GIFT HONORS COMPASSIONATE LEGACY OF A LEGENDARY PRESIDENT

Ann King Reynolds is mystified.

A man she has never met just gave Emporia State University a half million dollars to honor her father, the 11th president of the institution, known then as Kansas State Teachers College.

“I’m riven with curiosity about Mr. Piculell’s relationship with my father,” Reynolds admitted.

While Reynolds earned her undergraduate degree from KSTC in 1958, she doesn’t recall crossing paths with Piculell, who graduated a year later.

“I’m most eager to chat with him at some point,” Reynolds said.

“Mr. Piculell” is Arthur C. Piculell. His $500,000 gift creates the Dr. John E. King Endowed Professorship within The Teachers College, Emporia State’s distinguished teacher preparation school.

On establishing the King professorship, Piculell recalls the memory of his first encounter with the president of what was then Kansas State Teachers College, where he came from New York to enroll.

“I’d never been west of Pennsylvania before,” Piculell recalled, admitting that a friend talked him into attending college with him in Kansas while having a beer in a hometown tavern.

Piculell arrived on campus, strolling into Plumb Hall to enroll as a freshman. “A man walked across the rotunda and asked me what he could do for me,” Piculell said, soon finding out that the man who greeted him was Dr. John King, the college’s president.

“Let me do this for you, young man,” Piculell recalls King telling him. “Why don’t you come see me every month, and I’ll help guide you through your college career?” Those conversations between Piculell, the student, and King, the president, continued through Piculell’s four years at KSTC and are the source of fond memories today.

Piculell said King’s legendary compassion for students steered him through a successful academic career at KSTC, which was also where he met his wife, the former Dee Wagner.

Art and Dee married in 1959, the same year they earned bachelor’s degrees—psychology for Art, music education for Dee. Dee taught school in Scott City, Wichita
and Lawrence, where Art earned a law degree from the University of Kansas. In later years, the Piculells developed residential communities and commercial investments in Oregon, Washington, and Arizona.

In establishing the King distinguished professorship, Piculell achieves several firsts in philanthropy at Emporia State University. Not only will this fund become the first endowed professorship established by an individual within ESU’s renowned Teachers College, but he also becomes the first donor to establish endowed professorships in each of Emporia State’s three undergraduate colleges.

Previous gifts from Piculell and his late wife have established endowed chairs in honor of Dr. Herman Baehr in the School of Business, and Rosamond Hirschorn in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

For The Teachers College, the King Distinguished Professorship creates a vehicle to honor the legacy of the man who served as KSTC president from 1953-1966.

“We will have a rare opportunity to bestow Dr. John E. King Professorships and recognize and honor outstanding faculty who have built state, national, and international reputations that will attract students and faculty colleagues to come to Emporia State to study,” said Dr. Ken Weaver, dean of The Teachers College.