

Dr. John B. Flege, Jr. is recognized as a leading scholar, pioneer, and innovator in the field of cardiac surgery. His 60-year career has touched the lives of countless individuals around the globe.

Dr. Flege shares that in high school, he was not a top student and had not planned to attend college. Following graduation, he saw an ad in the newspaper and sought a job in a barrel factory in Covington. The work, he discovered, was hard and dangerous, and by summer's end, Flege had concluded that perhaps he should give college a try.

He borrowed money from an uncle for a bus ticket to Lexington, and arrived at the University of Kentucky with no idea what he would study. He liked the idea of being a structural engineer but did not have the grades to be accepted into the engineering program. Fortunately for Flege, UK's pre-med program was less competitive and he was able to enroll. To pay for his classes, he worked odd jobs, most notably as a tire repairman.

Flege is known for his subtle sense of humor, a natural curiosity and a knack for improvising. He explored, learned, and even invented things he needed for surgery. Whatever his task, he applied a principle he kept for life: "Any job worth doing is worth doing well."

Dr. Flege's knowledge and expertise as a surgeon became widely known, and he is recognized as a pioneer in the development of minimally invasive techniques in cardiac surgery. Dr. Flege served as Director of Cardiac Surgical Services at The Jewish Hospital and The Christ Hospital (Cincinnati), and Director of the Division of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery at the University of Cincinnati. During his tenure at University Hospital, the cardiac transplant program was established. Flege and his team successfully transplanted more than one hundred hearts.

Dr. Flege has promoted research and sharing of information between colleagues through his membership in a variety of medical societies. He has authored more than fifty original articles, and has taught students at universities around the world as a professor. Many of Flege's students have gone on to make significant contributions in the medical field.

In his 60's, Dr. Flege considered a career change. While working full time as a surgeon and teaching, Flege took classes at the University of Cincinnati College of Law. He decided to study law because he was curious about the legal system and the government, and hoped that law school would lead to an understanding of how the government worked. He graduated from law school in 1992 and was admitted to the bar in 1993. However, he says jokingly, he never achieved the clarity he had hoped regarding government functions and he decided to keep his job as a heart surgeon.

Dr. Flege and his wife Allison lived their adult lives in Cincinnati, where their home was blessed with four children. Despite Flege's exceptional personal and professional success, he fondly remembers the teachers who played a significant role in his upbringing in Grant County. Flege believes the best thing people can do for themselves is to read. If a person can read, he can learn anything. Dr. Flege encourages students to recognize their talents, take advantage of opportunities, and always do their best. Remember, "Any job worth doing is worth doing well."

A favorite quote of Dr. Flege's is, "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these, 'It might have been.'" (John Greenleaf Whittier, from the poem Maud Muller, 1856).