

Starker Chair in Private and Family Forestry John Bliss

In 1995 Elizabeth Cameron Starker, the daughter-in-law of TJ Starker, member of Oregon Agricultural College's first graduating class of forestry students in 1910, gifted the College of Forestry with a 260-acre tract of forestland. Her intention was that the revenue from timber harvests on this property, which came to be known as "the Cameron Tract," would go into an endowment that would later finance an endowed chair in non-industrial, private forestry. However, due to the nature of the gift, it would take several years in order for the endowment to reach size large enough to support the new position. Recognizing the College's need for a specialist in private forestry, Dean George Brown crafted a plan wherein state funding and revenue from other timber sales were used in order to hire a professor to fill the chair quickly.

In 1997, John Bliss, from Auburn University, was named the Starker Chair in Private and Family Forestry. At that time, the College had much ongoing research on public and industrial forestry, but very little research focus on family forestlands, despite this being the single largest forestland ownership category in the country. "Family forestlands dominate landscapes throughout much of the United States, providing essential ecological services and forest products," Bliss explains. "Just as importantly, family forest owners provide invaluable human resources to their neighborhoods and communities."

When Bliss arrived in Corvallis, he spent some time in the woods with Barte and Bond Starker, Elizabeth Cameron Starker's sons, and owners of Starker Forests. Although Bliss initially had some reservations about what it would be like to hold a "named" chair, getting to know the Starkers quickly dispelled any doubts. "I was and continue to be amazed with what they're doing for sustainable forestry," he says. "It made me much more comfortable to know that I was allied with such good people."

Bliss notes that all of the endowed chairs have allowed the College to grow and expand in recent years; however, he is most excited for the future. "Of anything, I'm the most proud of my graduate students," he says. "They are profoundly inspiring and have great potential to shape the world of responsible private forestry."

His position as the Starker Chair has also benefited Bliss's students. "I am a strong proponent of experiential





John Bliss with graduate students from the Communities and Natural Resources class, atop the Finley Buttes at Zumwalt Prairie in September, 2008.

learning, which requires creating opportunities for students to engage with folks that are directly involved in forest resource issues,” says Bliss. “In the graduate class, Communities and Natural Resources, we take students to rural communities across the state where they learn directly from forest owners, community leaders, and citizens of all persuasions. This intense engagement has profoundly influenced many students’ understanding of rural issues, and inspired some great thesis and dissertation research. The class would not be possible without the freedom afforded by the Starker Chair.”
