

Empowering Their Future

A lifetime interest in the outdoors persuaded Danny L. Koon, B.S. '77, M.S. '79, to study forestry, but he didn't take a traditional path. After graduating from Buckhannon-Upshur High School in West Virginia, Koon went to electronic school in Baltimore, then got a job with AT&T in Washington, D.C., before he was drafted in 1966.

"I made my first trip to Kentucky when I went to basic training at Fort Knox," he said. "After basic, we rented a car and drove back to West Virginia. I was really impressed with the Bluegrass and the horses—the beauty of it kind of stuck in my head."

After Koon got out of the Army, he saved up enough money to supplement his GI Bill and returned to the Bluegrass to attend the University of Kentucky. He earned a bachelor's degree in forestry and a master's in agriculture.

Koon took several business courses during his time at UK, and although he didn't end up directly working in forestry, he believes the college prepared him for the rest of his life.

"It was a really diverse degree that prepared me for anything I wanted to approach in life," he said. "While still finishing my master's thesis, I moved to Madisonville to work at Madisonville Community College. Then I began starting businesses."

His first was a lawn-spraying business. From there, Koon ventured into surface mine reclamation, eventually started a manufacturing consulting business, and also dove into real estate development. Now retired in Florida with his wife Beverly, Koon still has a few real estate projects going.

Thinking back to his time at UK as an older, non-traditional student, Koon said he appreciated all the help he got from faculty and staff in the college's family atmosphere. He wanted to empower current and future students to attain their college and career goals.

"I believe education is absolutely the key to anyone's future," he said. "I have a real soft spot in my heart for forestry students."

Because of the success he has attained, Koon began funding scholarships for deserving forestry students. He has included the forestry department in his estate plans, providing education and opportunity to forestry students for years to come.

"It's unbelievable the confidence I gained through college," Koon said. "I worked hard and had a lot of great professors that were very caring. It has served me throughout all of my life. To be able to help give that to students now is near and dear to my heart."

—Aimee Nielson

