



Pay Back Time

By Dr. James C. Kroll, Ph.D.

Over the last 20 or so years I have seen an interesting trend. It starts with a phone call from a young man who wants to come talk with me about careers in wildlife. In every case, he wants to come after normal work hours, so we set up an appointment. He arrives, family in tow. The story almost always is the same. He and his wife married right out of high school and have been happily married ever since. They have three children who seem to be well mannered and well-adjusted. But, here is the problem. *He is miserable!* He hates his job and now is coming to the realization he

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My daughter Sydney gave me an excellent book to read a few years ago. It was entitled, "Rich Dad, Poor Dad" by Robert Kiyosaki. Reading it turned

skills, something that made his activist real dad angry. Today, Kiyosaki is a tremendous success and a very rich, happy man.

These were my thoughts when about two years ago, I sat down for coffee with my long-time colleague, Dr. Mike Legg (who also grew up on the land). On the table was a newspaper, with a headline about all the carnage going on in Iraq. "You know," Mike said, "I read here there will be at least 35,000 wounded veterans coming back from Iraq when it all is said and done." That was a staggering figure. We both discussed what these wonderful—perhaps

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abandoned his dreams. His question is simple and straight to the point: "Do you have any night courses that will lead to a degree in wildlife management?" Unfortunately, the answer has been no. The young man went home very unhappy, his dreams dashed. But, that is about to change.

In 1997, I decided there had to be something we could do. Universities are changing ever so slowly. For too long, higher education has meant a student attending class after class, in which an over-educated professor with very little real world experience stands up front, railing on about his/her point of view.

out to be one of those life-changing events. Kiyosaki's thesis was intriguing. He believes in these times, you do not necessarily need a degree, you need an education! His real dad (poor dad) was a college professor, who believed in the old way of working hard over a career, relying on government and then retiring to his "golden years." His surrogate dad (rich dad) was the father of a friend, who was an entrepreneur who taught Robert to establish what he wanted to accomplish in life and where he wanted to go, then to acquire the skills to get there. He joined the Marines just to learn their management

our best and brightest—young men and women were going to do?

We started brain-storming about possible solutions. Mike already was involved in distance learning for advanced studies by National Park Service and National Forest Service personnel, so he knows a thing or two about the subject. One thing led to another, and before long we were fleshing out a new program that would accomplish what all those young people wanted when they came to visit me. Then we turned to a name for the program. At the same time, we both gave our new program a name. Stephen F. Austin State Universi-



Students learn by doing, not just reading about it.

ty's colors are purple and white. "Purple Pride" is every where in Nacogdoches. Why not call it the Purple Heart Scholars Program?

The next step was to develop the idea. Coincidentally, I am working with a unique project through the DeerChannel.com facility near Stephenville, Texas. We have placed live video cameras on bucks and they are broadcasting what he deer sees over their site. But, they also are very actively involved in working with Wounded Warriors and kids programs. We reasoned between SFA's and DeerChannel's advanced technologies, surely we could produce a landmark on-line education program;

and that is what we are in the process of doing. The new program not only will focus on wounded vets, but also any person (veteran or otherwise) who dreams to work in the out-of-doors. Through a series of on-line modules, coupled with capstone field experiences, a student will be able to acquire university certification of competence in fields such as deer management, deer breeding, upland gamebird management, waterfowl management, fishers (private and public) and geospatial technologies (GPS and GIS). Since my ancestors were gamekeepers in Germany almost 400 years ago, and since I feel the title "game keeper" is of the highest order (the Magna Carta acknowledges foresters and gamekeepers), programs will lead to a "Master Game Keeper" certification, along with individual certifications.

So, now the young person—especially those who have paid so much for our freedom—will have a way to realize his or her dreams. It now is time for

pay back. The real test will be whether or not in these hard economic times, conservation organizations, corporations, and individuals step forward to help out. We are launching a major campaign for support. We are not doing this for higher esteem in academia, rather to leave something great behind. Therefore, my "Up on a Stump" message this issue is, what will you do? *KJP*

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