

Harold G. “Hal” Burke

(1924 –)

Harold G. “Hal” Burke was born in Elkins, W.Va., March 19, 1924. He attended Randolph County schools and, following graduation from Elkins High School, entered the military and served as a lieutenant in the Philippines during World War II. Following his military service, he studied forestry at West Virginia University (WVU), earning a Bachelor of Science in 1950.

His first employment was with the West Virginia Conservation Commission, conducting wildlife research. He later became a salesman with the Osmose Treating Company. Recognizing the future of treated wood materials, Mr. Burke and two fellow foresters started their own company, Burke, Parsons and Bowlby Corporation in Spencer, W.Va. Operations were later expanded to include mill and treatment plants in Virginia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky and other parts of West Virginia.

The Burke, Parsons, and Bowlby Corporation continues today. In the mid-1970s, Mr. Burke sold his interest in the firm and formed a new wood treating company, Appalachian Timber Services, Inc. He worked as owner-operator of the company until his retirement in 1989. Throughout his career, he was recognized as a visionary by wood utilization foresters.

In 1972, he was chairman of the committee that developed the West Virginia Forest Practices Standards for the industry. These were the first such standards in the United States and preceded U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulations. These practices remained in effect until West Virginia adopted Best Management Practices in 1992.

An active member of the West Virginia Sawmill Operators Association, Mr. Burke saw the need for this association to include the whole wood industry in West Virginia. He helped organize the West Virginia Forest Products Association, later West Virginia Forests Incorporated, which became the West Virginia Forestry Association in 1985. Mr. Burke provided ongoing service to the organization, acting as president, secretary and board member. He was voted Director Emeritus of the Association in 2002.

Mr. Burke has been named a Distinguished Alumnus of the WVU Davis College of Agriculture, Forestry, and Consumer Sciences and its Division of Forestry. He has been a member of the Cross Lanes United Methodist Church for 50 years, assuming many leadership roles in the parish. He has taught Sunday school and served as a youth leader.

