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## The Enduring Legacy of Gracious Professionalism

*Remembering Dr. Woodie Flowers: FIRST Executive Advisory Board Chair Emeritus and Distinguished Advisor*

By *FIRST* Staff



Woodie Flowers at the *FIRST* Championship.

“Think of *FIRST* as a catalyst in a chain reaction. Each collision releases human potential which feeds an exponential expansion of additional human potential. *FIRST* students seize this opportunity by being informed, being creative, and thinking hard – all three, all the time.” -Dr. Woodie Flowers

The *FIRST* ethos of [Gracious Professionalism](#) encourages high-quality work, emphasizes the value of others, and respects individuals and the community in pursuit of a meaningful life. It was coined by the late Dr. Woodie Flowers, *FIRST* Executive Advisory Board Chair Emeritus and Distinguished Advisor, who passed away last year on October 11, 2019, at the age of 75. Woodie, as he was known to all in the *FIRST* community, was an innovative and beloved Pappalardo Professor Emeritus of Mechanical Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and helped *FIRST* Founder Dean Kamen develop the *FIRST* Robotics Competition.

From the early beginnings of *FIRST* until his very last days, Woodie was an incredible supporter of our mission, a friend to everyone he met, and an inspiration to our students, alumni, mentors, volunteers, supporters, and staff. Survived by his wife, Margaret Flowers, the couple had no biological children, but she said in an interview, “the MIT kids and the *FIRST* kids were his children.” Throughout his 30 years of involvement with *FIRST*, the couple, together, were tireless advocates for the organization.



Some teams have posted #WalkLikeWoodie photos wearing Converse, part of Woodie’s signature style.

Woodie’s legacy will live on as the *FIRST* community continues to embody his words and actions. Woodie taught us how to carry ourselves with *Gracious Professionalism*. He taught us that hard work, determination, and believing in yourself allow you to accomplish even the most difficult of tasks. He taught us what it means to be a member of a team. Most of all, Woodie taught us how to be positive role models for others.

Woodie often said, “Societies get the best of what they celebrate.” In *FIRST*, we celebrate those like Woodie who lead and inspire a better world through STEM and *Gracious Professionalism*:

- Since 1996, the [Woodie Flowers Award](#) has celebrated effective communication in the art and science of engineering and design. Dr. William Murphy founded this prestigious award in 1996 to recognize mentors who lead, inspire, and empower using excellent communication

skills – starting with Woodie himself, and most recently recognizing Lucien Junkin, lead mentor for Houston-based *FIRST* Robotics Competition Team 118, Robonauts.

- The *FIRST* Dean's List Award, named after *FIRST* Founder Dean Kamen, celebrates outstanding student leaders whose passion for and effectiveness at attaining *FIRST* ideals is exemplary. Starting in late 2020, *FIRST*, with funding from generous donors, will award the [Woodie Flowers Memorial Grant](#) annually to one *FIRST* Tech Challenge or *FIRST* Robotics Competition Dean's List Award winner to support their pursuit of higher education in STEAM.

We'll continue to celebrate and inspire *Gracious Professionalism* through the *FIRST* Core Values. Founded by students from Camdenton LASER 3264 *FIRST* teams and embraced by the *FIRST* community, [#WalkLikeWoodie](#) invites us all to post photos and memories of Woodie on social media, and to share acts of *Gracious Professionalism* and ways they intend to follow in his footsteps. On October 12, Walk Like Woodie Day, we invited our community on social media to share the hashtag. Here are just a few of the hundreds of posts, comments, and shares made in remembrance:

**Follow *FIRST* and continue sharing how you [#WalkLikeWoodie](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#).**

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If you have an inspiring story or piece of wisdom that you've picked up through your experiences in the *FIRST* community, please reach out to us at [inspire@firstinspires.org](mailto:inspire@firstinspires.org) and inquire about becoming a guest contributor for Inspire.

*Back to Blog*