

Nathan Baker, Senior  
Rochester Community High School  
Ms. Maria Kelsay, Teacher  
Mr. Dean P. Baker, Hoosier Hero

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“From a conservation and stewardship standpoint, I believe we are expected to leave the land, air, water, plant life and creatures in a better condition than when we arrived,” this the philosophy of my Hoosier Hero, Dean Baker. Dean’s legacy extends from business to service and from leadership to inspiration.

Dean P. Baker was born March 2, 1937 in Canton, South Dakota. Dean and his elder sister, Lois, were children of the Great Depression. He recounts “[that because of the depression], our parents prepared us for life through education. It was understood...that we would attend college.” After vacations to northern Minnesota and meeting a professor from Iowa State College Forestry Department, forestry interested Dean. With encouragement from Lois, Dean attended Iowa State College. Finishing college was not easy; his father died five days before his senior year. Finances were scarce, but Dean’s oldest friend, sister and now teacher offered to help him finish college. In 1959, he graduated with a B.S. in Forest Management.

I admire that Dean pursued and accomplished his interests and goals of education. As I choose my career path, I know I will be met with opposition. However, Dean’s commitment to seek an education that interested him despite financial hardship and grief makes him a hero and inspiration to seek knowledge to prepare for life.

Dean took a job offer with farmer-sawmiller Mr. Page Randall of Biggsville, Illinois after declining offers from the US Forestry Service and Weyerhaeuser. “I preferred to be a big fish in a small pond rather than a small fish in a big pond.” Soon

thereafter, Dean married high school sweetheart, Suzanne Turk. Unfortunately for the newly married couple, Mr. Randall was underfinanced. With inconsistent income in 1960, Dean's military draft was close so he joined the Army Reserve and went active in July. After declining military offers for officer training citing no desire to seek leadership roles, Dean went on reserve duty for 5 ½ years and moved his family to Dyersville, Iowa where he worked for a wood pallet manufacturer.

In 1963, Dean had a glimmer of hope for stable employment. He spotted an advertisement in a logger magazine for a vacancy at Pike Lumber Company (Pike) in Akron, Indiana. By the time he replied, the position was filled. However, Dean later contacted Mr. Howard Utter, Pike President, and he arranged for Dean to visit Indiana. Dean was attracted by the professionalism and forestland base at Pike. Mr. Utter and Dean shared a love for the forest and "doing things right." Pike was perfect: Dean lacked business skills that Mr. Utter could teach, and the company needed a forester. Dean, timber buyer/forester, was hired as the company's first employee with a forestry degree in 1964.

By 1968, Dean was on his way to become a stand-out forester. He led Pike in purchasing forestland in Parke County in what began the Carbon Region and the second Pike plant. Along with expanding the company, Dean created forest management plans for non-industrial, private forestlands in Indiana with Best Management Practices (BMP) before law required BMP. From these original plans, Pike now manages thousands of acres of forestlands for private owners. Dean also encouraged the company to upgrade logging techniques to conserve natural resources and hire more foresters. In conjunction

with private ownership management, Dean was instrumental in purchasing 80 of 100 Pike owned forests and creating Forest Management Policy and the Unique Area and Special Tree Policy. These methods to improve conservation and forest management have influenced others to shape legislation to improve Indiana's forestlands and natural resources. With these advancements, Dean moved up the corporate ladder assuming roles of Vice President, a shareholder, and director. Although he had never desired leadership roles before, upon becoming Executive Vice-President in 1982, he knew he was the best man for the job to be the President of Pike Lumber Company.

In 1995, Dean became President of Pike Lumber Company. During his presidency, Dean was not only a forestry expert, but an educator. Dean implemented a partnership with Akron Elementary School. As a result of Dean's efforts, for 14 years second graders from Akron Elementary have participated in a field trip to learn about forestry and the environment. Each year students tour Pike facilities, picnic and hike in the forest, and plant a tree. Dean is a hero for becoming a leader and using his leadership to better the community. After 35 years of service and creating the largest staff of private-business foresters in Indiana, Dean retired in 1999 with a Distinguished Hoosier Honor from Gov. Frank O'Bannon.

Throughout his career, Dean has been a leader, even though he never thought he would assume leadership roles. In 1975, he was the President of the Indiana Hardwood Lumberman's Association. He has been a member of Akron United Methodist Church for 45 years, a Sunday school teacher, and member of several committees. He is a 44 year member of the Akron Lion's Club and led the club to plant 400 street side trees in

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Akron. Each winter he prunes every tree planted, a long-lasting commitment of heroism. Also, for six years he served on the Fulton County Community Foundation Advisory Committee and he and his wife established an endowment fund in honor of their parents. Dean has accomplished many feats, but there are distinct recognitions that separate him from many foresters.

Perhaps Dean's most notable professional honor was in 2006 when he accepted the National Hardwood Lumber Association Forest Stewardship Award for Pike. In addition to this achievement, Dean and his wife created the Baker Forest Company with four forests in Indiana and Michigan. Portions of one of these forests in Kosciusko County by Silver Creek was planted from "highly erodible cropland" and today serves as wildlife conservation, education for Akron Elementary School second graders, hunting areas, and mushroom harvests. In true heroism, Dean is a member of the Advisory Committee for Hardwood Tree Improvement and Research Center at Purdue University to continually improve research and development of Indiana hardwoods. These recognitions make Dean Baker a Hoosier Hero because he gives of his resources and knowledge.

Dean has overcome great challenges of life from economic hardships to tragic grief. Through his inspiration, I know that I can reach great heights professionally, socially, and civically. Professionally, Dean has dedicated 50 years to forestland management, introduced policies and practices that have influenced others to shape legislation, and created industrial forestry. Through heroism, Dean is an admired citizen of Akron. Most importantly, Dean has made an impact in the lives of many people.

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Through educational field trips, community endowments, neighborly giving, and diligent work, my Hoosier Hero has made Indiana a better place than when he arrived here in 1964. Dean has inspired me to work hard, give to others diligently, use leadership opportunities wisely, and make Indiana a better home. His greatest accomplishment is encouraging others to commit to education and hard work while making a difference through humble benevolence. Dean Baker is my Hoosier Hero for his professional and civic commitment to make Indiana better for all Hoosiers.