

The Precious Flame of Knowledge

[Photo: Dr. Farmer.jpg] **2/22/21** — Fire holds a special place in the human psyche. Early human societies used fire to cook their food and to provide warmth. Indigenous tribes used fire as a protection from predators and as a source of light at night. Natives would use fire for communication purposes and would dance around fires during various tribal ceremonies. Fire was incredibly important to early societies. The societies that learned to harness the powers of fire prospered disproportionately well. Wherever these early societies expanded geographically, they took fire with them.

Later, more advanced societies used fire to develop steam engines, to power factories, and to ignite economic development. Early lighthouses used fire to help ships navigate dangerous waters and to safely dock in harbors. Paul Revere famously used fire-lit lanterns to signal if the British were attacking the American colonies by land or by sea. The cowboys of the West would sit around fires to eat, to warm themselves, and to share stories and poetry.

Today, even in the most modern of homes complete with central heat and air, fireplaces often provide the desirable aesthetics of sound and flickering light. Lovers often associate a warm, crackling fireplace with romance. Whether it is a candle-lit dinner or the glow of a warm fireplace, there is something about fire that causes our brains to relax.

Fire also holds many symbolic meanings. Eternal flames burn in various cultures around the world to honor deceased leaders, fallen soldiers, or victims of war. A few eternal flames burn in honor of the commitment to learning and the expansion of knowledge. Fire is also frequently used to symbolize wisdom, knowledge, and power.

While early societies harnessed the power of literal fire, later societies realized that knowledge literally equated to power. Knowledge of warfare, technology, medicine, and a myriad of other disciplines provided societal advantages. Knowledge provided national security and economic advantages that resulted in measurable global power.

Higher education institutions around the world are committed to protecting and preserving the precious flame of knowledge. Not only do colleges teach knowledge, they create it. Through research and experimentation, higher education institutions actually create new knowledge. Scholars literally reshape the world.

Royal Society fellow Edward Jenner invented the smallpox vaccine in 1796, which ultimately led to the eradication of smallpox and the creation of the field of immunology. Professor Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin in 1928, which effectively treated a plethora of infections. UCLA and Stanford University were instrumental in creating the internet in 1969. The spinoff technologies and new knowledge associated with the internet are immeasurable. Another example of new knowledge was produced by the international team of researchers associated with the Human Genome Project. In 2003, the researchers completed the sequencing and mapping of all human genes. The resulting new knowledge led to more informed treatment of many diseases.

Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us all of the importance of knowledge. We have increasingly turned to science for life-saving solutions to the real and present danger. The crisis has been

a reminder of the critically important role that knowledge plays in both protecting our loved ones, and in preserving our way of life.

At Weatherford College, we provide our students with the education and credentials necessary to secure employment and to financially provide for themselves and their families. However, we also preserve knowledge and share it with the next generation. Just as fire was the tool that advanced early societies and changed the developing world, knowledge will be the tool that we at WC will continue to use to more effectively serve our society and to make this world an even better place. Weatherford College will strive to ignite a passion for learning in our students, and we will resolutely continue to protect, preserve, and enrich the precious flame of knowledge.

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