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Office of the President
June 16, 2017

Members, Board of Trustees:

HONORARY DEGREE RECIPIENTS

Recommendation: that the Board of Trustees approve awarding an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters to Jewell Deene Ellis and L. Stanley Pigman as approved and recommended by the University Faculty.

Background: Pursuant to the Conditions of Merit for Honorary Degrees, the University Joint Committee on Honorary Degrees recommended to the elected Faculty Senators that the specified honorary degree be awarded to Jewell Deene Ellis and L. Stanley Pigman. The elected Faculty Senators have approved the recommendation.

Biographical sketches of the recipients are attached.

Action taken: Approved Disapproved Other _____

Jewell Deene Ellis

Jewell Deene Ellis was born in Boyle County, Kentucky on October 11, 1928, the oldest of 11 children. In addition to working on the family farm, Ms. Ellis helped her mother care for the younger children and take care of the chores related to running a busy household. She attended Forkland School, a combined elementary and high school, graduating as valedictorian of the class of 1947. While participating in 4-H activities, she got to spend a week at the University of Kentucky in Lexington and became enamored with the campus, setting her sights on enrolling there one day.

Ms. Ellis not only matriculated at UK, she excelled, being chosen to attend the American Home Economics Association annual national meeting in Boston her junior year. In 1951, she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in vocational home economics education, and later earned her master's in education from UK. She seriously considered becoming a county extension agent, but chose teaching instead, beginning what would become a 57-year career in education.

While at Nicholas County High School from 1951 to 1960, Ms. Ellis developed a reputation for innovative practices, both inside and outside of the classroom. Over those nine years, she supervised over 30 student teachers from the University of Kentucky. In 1960, she left secondary teaching to become a traveling teacher trainer at Murray State University. As a liaison with the Kentucky Department of Education, she supervised western Kentucky home economics education programs and coordinated a statewide curriculum project, her first of four. Her next move was to the state Department of Education's main office in Frankfort in 1971, where she rapidly advanced to the role of director of the home economics unit the next year. Subsequently, Ms. Ellis was called upon to take on a wider role in vocational education for the Commonwealth, serving in a variety of state educational leadership roles for 36 years until her retirement in 2008.

Known as a consensus builder and team player, Ms. Ellis inspired and earned respect and admiration from those with whom she worked, on the local, state, and national levels. Among her many accomplishments are the development of national standards for family and consumer sciences education; co-founder of the Family and Consumer Sciences Education Coalition; and playing an instrumental role in the merger of the School of Human Environmental Sciences at UK.

Her nominator writes, "Few people have had both the broad and in-depth impact on a field of study as Jewell Deene Ellis. She is one of those rare individuals who leaves her chosen profession better for multiple generations into the future."

L. Stanley Pigman

L. Stanley Pigman is a person who exemplifies and embodies commitment, determination, and service. As one of eight children from humble beginnings in the rural coal mining area of Knott County, Kentucky, he learned the value of hard work from his father. His father worked in highway construction and supervised a small crew. Stan worked on the crew in the summers during his high school years.

He also became an entrepreneur at an early age. His family grew vegetables, and he was allowed to market part of the green bean crop each season and keep the proceeds. During the school year, he was a contract photographer, taking and developing pictures for special functions and the high school yearbook.

A pivotal moment in Mr. Pigman's life came when he was 17 years old and received a mining engineering scholarship from the University of Kentucky. Despite some early academic struggles, he stayed the course and succeeded as a first-generation college graduate, earning his Bachelor of Science degree in 1981. Mr. Pigman began his professional career that year as a project engineer with a new mining company, Sierra Coal, a subsidiary of General Electric. Eventually, he followed his entrepreneurial spirit and in 1992, joined with two colleagues to form Sugar Camp Coal. Mr. Pigman later formed his own company, Pigman Coal Sales, providing sales services to an independently owned start-up company for a new mining project in western Kentucky. He built several more businesses that own and lease coal properties, then relocated his company headquarters to High Point, North Carolina, where his wife of 21 years, UK alumna and insurance executive Sheila Nickles Pigman, had purchased her own agency.

In 1999, the Pigmans decided to establish a scholarship program at UK for full-time undergraduate engineering students from Kentucky with financial need. They gave generously of their time as well as their finances. Mr. Pigman's commitment never faltered, even after Sheila's death in 2002. Since then, he has expanded the program several times and has become more and more involved with the student recipients.

Today, he and his second wife, Karen, are providing major scholarships for 28 engineering students each year. All told, over 80 students have benefited so far from their generosity. The scholarship recipients are known as Pigman Scholars. In addition to the scholarship program, the Pigmans also sponsor a leadership development institute for UK students.

When asked what motivates their philanthropy at the University of Kentucky, Mr. Pigman reflected, "I was given a scholarship to study at UK, and I couldn't have gone to college without it. The only way out of poverty is through education. There are still many young people in Kentucky in this same situation today, needing help to pursue a college degree and a successful career. That's why we do what we do."