JEROME P. KEUPER
DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD RECIPIENT:
CHIP HEFLICH

By Karly Horn

Henry "Chip" Heflich '73 came to Florida Tech in the late 1960s to be close to the budding space program and to study electrical engineering. But it was a lesson in Professor Catherine Ackerson's history class that has had, perhaps, the largest impact on his career.

"She told us, 'When I got my bachelor's degree, I thought I knew everything there was to know about the world's history. When I got my master's degree, I gathered that I might not know as much as I thought I did. When I got my Ph.D., I realized I didn't know anything at all,'" Heflich recalls. "For some reason, that stuck with me, and as the years went by, I realized how utterly, perfectly on target Dr. Ackerson was."

The philosophy sparked a passion for lifelong learning that led to Heflich's exciting, successful career and his receipt of this year's Jerome P. Keuper Award.

In one of the earliest renditions of Florida Tech's cooperative learning program, Heflich worked for NASA at Kennedy Space Center while he was earning his bachelor's degree. After working on the first stage of the Saturn V rocket's electrical systems and Apollo program missions 12 through 17, Heflich received his Florida Tech diploma and a job offer from NASA.

However, as the space industry's interest shifted to the shuttle program, Heflich's shifted to the semiconductor industry, and he accepted a position designing analog integrated circuits for Texas Instruments. While there, he earned his master's degree in electrical engineering from Southern Methodist University as well as an MBA from the University of Dallas.

As his passion for invention grew, so did his entrepreneurial spirit, and Heflich left Texas Instruments to form MicroNet Research, a company that designed corporate, local and wide area network computer systems.

Meanwhile, soon to be opened up for commercial applications, what Heflich referred to as a "newfangled idea" was gaining traction: the internet.

He didn't know much about it, but he knew he wanted to be part of it. So, Heflich dove into the books, giving himself a crash course on the Unix operating system and eventually commercializing his technologies.

"You have to recognize opening doors, and if you're prepared, you can jump through them," Heflich says. "Throughout my life, I was constantly reading and trying to learn new things, and it gave me a lot of options for what I could do in my career."

Heflich co-founded Genuity with a vision to develop corporate internet services, including data-center-quality web server facilities and a distributed web content access optimization platform called Hopscotch.

Met with rave reviews, Genuity was acquired by GTE, ultimately becoming Verizon. From there, Heflich was recruited to become the chief technology officer for AudioNet, an early pioneer in internet-hosted video streaming started by Mark Cuban, who today is known for being a serial entrepreneur, investor and ruthless "shark" on ABC's "Shark Tank." The company was later renamed Broadcast.com and was purchased by Yahoo in the late '90s for more than $5 billion.

"What motivated me was that competitive spirit of knowing that each venture challenged the thinking of present technology," Heflich says. "I didn't actually realize at the time that I was so competitive—I was too focused on just having my nose to the grindstone, so to speak."

His enterprise and ambition didn't cease with his retirement in 2000, as evidenced by his contributions to the Florida Tech community alone. Heflich served on the board of trustees for nine years. In 2009, his generous donation provided for extensive renovation to Florida Tech's All Faiths Center, including the bell music system that can be heard throughout campus before religious services and many sporting events.

"It is quite rewarding to see the progress the school has made over the years and the prestigious notoriety it has obtained," Heflich says. "For me, to be part of that is an extraordinary honor."

Florida Tech is not the only benefactor of his generosity. In 2002, Heflich joined the board of Reflect Systems, serving as chairperson from 2006 to 2013. He is a founding member of the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., and he continually contributes to charitable organizations like PIKE University, Dallas LIFE homeless shelter, Prestonwood Pregnancy Center, The Warren Center for children with developmental differences and the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research, an organization of particular significance to Heflich, who lost his wife, JoAnn, to the disease in April.

"I think it's just important to give back to our fellow human beings," Heflich says. "I was blessed with all those opportunities and adventures, and somehow, I'd like to share that with other people."