

Pierce County

David Townsend

“The Coburg Tree Farm originated when my father bought the land in 1954. The minute he saw Washington state in 1920, he fell in love with the woods. Dad came from Cedar Falls, Iowa. They have pine trees back there that you can wrap your hands around. When he took the train across the Cascades, he couldn’t believe what he saw and instantly fell in love with the trees. He was just flabbergasted with their size. Imagine going through Snoqualmie Pass and seeing virgin forests from a train in 1920. After he saw the trees he wrote his mother, ‘Mom, I’m going to go to school out here’ – and he stayed. It must’ve been about 1920, because he had been in the Army briefly after WWI.” – Lane Townsend, Robert Wise’s daughter



During a summer job on his uncle’s farm in Yakima, Washington, Robert Wise decided to head over the mountains to Seattle and see what it was like. As Lane his daughter describes, the land and the trees enchanted Robert so much, he transferred his credits and finished college at the University of Washington (UW).

Robert spent his summer breaks working in logging camps while attending the UW. After graduating in 1924 with a degree in business, he took a job in a logging camp at Selleck. There, Robert ran small business ventures, such as selling firewood and coal stoves. Lane, “It wasn’t until after his business succeeded and we were pretty much grown up that he had enough money to invest. He went hunting for some good tree farm land and bought 160 acres in 1954 at a very reasonable price. The following year he bought the adjacent 120 acres, which had better trees on it. He worked the land and we continue his work to this day.”

Robert spent much of his spare time working in the woods. To entice his grandchildren to join him, Robert used monetary incentives. David, Robert’s grandson, explains, “Steve got 50 cents a day for helping. I got 25 cents for not getting hurt. We always thought it was ironic that he was admonishing us not to get hurt, and he was the one that was killed in a logging accident.” Shocking the family, Robert died in a logging accident on his property in 1966.

Lane and her husband Ivan Townsend inherited 120 acres from her father. Robert recognized the multi-generational aspect of tree farming and had put the other 160 acres in his grandchildren’s names. In 1992 the Coburg Tree Farm Partnership was formed. Ivan and Lane combined their inherited 120 acres with the 160-acre parcel. Lane, “I was very fortunate in

having a husband that appreciated the land and the opportunity. It was a lot of land to be responsible for.”

Prior to Robert’s death, Ivan Townsend, an electrical engineer, spent his weekends helping his father-in-law with the thinning and general maintenance of the property. In 1966, Ivan and Lane joined the Washington Farm Forestry Association. The meetings and presentations taught them forest management techniques that eventually earned them the “Washington State Tree Farmer of the Year” award in 1976. In 1996, Dave and his brothers received the “Pierce County Tree Farmer of the Year” award.

Dave and his brothers grew up working on their grandfather’s tree farm and now their children do the same. The second weekend in August is an annual event involving the entire family coming together to work the land. Lane, “It’s engraved in stone, that’s the day of the picnic. I have one brother that always provides a big salmon. When you have a marvelous heritage like that, you have to keep it and love it.”

Dave, “At my day job I come home sometimes and wonder if I’ve accomplished anything at the end of the day. At the tree farm you go up there and see your accomplishments. You see the trees planted and you watch them grow. It’s a very soul satisfying sense of accomplishment.”

On the topic of regulations, Dave comments, “You need to have a certain passion, maybe almost an irrationality, to be a tree farmer. It would be a sad day when regulations are such that it’s better to cut it up into five-acre tracts and build houses rather than grow timber. It doesn’t make sense.” Dave hopes the majority population will become educated enough to understand how increasing restrictions force landowners to sell out to developers.

The Coburg Tree Farm is named after the town in Germany that Robert’s ancestors are from. It’s held in a tree farm family partnership with Dave, his brothers, their wives and children. A “Forest Eternal” was Robert’s dream and his family is carrying it out with a generational management plan.

Dave, “On our 280 acres we figure we could cut and replant 3 acres a year forever. But three acres is too small for a commercial operation. We cut somewhere between 10 and 20 acres once every 3 to 5 years. To fund operations between harvests, we retain some of the proceeds from previous harvests in an operating account to pay the tree farm’s property taxes, road maintenance, insurance, replanting, fertilizing, brush control, pruning, thinning, equipment, forestry consulting, regulatory compliance, and harvesting costs. While the tree farm pays all the expenses of the farm, all of us work elsewhere to support our families.”

Profits after these ongoing costs fund education accounts for the children and future grandchildren, just as they have for the past 50 years. Some minor proceeds are also generated every year in “salvage” operations. In a salvage operation, they will comb the property for dead trees, wind thrown trees, trees with broken tops or other damage.”

“One thing I’d like to say about the tree farm is that for our family it has been a godsend teaching our kids some values that we hold, which is working hard and giving them a more realistic look at the world.” – Jan Townsend.

“You need to have a certain passion, maybe almost an irrationality, to want to go into this.” – David Townsend.

COBURG TREE FARM FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

Robert Wise (founder), 1900 - 1966

Lane Townsend, born October 27, 1927 (Seattle, Washington)

Ivan Townsend, 1925 - 1997

Steve and Kay Townsend

Dave and Jan Townsend

Carl and Jennine Townsend

Keith and Yvonne Townsend

Washington State Tree Farmers of the Year, 1976, Lane and Ivan Townsend

Pierce County Tree Farmer of the Year, 1996, Coburg Tree Farm / Townsend family

Pierce County Lions Club "Outstanding Farmers of the Year," 2002