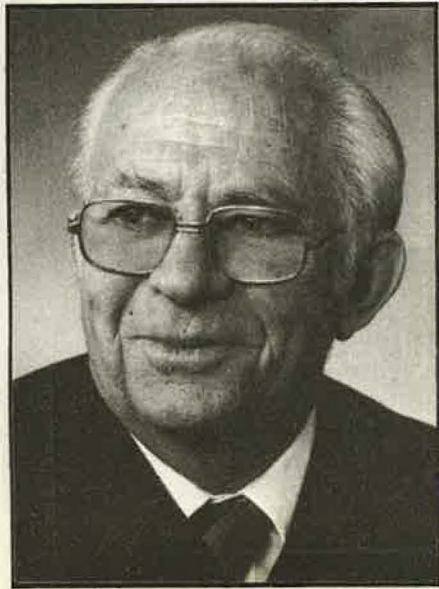


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UW recognizes four outstanding alums during Homecoming 1991

Four University of Wyoming alumni will be recognized during 1991 Homecoming festivities Oct. 11-12 in Laramie. Three -- the late Rodney Guthrie, Harold Kester and Ed Witzemberger, will received Distinguished Alumni Awards.

A fourth, Dick Brown, will receive the 1991 Medallion Service Award. Judge Guthrie will be honored posthumously, with his family accepting on his behalf. Shown, from left, are Brown, Guthrie, Kester and Witzemberger.

Distinguished Alumni

Kester's engineering influence felt at sites across West

Distinguished alumnus Harold Kester admits he didn't really know what earning a UW civil engineering degree would require when he registered for classes in 1936.

"I had no idea, at the time, what all was involved," the Loveland, Colo., resident says, "except that I knew I like to build things." Civil engineering seemed, at the time, to be a natural route to reaching his career goals. Judging from the success Kester has enjoyed professionally, he was right.

By the time Kester and his partner, George Fancher (also a UW alumnus), liquidated Loveland-based Eagle Construction Corp. in 1987, they had completed 249 contracts in 17 states and Canada.

Heading Eagle's list of accomplishments is installation of the largest hydro turbines and generators at Grand Coulee Dam. But that's just one of many notable jobs. Some other projects included the Grand River Dam at Langley, Okla., the Boysen Power Plant at Shoshoni, Wyo., and the Lake DeSmet tunnel near Buffalo, Wyo.

Kester started his career after returning from service in World War II. He worked for Kiewit Construction Co. as grade foreman for the crew building Highway 16 west of Buffalo. Kester then supervised construction of the road between Hill City and Custer, S.D.

When winter weather closed down the crew's work for the season, Kester decided he would rather work for himself. He quit Kiewit and became a partner in the new Flora Construction Corp. The firm was based out of Denver; but Kester operated from his Cheyenne home, bidding and building jobs in Wyoming. The first summer, he oversaw construction of a substation at Medicine Bow, a bridge across the Wind River near Dubois, and an irrigation diversion dam on the Tongue River north of Sheridan.

Kester and Fancher purchased Flora, moved the company to Wyoming and renamed it Eagle Construction Corp. in 1951. Their first major job was completing the Boysen Dam project Flora started. That job went well and returned a good profit. Eagle's owners felt secure about the future.

"We were beginning to feel we would be successful contractors," Kester says in a 1989 autobiography.

Eagle's affiliation with the Grand Coulee Dam project lasted 12 years. Five of those involved installing the turbines, the largest hydro-electric units in the world, according to Kester.

Installing the massive units was no small task. The 825-megawatt units generated more than 1 million horsepower per wheel. Each wheel weighed 500 tons; each shaft measured 62 feet in

length and 11 feet in diameter; the rotor had a 62-foot diameter.

Eagle Construction employees worked on most of the dams on the Missouri, Colorado and Columbia rivers. They also played a part in nearly all Bureau of Reclamation projects in Wyoming and several in Colorado, according to Kester.

Owning a business was hard work, but worth the effort, he says. Kester finds a great deal of satisfaction in building a project from beginning to end. Accomplishing that requires quality people, as well as the right resources to get the job done. Coordinating 300-500 workers challenged Kester, but "I think the satisfaction outweighs the frustration, by far."

Though Kester is officially "retired," he is far from idle. He maintains partial interest in another company, Loveland Ready-Mix, and he serves as a consulting engineer for several firms in the hydro electric industry.

World War II

Kester served in the 35th infantry of the Third Army (led by Gen. George Patton). His division entered France over Omaha Beach in 1942. They arrived at Orleans in mid-August; Kester's duty was to serve as public

works officer for the city and province. He served in similar capacities in Belgium and Manheim, Germany. A lot of his time was spent building and repairing bridges, repairing railroads and public utilities. Kester received a war medal from the Belgian government for his work in that country.

Much of his work in Manheim involved reconstructing a war-torn city. Before the war, Manheim was a bustling metropolis of more than 400,000. Following the war, 95 percent of the city was destroyed, and only 40,000 people remained.

Long Days at UW

Kester enrolled at UW five years after graduating from high school in Johnson County, Wyo. He spent the years between 1931 and 1936 on the family ranch and "did a little bit of everything, just to get by." By 1936, however, Kester decided to try something different. That's when he got a job and moved to Laramie.

Balancing work and school created some long days.

"I was forever studying and forever short of sleep," Kester says. Still, he found time to serve on the Reserve Officers Training Corps rifle team; and

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Harold Kester...

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he lettered on UW's first wrestling team. The extracurricular activities took a back seat — Kester says he rarely practiced in preparation for competitions.

Former UW President H.T. Person was one of the first people Kester met, and one of the most influential.

"He was the finest professor that I ever knew," Kester says of Person, then head of the Civil Engineering Department. Person instilled in his students an enthusiasm for whatever subject was under study. "It was almost impossible not to learn in his class," according to

Kester.

His respect for Person prompted him to serve on the H.T. Person Endowment Initiating Committee. This group is helping to raise funds for a chair in the College of Engineering, and members are "well on the way" to achieving that goal.

Repaying a "Debt"

Kester's work on the Person Committee is just one service obligation to UW that he maintains. He also is a member of the UW Foundation Board of Directors and the benefactor of several

civil engineering scholarships. Some might consider his extensive work and dedication to UW above and beyond the call of duty, but Kester says it's simply returning a favor.

"It is a good opportunity for me to pay back something that the university contributed to me," he says. "It seems like when you owe a debt, you ought to pay it back."

Fund-raising for the university in tight economic times is a challenging assignment, according to Kester. He finds broad support for UW, but not everyone can show it financially.

Kester is one individual who has been

able to do that. His contributions provided 24 scholarships last year to deserving students. Half of his contribution also went to help fund a new master's program starting this fall.

Word of the Distinguished Alumni Award left Kester "dumbfounded." He says he never believed he could have qualified for recognition, but he is appreciative.

Kester and his wife, the former Bonnie Jane Reymore (BA '41), have four children: Patricia Mueller, Rebecca Weisert, Scott Kester and Martin Kester.