far more skilled. The challenges of pushing yourself physically teach you how to push yourself mentally as well. As in life, failure in sports happens often and achievement in life happens when you can take the lessons from failure and improve.

I started my career as a Design Engineer designing computers and then writing software to implement systems. At the time, microprocessors were relatively new and semiconductors were just beginning to be used in many products. My career dramatically changed when I joined a very young company named Xilinx as a Field Applications Engineer. This role opened a whole new world of interactions with engineers, business leaders, business development, marketing and sales. I was a key contributor to the definition of many Xilinx DSP products.

In addition to these accomplishments, there have been some failures along the way. While working on a large and important project at Xilinx, my team and I failed in our solution time and time again. We were very concerned about failing and getting fired because of the repeated failures! Finally, through a chance meeting, we got an opportunity to present to the CEO of the company – and he loved our idea! We successfully got approval and then immediately failed to effectively engage customers.

That fear of failure could have stopped us, but it lit a fire under us; and we worked through each failure with customers – examining why we didn't win, creating new approaches and adjusting our strategy. I have two general sayings on failure: "Fail fast," and "Failure is necessary to success – it is an opportunity to learn." "Fail fast" because what you learn from failures is so valuable that you want to gather that knowledge as quickly as possible. Scholars should learn from each of their failures or setbacks and think of ways to overcome them and move forward to success.

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I did a little Google research as to the importance of reaching back to help and support others, especially those who are most vulnerable; and here are some answers I came up with:

- Helping others is one way that people create, maintain, and strengthen their social connections. For example, volunteering and helping others brings a feeling of belonging, making new friends, and connecting with our community.
- It feels good!
- Creates a sense of purpose.
- Helps keep things in perspective and is a great opportunity to learn about others.

All these things are true; and one more interesting fact, according to Charities Aid Foundation's World Giving Index is, "America is the world's most generous country over the past decade." In other words, helping others is part of the fabric of our nation.

For me, volunteering with YMWIC is a fantastic opportunity to meet interesting young people and expose them to what I believe is one of the best opportunities in our lifetime – exploring Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. STEM is not only a very personally rewarding career path but also has the potential to improve so many lives. The people, Scholars and Staff are great to work with, passionate about helping others, and provide guidance for our students so they can learn and grow.