Kao was born in 1949 in a small town in Taiwan called Jhushan in Nantou. He graduated from National Taiwan University with a BS degree in electrical engineering. After graduation, he decided to apply to schools in the United States for his postgraduate studies. He was offered a teaching assistantship at the University of Tennessee, which helped to pay for his tuition and expenses. Here, he earned his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in electrical engineering and was also involved in research for NASA and the U.S. Army.

Prior to co-founding Garmin, Kao served as a systems analyst at Teledyne Systems for inertial, radio navigation and fire control systems. While at Magnavox Advanced Products, he designed the Kalman filter algorithms for Phase II GPS user equipment. He later served as engineering group leader with King Radio Corporation and Allied Signal, where he led the development of the first GPS navigator to be certified by the FAA.

Kao co-founded Garmin Corporation with Gary Burrell in October 1989 to integrate Global Positioning System technology into navigation devices for multiple markets. He is credited with the breakthrough design and engineering of the GPS software technology that formed the foundation of the original Garmin product line.

The company, initially named ProNav and later re-named Garmin – a play on the first names of the founders – introduced its flagship GPS product for the domestic marine market, and shortly thereafter expanded to international marine and aviation applications. Burrell and Kao established their first office in Lenexa, Kansas, in 1989, and started to build up their US campus at the current Kansas City suburb location in 1996.

Currently a world leader in aviation, marine, recreational, fitness and automotive GPS markets, Garmin has reported significant growth over the past 15 years. The company employs nearly 3,000 employees worldwide and has facilities in Kansas, Oregon, Arizona, Taiwan and England. Garmin has shipped more than 10 million GPS navigation, communication and information devices.

Kao has served as Chairman of Garmin Cayman since August 2004 and was previously Co-Chairman of Garmin Cayman from August 2000 to August 2004. He has served as Chief Executive Officer of Garmin Cayman since August 2002 and previously served as Co-Chief Executive Officer from August 2000 to August 2002. Kao has served as a director and officer of various subsidiaries of Garmin Cayman since August 1990.

Kao has given back greatly to the University of Tennessee. The Min Kao Electrical Engineering and Computer Science building on the University of Tennessee’s engineering campus was opened May 14, 2007. This new facility was built with the funds from Kao’s donation, which was the largest private donation in UT history to that date. He has also established a Kao Family Foundation in Olathe, Kansas.

He and his wife, Fan, enjoy traveling and spending time with their two children. They currently live in Leawood, Kansas.

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