

# Alum's journey to leadership shows the power of lifelong learning

**Kathy and Scott King are dedicated to supporting ASU's future engineers and problem-solvers**

By Roger Ndayisaba, ASU News

February 10, 2025

In 1976, Kathy King was among a minority when a high school teacher advised her to pursue chemical engineering at Arizona State University.

"Mechanical and electrical engineering were popular, but I hadn't really heard of chemical engineering," King said. And as a woman, she certainly hadn't considered pursuing it as a career. "I always loved math and science in high school. I thought I was going to be a math teacher."

But soon after joining the chemical engineering program at ASU, she caught a glimpse of what kind of career opportunities the degree could offer.

"Chemical engineering sounded new, different and exciting, and I found it to be," King said. "I was hired by an oil company for two summers, and I really enjoyed getting to know that business. I discovered that with this degree, I could go in many different directions, including electronics, which was just exploding at the time."

In recognition of International Day of Women and Girls in Science on Feb. 11, ASU News is highlighting how King and her husband, Scott, came to be generous supporters of scholarship students in the [Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering](#) at ASU — and how their career journeys can inspire those students to continually acquire new skills.

**A lifelong love — for learning and each other**

After completing her chemical engineering degree at ASU in 1980, Kathy worked for ExxonMobil, where she met her husband, Scott King.

Like his wife, Scott loved math and science growing up. When he enrolled at the University of Oklahoma, he was determined to go into medicine, but he changed directions rather quickly.

“I left orientation day with doubts because I couldn’t find math and science in classes that would be part of premed,” Scott said.

Advised by an engineering professor, Scott enrolled in biomedical engineering, which at the time was an emerging discipline. After the first two years of the program, which were mostly focused on mechanical engineering, he says he was hooked.

“I never really even considered going into med school (after that),” he said.

Scott and Kathy have a lot in common. Besides their love for engineering, they enjoy learning, pushing themselves out of their comfort zone and traveling the world. After 10 years at ExxonMobil, Kathy left to follow a new curiosity. They moved to New Orleans, where she enrolled in a vocational technical school to learn [AutoCAD](#), a 2D and 3D design, modeling and drawing software.

She taught AutoCAD to engineers for some time before moving to New Jersey, where she earned her master’s degree in technical communication from the New Jersey Institute of Technology.

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### **A piece of advice from ASU chemical engineering alumna Kathy King:**

“When I worked for Ventura County in California, they were afraid of fax machines. They thought it was going to be a drain on the budget. I literally wrote the first proposal to put fax machines in different functions so that people could quit walking documents back and forth. They pushed back but

Her diverse skill set paid off massively when they were transferred overseas.

“I had the opportunity to reinvent my career as the executive director for the American Malaysian Chamber of Commerce for the entire country of Malaysia,” Kathy said.

Then, in 2001, Kathy and Scott moved to Nigeria, where she took advantage of her multicultural experience to teach a virtual, cross-cultural graduate communications course for the New Jersey Institute of Technology.

Similarly, Scott’s career took different turns within the ExxonMobil organization, from research and hands-on mechanical engineering to strategic planning and project management.

While in Equatorial Guinea, Scott was the general manager of ExxonMobil’s operations, working with a team of around 2,500 people. He credits his success to his mechanical engineering degree.

“When you get an engineering degree, what you really get is a set of critical thinking skills. You leave university with the skills to think a lot differently than many people,” he said. “You’re able to analyze data and information to understand problems.”

The Kings retired while in Equatorial Guinea, and now Scott builds and races cars while Kathy teaches people how to use technology to improve their sewing skills.

## Passing it on

Aside from supporting ASU engineering scholarship students, they have also guest lectured at the Fulton Schools many times.

“It’s just so wonderful to see students wanting to learn and preparing them to go into the world to contribute in whatever way they choose,” Kathy said. “I think ASU is doing a great job of giving students the tools and the opportunities to set them up for success along any path they choose.”

Particularly, the Kings support the [Engineering Projects in Community Service](#) program, known as EPICS, which brings diverse students together to solve challenging problems in communities at home and abroad.

Scott says it’s vital that students experience various cultures, meet new people and see what other societies are like.

“There is so much information in the media about everything from energy conversion, climate change and artificial intelligence. I encourage you to do your own research, question what you’re

eventually saw that it was a no-brainer. The same applies to you. Being young and knowing how to use new technologies such as 3D printers and artificial intelligence is your gift. Use it.”

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told and understand for yourself how the world really is,” he said.

Having held multiple senior leadership positions, Kathy advises students aspiring to be leaders in engineering to be clear, decisive and timely.

“Recognize the most important requirements for success in your organization and be sure every team member understands and is focused on them,” Kathy said. “You want to create an environment where people are valued and can learn from mistakes and remove obstacles to working on the important focus areas.”

She added, “We are thrilled to be engaged with the engineering community at ASU and wish great success for all students and faculty.”

*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image



Kathy King, an Arizona State University chemical engineering alumna, and her husband, Scott King. Their career journeys show the diverse applications of engineering, something they hope will inspire students in the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering to continually acquire new skills. Photo by Roger Ndayisaba/ASU