



Bond Starker

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Third-generation foresters and timbermen, brothers Bond and Barte Starker have worked side by side nearly all of their lives, nurturing and expanding their family-owned business, Starker Forests. Together, they have promoted forestry research, sustainable forestry practices, and educational activities as part of their business operations and their commitment to community and future generations.

Bond and Barte were both born in Corvallis—April 28, 1947, and March 12, 1950, respectively—the only children of Bruce (1918-1975) and Elizabeth “Betty” Starker (1920-2004). The brothers’ paternal grandfather, Thurman James “T.J.” Starker (1890-1983), had first come to Corvallis in 1908 as a student at Oregon Agricultural College—now Oregon State University. T.J. was among the first four to graduate from the college’s forestry program in 1910.

In 1936, while serving as a forestry professor in Corvallis, T.J. bought his first plot of forestland—110 acres. This was the beginning of Starker Forests; by the late 1940s, T.J. along with Bruce had expanded the family’s holdings to more than 10,000 acres.

Bond and Barte’s Corvallis roots also extended from their mother’s side: Betty Starker, née Bond, graduated from Corvallis High School. She went on to Scripps College, graduating as a landscape architect. For more than six decades, Betty played an active role in the operation of Starker Forests.

Bond and Barte spent most of their childhood growing up in Corvallis. In 1962, Bruce and Betty moved their family to a larger house, halfway between Corvallis and Philomath, to the west. Today, this house—remodeled and expanded—serves as the headquarters of Starker Forests.

In the Starker family, it made perfect sense that young Bond and Barte would accompany their father and grandfather on outings into the woods. At first, they just tagged along, watching their father and grandfather go about the day-to-day activities of managing their forestlands. The boys learned the importance of evaluating stands, planning roads and logging sides, and building friendly ties with loggers, landowners, and others in the industry.

Later—when they were teenagers—they began to take on work duties of their own. “I remember running property lines, using a staff compass,” recalled Barte, referring to a then-common stake-mounted compass used for surveying land. “Of course, this type of work is done now using GPS [global positioning system].” Bond echoed his brother’s memories. “I’d go with Dad and Granddad to areas where we would prune double leaders, and check on road building and logging jobs.”

Bond and Barte both graduated from Corvallis High School and continued on to their hometown university, Oregon State. Bond received his B.S. in Forest Management from OSU’s College of Forestry in 1969; Barte took the same degree in 1972. While Barte felt that forestry was his trajectory all along, Bond wasn’t so sure. “I had passing thoughts of studying business or law,” said Bond.

Though Bond didn’t pursue a law degree, he took on a great deal of legal work and research for his first major project as a full-time member of the family business. Over more than three decades, T.J. and Bruce had acquired extensive forestlands, but the operation had never been formally established as a partnership or corporation. After graduating from Oregon State, Bond organized land deeds and prepared paperwork to create a formal partnership. In 1971, Starker Forests Partnership was officially created, with five core partners: Bruce, Betty, Bond, Barte, and T.J.

After graduating from OSU, Barte followed his brother’s footsteps into the family business. “I went right into the company. We were a small business with just three full-time employees,” said Barte.

One of those employees was Gary Blanchard, who had been hired by Bruce as the company’s first full-time employee in 1961. Gary went on to serve as chief forester for Starker Forests, and in 2012 still works part-time for the company after more than 50 years of service. He has known Bond and Barte since they were youngsters.

“I’m a few years older than they are,” said Gary, “but we learned together in the woods from T.J. and Bruce. The company has always had a family atmosphere, with everyone working together



Barte Starker

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on friendly terms. Bond and Barte have carried on that tradition, supporting their employees through good and bad times.”

The course of Starker Forests changed unexpectedly—and in an instant—on July 27, 1975. Accompanied by Bond, Bruce was piloting a small airplane over timberlands in Yamhill County, Oregon, when they crashed into a hillside. Bond survived the crash with contusions and a broken leg, but Bruce was killed.

Since 1971, Bruce had been the operational head of Starker Forests, though T.J. was still consulted on major decisions. With Bruce’s sudden death, Bond and Barte took on leadership roles in the company. T.J. also resumed a more active role in the company. In addition, both Bond and Barte credit Gary Blanchard with playing a key role during this period of transition.

“There was no question how we would proceed,” recalled Gary. “We had a great cadre of contract loggers, road builders, and other operators. We maintained our day-to-day field activities of harvesting, planting, and tending—without interruption.”

Bond and Barte divided key duties at Starker Forests according to their interests and skills. Bond focused on business, administrative, and financial activities—managing the office, negotiating sales, land swaps, purchases, and so on. Barte assumed leadership of the company’s forestry operations.

Together, Bond and Barte had large shoes to fill. They also saw an opportunity to bring new ideas and research to the company’s forest management practices. “Granddad came from a generation that sought minimal costs and investment,” said Bond. “He basically took small steps to help nature along.” Bruce had made a significant imprint on the company’s operations as well. He sought more productive, higher-site timberlands with rich soil. He also converted less productive stands of alder, maple, and brush to conifers. These efforts required increased investments in site preparation to achieve successful plantations.

Barte and Bond shared their father and grandfather’s long-term view of forest management, with its emphasis on reforestation and sustainability. In addition to bringing new technologies and practices to their company’s operations, they also promoted ongoing forestry research and industry improvements in a number of ways. From 1987 to 1999, Barte served as chair of the advisory council of the Coastal Oregon Productivity Enhancement (COPE) Program, which was administered by the USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station and OSU’s College of Forestry. Dozens of research papers emerged from COPE and helped improve forestry practices in Oregon and beyond.

While Barte’s work with COPE helped guide important research, he also helped shape public policies affecting forestry. From 1987 to 1995, he served as a member of the Oregon Board of Forestry, which appoints the state forester, oversees the Oregon Department of Forestry, and is responsible for state forest policy and forest management practices.

Starker Forests also helped establish and continues to support several of OSU’s Forest Research Cooperatives, including the operations of OSU’s Swiss Needle Cast Cooperative (SNCC). Launched in 1997, the SNCC conducts research to improve the health and productivity of Douglas fir in the face of the fungal foliage disease Swiss needle cast.

Bond and Barte’s commitment to forestlands not only influences their company’s operations but has also fueled their support for a broad range of educational programs. “Education is an important part of our heritage,” explained Bond. “It’s the legacy of our grandfather as a professor.”

Most notably, property of Starker Forests has served as an outdoor classroom for generations of students, from elementary-age kids to university students. For many years, Starker Forests has hosted an educational forestry tour for school groups and the broader public. Longtime employee Dick Powell leads small groups along the Starker Forestry Trail, which runs through the company’s first timberlands purchased by T.J. Starker more than 75 years ago. On the tour, visitors learn about plant succession, forestry management practices, and other topics.

Gary Hartshorn, president and CEO of the World Forestry Center, cited Starker Forests’ educational program as an important

community and industry asset. “It’s remarkable for a small company to fund a year-round forestry educational program,” said Gary. “Bond and Barte recognize how important it is to help educate and inform the public about forestry and industry practices.”

In addition to nurturing their family business over more than four decades, Barte and Bond each established roots of their own in the Corvallis community. In July 1978, Barte married Patricia Lemon, whom he had known since grade school. Barte and Pat have twin daughters, Sally and Wendy, born in 1980.

Seven months after his younger brother married, Bond wed Marilyn McCornack, in February 1979. The couple raised two children, James (b. 1981) and Anna (b. 1983). Barte and Bond are both now proud grandparents.

While the greatest share of Bond and Barte’s energy is dedicated to family and business, they have always considered broader involvement in their industry and community to be priorities. Bond served on boards and committees of the Oregon Forest Industries Council, the American Forest and Paper Association, the Northwest Woodlands Owners Council, the Oregon Tree Farm Committee, and many others.

In addition to his service on the Oregon Board of Forestry and with the COPE Program, Barte served as a board member of the Oregon Natural Resources Education Fund, Keep Oregon Green, the World Forestry Center, the Western Forestry and Conservation Association (of which he was president in 2005), and more. In 1990, the Society of American Foresters awarded Barte one of its highest honors, the Forester of the Year. Barte received the E.T. Allen award in 2010 for his leadership in Cooperative Fire Protection from the OFIC Forest Protection Committee. Bond and Barte were both named Fellows of the Society of American Foresters in 1999.

The Starker brothers also brought their interests and abilities to other organizations beyond forestry. Bond participated in important civic work, serving on the Benton County Budget Committee and on the Corvallis-Benton County Economic Development Partnership Board. Bond followed in the family tradition of service on the Old Mill Center for Children and Families board. Barte also served his community in numerous ways and has been a long-time board member of the Good Samaritan Hospital Foundation, the Boys and Girls Club of Corvallis, and the Benton County Fair Foundation. Barte is also a longtime member of the Rotary Club of Greater Corvallis.

Bond and Barte continue to deepen their family’s long-term ties to Oregon State University. The Starker family has been affiliated with the institution for more than a century. In the first decade of the 21st century, Wendy, Jim, and Anna Starker became the fourth generation of Starkers to graduate from Oregon State, while Sally graduated from the University of Portland.

In 1985, Bond and Barte established the Starker Lecture Series at OSU as a memorial to T.J. and Bruce. This annual series focuses on key topics in forestry. Bond and Barte are also both members of OSU’s Harris Society—a group of OSU community members who have made substantial financial contributions to the university. Bond also serves as a Trustee of the OSU Foundation.

In turn, OSU has recognized Bond and Barte for their service to the university. In 2002, they were jointly awarded the College of Forestry’s Distinguished Alumni Award. In 2011, they were again jointly honored, receiving the E.B. Lemon Distinguished Alumni Award from the OSU Alumni Association.

Under Bond and Barte’s stewardship, Starker Forests has grown to approximately 80,000 acres, all in western Oregon. Every year, their company helps renew harvested land by planting more than 400,000 seedlings. They care for their family’s timberlands with the understanding that forests serve many roles and must meet the needs of many generations and interests: forests are a key part of wildlife and fish habitat; they provide a place of peace and recreation for people; they provide a beautiful, renewable resource; and they support the economic well-being of communities.