

Heroes are often best remembered by their titles and by the awards they have earned. Stephen “Flo” Florence, our team founder and mentor, has been awarded the IndianaFIRST Foundation Award, IRI Mentor of the Year Award, IndianaFIRST Volunteer of the Year Award, and, of course, a Woodie Flowers nomination. What makes a hero a hero, however, isn’t the awards they’ve accumulated, but the impact they’ve made on the lives of others. Flo has always said “The legacy I want to leave is the people I inspire,” and his career is a perfect reflection of his motto: throughout his entire career Flo has always put others first.

Flo’s commitment to his students and community can be seen through the positive influence he has had on those around him. Monica Bravo, a Team 461 alumna, explained, “Watching Flo always give his all and push for me to be the best I could be has influenced me to strive for greatness in every aspect of my life.” Though Flo’s impact on our team’s students is immense, his positive influence extends beyond Team 461. Brian Bettag, lead mentor of Team 1646 commented, “Without [Flo’s] guidance and leadership, our own corporation’s robotics programs would not be where they are today as I have utilized his expertise many times in the past 16 years.” Flo continues to be an influential teacher and leader for both our community and the Midwest as a whole.

The individual testimony of all the people Flo has positively influenced cannot begin to be captured in a mere 3000 characters. However, Flo’s influence can be measured by the sheer number of people whose lives he’s changed. He has started over 20 FRC (6 of which were outside of his home state, Indiana), 20 FTC, and 40 FLL teams, and has been a driving force in the creation of three FRC competitions. In addition, Flo was the first and only Regional Director of Indiana FIRST while the regional system was in place. He now serves on the Board of Directors of Indiana FIRST as the Chair of the Cross-Program Planning Committee. Though he plays a major role in Indiana FIRST, his influence goes beyond the Hoosier State: he has donated LEGO kits to teams as far away as Washington D.C. and Ecuador. In addition to the many leadership roles he has held and continues to hold in FIRST, his role as an advocate of STEM education is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by nearly forty years as a public high school Technology teacher. In celebration of his exceptional role as a teacher, mentor and leader throughout the state of Indiana, he was selected as a torch bearer for the Indiana Bicentennial Ceremonial Relay in 2016.

Flo’s legacy described by the people he’s inspired is both remarkable and extensive. He has single handedly transformed the FIRST program for Indiana into what it is today. From teaching to creating our team to working for Indiana FIRST, Flo has always had his students in his mind and continues to make them a priority in everything he does. Flo always has been and always will be; our hero.

~~From Sieur de La Salle, the explorer who discovered the state, to Elwood Haynes, the man who brought the automobile industry to Indiana, The Hoosier State has a history filled with people who have brought positive change. In last year’s celebration of our state’s 200th~~

birthday, Flo was selected as torch bearer for the Indiana Bicentennial Ceremonial Relay as a figure, who like many more before him, has transformed Indiana into what it is today. As a result of his relentless passion to innovate STEM education, Flo always has been and always will be our hero.

Flo's motto has a direct correlation to FIRST's mission, "to inspire young people to be science and technology leaders," and his actions emulate the values of FIRST. His efforts to create teams has led to the inspiration of thousands of students to pursue STEM fields. His dedication to this program has led to the founding of multiple events as well as an expansion of STEM principles to an international level. He is the reason that many students find their passions in STEM, because he felt the need and motivation to spread his knowledge in order to create a community that fosters these principles, allowing the next generation to build a better future.

Why Flo is pretty swag

- Torch Bearer
<http://wlfi.com/2016/06/29/indiana-bicentennial-commission-releases-names-of-tippecanoe-torchbearers/>
- PSEF (1999): FIRST robotics members at Purdue, including multiple 461 mentors, founded PSEF. PSEF : Purdue Student Engineering Foundation: do outreach in and around the community. PFP founded because PSEF's initiatives grew too large. PSEF founded 461 - a community based team.
- 2002, 461 founded PFP with Flo
- 2005, Founded boilermaker regional; lasted 10 years, then 1 boilermaker district event.
- 2013, founded crossroads regional at Rose-Hulman University.
- Mentor on board of directors indiana first
- First and only regional director of indianafirst
- Purdue FIRST Programs (2002): Founded 1646, 1747, 4272; 40 FLL Teams;
- 6 years of FLL workshops to start teams
- 5 years of Boilermaker workshops to start FLL teams
- Gave away kits to help start FLL teams
- FTC: workshops for 5 years
- Visited kentucky to put on an FRC presentation: Moved from 6 FRC teams to 12
- Volunteers