

Warren R. Staley

Kansas State '65

Oxford Cup Roll No. 050

Ask Cargill, Inc. Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Warren R. Staley, *Kansas State '65*, how he moved from a blue-collar neighborhood to the executive suite at Cargill's lake office, and he will humbly recount a colorful tale about his remarkable journey.

The son of a railroad worker and a teacher, Staley spent his boyhood days in Springfield, Ill. As a young man, he spent the summer months on his grandfather's farm in Emporia, Kan. It was there that he developed a work ethic that would serve him well in his later life.

"There was no culture of people going to universities in my neighborhood," recalled Staley. "My high school teachers, however, encouraged me to do so." Shortly after arriving in Manhattan, Kan., to begin his freshman year, Staley was taken aback when asked about his intended major. "As soon as I said 'engineering,' I was immediately asked 'what kind?'" Thinking quickly, and remembering his ardent interest in "fiddling with radios," Staley blurted out, "electrical!"

Paul E. Sangster, *Kansas State '61*, the older brother of a high school friend, encouraged Staley to become involved in a fraternity. With that advice, he departed for a rush event at the Beta house. The decision to pledge Beta Theta Pi was made after a good night's sleep, and some prodding from James N. Baxter, *Kansas State '63*, (who later became Staley's pledge father.) Staley went on to serve as chapter and Interfraternity Council president.

Staley then earned a masters degree in business administration at Cornell. He married his Delta Delta Delta sweetheart, Mary Lynn, in July 1967. The couple moved to Colombia to follow a job opportunity with the Ford Foundation.

In 1969, he joined Cargill, Inc., "an international marketer, processor and distributor of agricultural, food, financial and industrial products and services with 90,000 employees in 60 countries." Staley was enthralled by the now 138-year-old corporation, immediately expressing interest in an "opportunity to eventually be part of the senior management team and gain international experience."

Warren Staley climbed the corporate ladder swiftly, but not without sacrifice. Having found success in the corn milling division, he was promoted to general manager of the company's European branch in 1978. He and Mary Lynn, moved across the Atlantic with their three young children: Jennifer, Jeff and Chris. Four years later, as the family was preparing to return to the United States, Staley was offered a major role as head of Cargill operations in Argentina.

Staley served as president and chief operating officer from February 1998 until being named CEO in June 1999. By August 2000, he had added "Chairman of the Board" to his resume. Staley's predecessor, Ernest Micek, lauded him as a "critical factor in our march into more value-added businesses and services," with "a steady hand and an eye on the future."

No stranger to strategic planning, Staley is intrigued by the *Men of Principle* initiative, stating that it "is the right direction for today's environment. The vision promotes being friends, gentleman and scholars; no one of them is good enough . . . balance is required. Today's students will be competing with others for the rest of their lives; others won't be as interested in values development as the Betas."

Like Beta Theta Pi, Cargill has its own set of guiding principles. "These principles clearly indicate who we are and what we believe. The key driver of a high-performing company is behavior. If we don't act appropriately, we will fail," he said.

Staley believes that he, and others, have an obligation to give back to society. "At Cargill, the whole organization gets involved." According to its 2001 *Citizenship Report*, Cargill contributes an estimated \$15.5 million to community projects worldwide. In the United States, the company is committed to donating two percent of its domestic pre-tax earnings.

His philosophy is admirable, yet remarkably simple: "Be judged over the long-term, have the courage to make decisions and believe in yourself." Of his 41 years of membership in the Fraternity, Staley reflects, "It has been a positive experience and has certainly made a difference in my life."