



SIFE History

Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE) is a global, non-profit organization that is literally changing the world through highly dedicated student teams on more than 1600 university campuses in 40 countries. SIFE offers these students the opportunity to develop leadership, teamwork and communication skills through learning, practicing and teaching the principles of free enterprise, thereby improving the standard of living for millions in the process. Guided by distinguished faculty advisors and supported by businesses around the globe, SIFE Teams teach important concepts through educational outreach projects, including market economics, entrepreneurship, personal and financial success, and business ethics to better themselves, their communities and their countries. Each year, SIFE competitions are held worldwide, drawing together thousands of students and business leaders to pay tribute to these extraordinary educational outreach projects.

SIFE has been helping others achieve their dreams through free enterprise education for more than a quarter century. Today SIFE is the world's preeminent and largest university-based free enterprise organization.

SIFE had modest beginnings in Texas where the National Leadership Institute's Robert T. "Sonny" Davis, a Texas attorney, founded it in 1975. Originally a regional project, SIFE was funded by Southwestern Life Insurance and its chairman, the late William Seay. Each fall, university teams were invited to attend leadership-training programs where they would learn the principles of free enterprise and develop leadership skills. They were challenged to go back to their campuses and conduct free enterprise outreach projects in their communities. In the spring, the teams were invited to present the outcome of their efforts to judges at regional competitions who evaluated how well they taught others a working knowledge of the free enterprise system.

For the most part, SIFE has grown in scope each year; but in 1982, when the nation's economy was severely affected by recession, SIFE sponsorship fell dramatically, jeopardizing the organization's future. Mr. Davis was determined to secure new, dedicated leadership for SIFE. He found SIFE's leader in Alvin Rohrs, then Director of the National Free Enterprise Center and SIFE advisor at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri. Dr. Rohrs secured space for a national SIFE headquarters on SBU's campus, and the organization began its turnaround. Notably, Inc. Magazine named Dr. Rohrs "Entrepreneur of the Year Supporter of Entrepreneurship" in 1995.

In 1985, Jack Shewmaker, who was Vice Chairman and CFO of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., became SIFE's Chairman, adding significant credibility to the organization and resulting in rapid growth of fund raising. Wal-Mart provided stipends to faculty advisors who were named Sam M. Walton Free Enterprise Fellows, in honor of the founder of Wal-Mart.

Following Mr. Shewmaker's tenure, Stanley Gaines, then CEO of GNB, Inc., accepted the SIFE Chairmanship in 1988. He launched a campaign to fund the Jack Shewmaker Center/SIFE National Headquarters in honor of Mr. Shewmaker's service, and in 1989, SIFE moved into the new facility in Springfield, Missouri.

In 1992, Jack Kahl, CEO of Manco, Inc., was named Chairman. Under Mr. Kahl's leadership, the number of regional competitions grew, the number of participating teams hit an all-time high, and SIFE's Board of Directors grew to more than 100 members strong. Another inspirational leader, Tony "Too Tall" Stebbins, formerly Sr. Vice President, Market Development at Newell Company, took the helm of the SIFE board in 1998, even while battling cancer. He continued to focus on SIFE's vision to grow globally. An inspiration to all, "Too Tall" passed away in October 1998.

The seeds of the SIFE global expansion were sown in 1995 when the SIFE Team from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln guided by Sam Walton Fellow Dr. Robin Anderson encouraged the first university teams from outside of the United States to participate in SIFE. The first teams were exchange students

from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. They competed at a SIFE USA Regional Competition in Richmond, Virginia. The first competition outside of the United States was held the following year in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan on March 20, 1996. In 1997, 21 SIFE Teams participated in an interregional competition in Almaty, Kazakhstan. In November 1998, SIFE asked Yusuf Majidov to assist with the coordination of SIFE in Central Asia. SIFE also launched SIFE Teams in Canada, Mexico and Poland during these same years.

From 1998 to 2001, Mike Merriman, President and CEO of Royal Appliance/Dirt Devil, Inc., led SIFE as Chairman of the Board, helping SIFE focus on long-term growth as the nation's premier collegiate free enterprise organization. SIFE headquarters grew to more than 25 full-time employees, and SIFE's Board of Directors expanded as well.

During the late 1990's, SIFE expanded internationally into Albania, Brazil, South Korea, Ukraine, Russia and Uzbekistan.

On September 13, 1999, SIFE officially dedicated its expanded headquarters, renamed The Jack Shewmaker SIFE World Headquarters. The 11,200 square-foot addition was named the Robert W. Plaster Free Enterprise Center, and the existing building was named The Jack Kahl Entrepreneurship Center. The buildings and complex were named after three of SIFE's longtime supporters who each stepped forward with \$250,000 commitments to help kick off the building fund campaign. The expanded headquarters facility houses SIFE's dedicated staff who support SIFE Teams in the United States and 37 other countries around the world.

In the year 2000, SIFE saw its most significant growth with new program operations opening in Australia, Belarus, Botswana, Ghana, Malaysia, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa and United Kingdom. This growth was in preparation for the new competition structure planned for SIFE. For the 2000/2001 academic year, SIFE announced a new competition format to accommodate its international growth. SIFE regional champions in the U.S. would now advance to the SIFE USA National Exposition in Kansas City, Missouri. This new format would allow each country that holds a SIFE national competition in their country to earn the right to send its champion team to compete at the newly announced SIFE World Cup.

From 2001 to 2002, Tom Moser, Vice Chairman of KPMG, led SIFE as Chairman of the Board, which grew to more than 170 members strong. In July 2001, SIFE held its inaugural SIFE World Cup competition in London, England, where National Champion SIFE Teams from 17 countries vied for the title of SIFE World Cup Champion. Lee Scott, President and CEO, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., hosted the event. Twenty-one global chief executive officers from eight countries served as final round judges.

In December 2001, country coordinators for SIFE countries gathered at the SIFE World Headquarters for the first Global Leadership Training Institute. During 2001-2002, SIFE expanded into Chile, China, France, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Slovenia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. In September 2002, SIFE World Cup 2002 was held in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, where national champion SIFE Teams from 23 countries competed for the title of SIFE World Cup Champion.

In October of 2002, Tom Coughlin assumed leadership of SIFE's Board of Directors. Tom's leadership is providing significant advancements in fund raising, program expansion and business awareness. The SIFE Board of Directors now has over 200 members. SIFE Teams in the United States have reached 795. Worldwide, the university-based program is located on 1500 campuses. New country operations in 2002-2003 included Germany, India, Kenya, Lesotho and Singapore. In October 2003, SIFE World Cup 2003 was held in Mainz, Germany, near Frankfurt. National champions SIFE Teams from 31 countries competed for the title of SIFE World Cup Champion.

Today, SIFE continues its strategic growth, spanning its reach to 1,400 **active** teams in 41 countries.