

GENE MERKLEY

Answering His Call: The Life Journey of Gene Merkley

Graduate: Class of 1973 Occupation: President of Southern Indiana Hardwoods, Inc.

Some people know exactly what they are going to do when they leave college and officially join the workforce. Not Gene Merkley. Three years after attending Indiana University, he finally found his life-long calling. A former Beta Club member, Gene graduated from Forest Park in 1973 with honors, and afterwards, attended IU from 1973-77. Unfortunately, he fell just short of graduating. Gene needed ten more credit hours of foreign language; he would have received a Bachelor of Science degree in physics and a minor in math. Financial issues prevented him from completing his degree.

Gene experienced many jobs the first three years after leaving college. Starting in seventh grade, he and his brother Richard worked at Jerry Seidls' sawmill. He worked there through his college years, and afterwards juggled that with a job at an electric store where he installed electronics. Gene has also held many other jobs: commercial truck driving, a small stint working in a coalmine, and various construction tasks.

One year, while working at Randy Berg Construction, Gene came into close contact with a circular saw. The result: a six-inch long, half-inch deep gash above the knee on his right leg that deeply cut his muscle. However, that did not stop him. After going to the emergency room and receiving twenty stitches, he went straight back to work.

After searching for many years, in 1980 Gene realized why he wanted to get up in the morning. He and his brother Richard started their own business, Merkley logging, which has since turned into today's successful company, Southern Indiana Hardwoods. Since then, Genes other two brothers, Joe and Frank, have joined them.

The company of SIH purchases, hauls, saws, dries, and sells products such as grade lumber, pallet stocks, and railroad ties. A typical day starts and ends with a meeting of the four brothers. Gene's main job is to sell their products and buy the timber. When he goes on the road, he uses his cell phone to get in touch with potential customers and to stay in touch with the operations back at the mill. Gene says one of the worst moments of his career occurred when he received a phone call in the middle of the night. A person had called to inform him that the mill was on fire. He and his brothers did everything they could to salvage the remains, but they ended up having to relocate and rebuild.

In 1982, Gene married his love at first sight sweetheart, Sandy Elliott. Six years later, their family started with two beautiful children that he and his wife are extremely proud of. Chelsea is 20 and attending Embry Riddle Aeronautical University in Florida the nation's number one school for aerospace engineering and majoring in engineering physics. Alexis is currently 17 and a junior at Forest Park. She plans to pursue a career in pharmacy.

Gene faced many hardships while raising two teenage daughters and co-running his own business. What motivates him is having an accomplished company and well-rounded family going to work every morning and being a father but success doesn't guarantee happiness. However, in Gene's case, they are one in the same; he absolutely loves what he does.