Reflecting on his years as a professor, Dr. Wayne Keim declares, "The primary responsibility, in my eyes, is educating students." After he was named a "Legend" for his teaching at both Purdue University and Colorado State University, his children teased him, "You're a double legend!" Wayne modestly shrugs off the honor, arguing that the term is simply an ambiguous myth.

Born on May 14, 1923, Wayne lived in Lincoln, Nebraska and loved playing sports of all kinds, though he especially thrived on music. Playing his trumpet in jazz dance bands, symphonic orchestras, and the university marching band, he was a jack-of-all-trades.

He never held a solid vision for his future, since the future of young American men during World War II was indeed uncertain. In 1943, he was drafted into the United States Army, traveling for three years throughout many states as diverse as California and New Jersey.

Before he was drafted by the army, Wayne had taken a course in genetics from his father, who was a professor at the University of Nebraska. This course sparked his interest, and, after he returned to college, he chose to study biology and agriculture instead of engineering. "Thermodynamics was my downfall," he laments with a grin. Wayne went on to earn his Master’s at Cornell University, and he graduated in 1952 with a PhD in Plant Breeding and Genetics, his thesis covering Biochemical Genetics.

Wayne’s first job post-college was teaching undergraduate botany classes at Iowa State University in Ames. After four years, he took a position at Purdue University teaching undergrad genetics and plant breeding, which he maintained for twenty years. Meanwhile, he traveled to Colorado to teach two summer school sessions, as well as taking a sabbatical in Colorado. His wife Joyce teased him, "If you’re going to travel back and forth, why don’t you get a job there?" He did just that. He moved to Fort Collins in 1975.

Wayne recalls that when he arrived, only three departments existed in the School of Agriculture at CSU. At Purdue, his main responsibility had been teaching, but at CSU, he took an administrative role. He led well. Though financial backing for ambitious projects always seemed elusive, at one point in his career, Wayne led the biggest department in all of CSU!

Though Wayne’s own accomplishments are evident in the development of CSU’s agricultural department, he especially celebrates the successes of his students. Over one hundred of his students majored in what he had taught them, and nearly all of his twenty graduate students were published. During his career, Wayne has traveled to Sweden, Guadalajara, and Egypt. He has been involved in notable organizations such as the Genetics Society and the American Society of Astronomy, even becoming the head of the Crop Science Society of America in Madison, Wisconsin.

Looking at CSU today, Wayne laments the lack of state financial backing, clarifying, "It’s not state-supported; it’s state-assisted." He also notes the excesses of the athletic program. "When the coach gets paid three times more than the president of the university, something’s wrong!" Perhaps his disappointment with some of the university’s recent decisions comes from his solid conviction on the foundational purpose for CSU. “Research can be done by others besides universities,
but others cannot educate students.” Indeed, Wayne is a master of education. He notes, “I think if I had success, it was because I didn’t talk down to my students.” His students, and Colorado State University, have noticed.