

In 1999 Steve “Flo” Florence founded FIRST Team 461 Westside Boiler Invasion (WBI) when he saw a need for the rejuvenation of technology education in our community. Ever since, he has worked tirelessly to ensure that every member finds their own place on the team. Flo started the WBI as a community wide team in order to give students equal opportunities, regardless of their school district. When the team grew too big, Flo worked to start teams in each of the local high schools. His enthusiasm has continued for 16 years by helping rookie head mentors and supplying materials to new teams throughout the state. In recent years, Flo has held several positions in IndianaFIRST in order to further his involvement in FIRST.

Outside of his work with FIRST Flo strives to improve Technology Education in the state by organizing workshops for teachers and becoming an evaluator for Technology Education student teachers. Flo taught at West Lafayette High School for 31 years before reluctantly retiring in 2014. His decision to retire has allowed him to spend more time on improving FIRST events and helping rookie teams in the state. Through his many years at the high school Flo has completely overhauled the Technology Education curriculum twice, the first time by creating a more hands on approach to teaching, and the second by introducing Project Lead The Way classes that promote futures in STEM. Before his changes to the curriculum, students used their textbooks to learn how to use tools, but Flo believes that that students should learn to use tools through realistic projects and changed the curriculum to incorporate a hands-on approach to teaching. But Flo is much more than an impressive resume, throughout his 33 years in the field of Technology Education Flo has helped countless alumni find their passions in life. Since the creation of the team Flo has tried to incorporate students with a plethora of interests to join FIRST by explaining that everyone can have a productive role in our team. He’s always sure to make each person on the team feel at home, by giving them individual jobs, encouraging students to express their ideas and helping them accomplish their goals, or even by simply making ‘Flo jokes’. For Andrew Buess, a 2011 graduate, Flo was not just a teacher. Before meeting Flo, he intended on not graduating, but after joining WBI Flo’s reassurance inspired Buess to pursue a career in STEM. Now, he is a college graduate and thanks Flo changing his life. From my own experience Flo has taught me to challenge and pursue my passion in life: teaching. Personally, Flo will always serve as an outstanding example of a caring mentor, dedicated teacher, and a motivated individual.

For the past two years I have attempted to fully express Flo’s accomplishments the best way I have known how, but, Flo’s accomplishments as a mentor and a teacher are immeasurable. Flo’s dedication to FIRST, WBI, and the lives of his students cannot fully be expressed in 3000 characters.