

J. Kenneth Kennedy Distinguished Alumnus

By Julianne Couch
Alumnews Editor

FAST FACTS:

EDUCATION: B.S.C.E., Civil Engineering, UW '48

OCCUPATION: Consulting engineer and land surveyor, retired.

SELECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Named Outstanding Engineer by the Wyoming Engineering Society; Landowner of the Year, Wyoming Game and Fish department

BEST KNOWN FOR: "Sense of humor and story telling, but not public speaking"

FAMILY: Wife, Patricia (late wife, Margaret); three children, Shonna, John and Dan

HOBBIES: Golf, fly fishing, pheasant hunting, creating habitat for birds and wildlife.

J. Kenneth Kennedy has had dual occupations, and several avocations, for most of his life. He was born and raised a wheat farmer, an occupation he continues to this day. He served many years on Wyoming school boards. Finally, he is a retired engineer, having worked on many of Wyoming and Platte County's most important thoroughfares.

Kennedy was a project engineer for the Wyoming Highway Department from 1954 to 1965. During that time he supervised the design and construction of a farm-to-market road. "The Highway department made roads from farm towns out to the main highway so produce could get to market. Eventually they became state roads," he explained. One example is the road from Chugwater, Wyo., to Highway 85.

He was involved in the location and construction of I-25 in Platte County. "I was in charge of construction in the field. We worked on laying out alignment and did preliminary surveys," he said. There was little or no citizen input as to where the road would go, he said. "Then toward the end of process aerial photos came into play - that made it a lot easier. Some of topographical maps for that area weren't available then either, so we did without them."

Kennedy served as city engineer for Wheatland and county engineer for Platte County since 1965. He was the engineer for three large irrigation



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districts in southeast Wyoming and western Nebraska. For one of the districts he did the design and construction supervision for the complete renovation from open dirt laterals to an underground pipe lateral system over the entire district. In 1965 he took over an existing engineering/surveying firm and created Kennedy Engineering.

Kennedy grew up on a farm east of Chugwater. Of the current wheat crop, he said this has been a "good year, with lots of moisture, but with lots of hail." Most of the operation of the farm is in the hands of his children, "But that's ok - it still gets in your blood and you never get rid of it," he said. Kennedy Farms was named Co-operator of the Year by the Platte County Natural Resources district in 2000, and Landowner of the Year by the Wyoming Game and Fish department for the farm's involvement in conservation practices. Pheasants Forever magazine featured Kennedy Farms in one of its issues for outstanding conservation practices.

While attending UW, Kennedy was

a member of Sigma Nu fraternity. He also took part in intramural sports such as softball and basketball, which he described as "a lot of fun." After graduation he returned to the family farm in Chugwater for six years.

In addition to farming and engineering work, Kennedy has devoted much time and energy to Wyoming public education. He served on the school board of Platte County School District No. 1 for 13 years. He was a member and the president of the Wyoming School Board association. He was given the "School Bell" award for his contribution to education in Wyoming. He was appointed a charter member of the Wyoming Community College Commission by Gov. Stan Hathaway and was appointed to the Education Commission of the States by Gov. Ed Herschler. Kennedy recalls his time in serving on school boards. "You always knew a UW grad or fraternity brother and you got to work with legislators. It was a great time - it was great to be from Wyoming and work together to develop a better education system."

Edward W. Hunter, executive director of the Kaiser Foundation in Cody, Wyo., recalls Kennedy's service on the school board when Hunter was superintendent. "He spearheaded our efforts to reorganize the school district, our rebuilding of the Wheatland High School after a destructive fire, the impact of the power plant's arrival, and the always present need to improve the educational milieu."

Kennedy said it was an "exciting time" to rebuild the Wheatland school while at the same time planning ahead to the increased enrollment the new Laramie Basin Station power plant would bring to town.

He was named Wyoming's Eminent Engineer in 1982 by the College of Engineering's Tau Beta Pi honor society. He was president of the Wyoming Engineering Society (WES) in 1978. He was named its Outstanding Engineer for 2006 by WES. He helped establish the H.T. Person chair in the College of Engineering. He and his wife Patricia have their names on the bronze bust of Dean Person located in the Engineering building. According to Paul A. Rechard, who nominated Kennedy for this award, the couple established an endowment "to bring top high school juniors to the campus for two weeks of training and fun to introduce the students to various engineering concepts. Many of the students decided on a career in engineering after participating in those programs."

Paul Tyrrell, state engineer, commented on Kennedy's award. "In observing many past winners of this award, it is not unusual to see people who have taken their talents abroad to do great things. I feel pride in the fact that our graduates do such a fine job of being Wyoming ambassadors on a world wide stage. Alternatively, Ken mainly directed his talents, and his life, back toward the state and community he loves."

Thomas F. Stroock, president and CEO of Alpha Development Corporation, agreed with Tyrrell's assessment. "Ken is a Wyoming gentleman of great ability, a contributing citizen and a leader in every group with which he is associated."

Kennedy is proud to say for a period of 16 years, at least one of his four older sisters or himself was registered at UW. His reaction to winning the Distinguished Alumni award was to be "very pleased, of course, to be running with the big dogs. Lots of very influential people have received this award and I felt very pleased to be among them."