

College of Agriculture
Honorary Doctoral Degree Nomination, 2009-2010

Nominee: Robert D. Burke

Nominator: Department of Forestry and Natural Resources

Honorary Doctoral Degree Nomination of Robert D. Burke
Department of Forestry and Natural Resources
September 25, 2009

B.S. Forestry, Purdue University, 1960

The Department of Forestry and Natural Resources is pleased to nominate Robert D. Burke for an honorary doctorate from Purdue University.

Mr. Burke is retired from a distinguished career at Pierson Hollowell Veneer Company in Lawrenceburg, IN, where he served as a veneer log buyer for the tri-state region of Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky. He also served as forest manager of timber properties owned by the company.

As one of the first foresters certified by the Society of American Foresters (SAF), Mr. Burke is an acknowledged authority on hardwood forestry. He is sought out regularly by industry, private landowner associations, and state and federal governmental leaders for advice and direction in the management of hardwood forests. In recognition of his contributions to the advancement of forestry, he was elected a SAF fellow in 1985. Mr. Burke truly is a passionate visionary who recognized half a century ago the importance of trees to our national economy and global well-being. Among the many accomplishments and indications of his professional stature, particularly noteworthy is his role as co-founder and past president of the Walnut Council, an international association representing nearly 1000 woodland owners, foresters, forest scientists, and wood-producing industry representatives in 45 states and seven foreign countries. Mr. Burke also is co-founder of the Hardwood Tree Improvement and Regeneration Center (HTIRC) at Purdue, on whose advisory committee he still serves. HTIRC serves as a model of university-federal agency-industry cooperation that is unparalleled in North America. Mr. Burke is an advocate for valuation of ecosystem services provided by forests, and in that capacity he serves on the Forestry Committee of the Chicago Climate Exchange. He also was appointed to the Forestry Committee of the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), the first Hoosier to serve on a national committee for NACD. Mr. Burke is a strong proponent of globalization as it pertains to forestry and the competitiveness of domestic forest products industries, and he is well known and respected internationally. He has represented the hardwood industry on trade missions to Vietnam and Taiwan, participated in study tours to France and Germany, and traveled to 12 European countries to exchange methods of hardwood forest management practices.

In addition to being elected a fellow of SAF, Mr. Burke has received a Certificate of Recognition from the United States Senate in appreciation of his contributions. He also has been recognized for his achievements by every state conservation and forestry association, and he has been given their highest awards including the Black Walnut Achievement Award (National Walnut Council); Fellow, Outstanding Career, Distinguished Career and Certified Forester (Society of American Foresters); Friend of Forestry Award (IDNR-Division of Forestry); Honorary Director and Honorary Life Member (Indiana Hardwood Lumbermen's Association).

The Department of Forestry and Natural Resources solicited letters in support of Mr. Burke's nomination from highly respected individuals in the natural resources profession and in government leadership. We received letters of support from U.S. Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana; Indiana Lieutenant Governor Becky Skillman; John Seifert, Indiana State Forester; Dr. Victor Lechtenberg, Purdue University Vice President for Engagement; Dr. Dennis Le Master, former Purdue University Department Head, Forestry and Natural Resources; Richard Lewis, President of the Forest Resources Association; and Mrs. Julie Fisher, Utah State Representative. Senator Lugar stated that "Bob has been a remarkable forester whose forty plus years of tireless leadership ... will help secure Purdue and Indiana's continued worldwide recognition in the various fields of forestry." Lieutenant Governor Skillman spoke of Mr. Burke's "extensive awareness and understanding of the forestry industry" and "his passion and knowledge of hardwood production". Forest Resources Association President Richard Lewis noted that Mr. Burke "is truly an exception 'Leadership' forester". State Forester John Siefert stated that "Bob's name comes to mind as one of those rare individuals who will be long remembered as a true leader in the profession of forestry." Vice Provost Lechtenberg considered Mr. Burke "an excellent nominee for an honorary degree" and noted that he found him "to indeed be a visionary – well beyond the field of forestry". Former Department Head Le Master observed that "For unselfish reasons, [Mr. Burke] wanted to increase research on hardwood tree improvement and regeneration of high-valued specie [and brought about] political, industry, and scientific support for his idea".

Mr. Burke remains an ardent advocate for Purdue University generally, and the Department of Forestry and Natural Resources in particular. He freely shares thoughts and information that he believes may be beneficial to the academic enterprise, and they often are! He gives selflessly of his time and talents to the institutions and organizations working to improve the human condition by seeing the value of the forest and the trees. Purdue is fortunate to count such a dedicated, passionate, and visionary leader among its alumni. We hope you agree with the Department of Forestry and Natural Resources and his many distinguished supporters that Mr. Burke is most deserving of an honorary doctorate.