

Steve “Flo” Florence simply embodies dedication, throughout the past 15 years he has shown relentless passion for what he truly loves: FIRST. His involvement in FIRST began in 1999 when he and a Purdue University freshman started FIRST Team 461 Westside Boiler Invasion (WBI). This original team had members from all area schools, but as WBI grew, Flo worked with the other local schools to start their own teams. This helped him to initiate Purdue First Programs, a student run organization that supports teams financially and provides Purdue University students the opportunity to mentor local FIRST teams.

Flo has spread the message of FIRST not just in our community, but throughout our state. In 2012, Flo was appointed the Senior Mentor of Indiana and promptly promoted to the Regional Director of Indiana FIRST where he oversees the expansion of FIRST programs. This past year, Flo joined the board of Indiana FIRST as chair of their outreach team where he encourages the expansion of FIRST. Over the last 15 years Flo has helped with the creation of over 150 FIRST teams by working with each individually. He is also on the planning committee of the Boilermaker Regional and is a driving force behind the newly created Crossroads Regional. Outside of his work with FIRST Flo strives to improve Technology Education in the state by providing workshops and by becoming an evaluator for Indiana Tech Ed Students Teachers. In 2012 Flo intended to retire and focus his efforts on FIRST; however, in order to guarantee the continuation of WBI he chose not to and took over the Jr. High Tech Ed classes.

Flo’s improvement of STEM awareness in the our state stemmed from his improvements of the curriculum in our high school. In 2003 Flo facilitated a complete overhaul of the school’s Tech Ed department changing classes from a book-oriented course to a hands-on class. Last year, he also pushed to add three courses through the Project Lead the Way program, where students focus on critical thinking and skill application in a hands-on environment. He has also helped Boy Scouts across the state earn their Robotics Merit Badge by collaborating with the Boy Scouts of America and designing a workshop that the team runs throughout year. He also oversaw the creation o a set of documents that outline instruction on how to recreate the workshops.

But Flo is simply more than just a notable résumé, he is a caring figure in the eyes of his students. His dedication has lead our team to where it is today; Flo has has always been the first person to arrive at meetings and the last person to leave. Under his guidance, WBI became a student-run organization that works because no one is afraid of speaking up, where every student is important. There is a welcome environment created where each team member can feel comfortable. Yet Flo’s impact on the team extends further—he works with every member individually, providing them with assistance and forging a strong connection between teacher and student.