

From Granite Falls to Greatness: The Journey of Allen Wilson

Allen's story begins in the small town of Granite Falls, North Carolina, where he grew up as a "big fish in a small pond." This early experience in leadership roles instilled a sense of confidence in him that would prove invaluable later in life. When he arrived at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), he found himself navigating the waters of a much larger environment—transitioning from a "big fish" to a "little fish in a big pond."

Academic Path at UNC

At Carolina, Allen pursued a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with an emphasis in accounting, graduating in 1977. His time at the university not only equipped him with technical skills but also fostered a sense of teamwork that would shape his career. Allen recalls that his initial goal was to attend law school, and it was through the encouragement of his advisor to explore accounting classes where he discovered his passion for business.

Memorable Experiences

Among his most cherished memories at UNC are his years spent in Teague Dorm. Allen and his suite mates became part of a remarkable legacy, contributing to Teague's 18 years of intramural dominance, winning the intramural crown 15 out of 18 years. He described his suite mates as a family away from home. The friendships he formed during those years remain strong, approximately 50 alumni get together annually for a reunion.

An unforgettable experience that Allen fondly recalls took place during a thrilling UNC vs. Duke basketball game nearly fifty years ago. With just 17 seconds left and UNC down by 8 points, many fans had already left the Carmichael Arena. As many of the fans heard the roar and headed back into Carmichael, Allen's suite mate passionately pleaded with the security guards to lock the door and not let the "unfaithful" back in! However, fueled by his passion for the Tar Heels, Allen and his suite mate stayed and witnessed a stunning comeback that was culminated in a buzzer-beater shot by freshman, Walter Davis, leading UNC to a dramatic overtime victory.

Allen's unique once-in-a-lifetime Carolina moment occurred when he attended the 1977 Men's Basketball National Championship in Atlanta without a ticket. One of Allen's best friends, Freddie Kiger is known as the walking encyclopedia of ACC basketball knowledge. Freddie was the statistician for the men's basketball team and usually entered before most fans. Freddie arrived early to the championship game and the ticket taker tore his ticket in half. Freddie exited the arena and saw Allen outside. Freddie gave Allen his torn ticket. Allen dressed up as a statistician and tried to enter the arena. The ticket taker would not allow Allen to enter because he had a torn ticket. However, Allen's persistence and creativity paid

off when Allen told the ticket taker that Dean Smith would be extremely upset and would hold the ticket taker personally responsible if he did not know how many fouls each player had during the game. Allen was reluctantly allowed entry and was surprised to find that his torn ticket was the seat directly beside Walter Davis's parents.

Career Journey

While at UNC, Allen excelled in his classes. He was very good at math and stumbled into taking a few accounting classes. After graduating from UNC, Allen continued his education by earning a JD with honors from Wake Forest University. His career took an unexpected turn when he was introduced to tax law by his best friend in law school, who persuaded him to accept a position at Arthur Andersen. What began as a two-year "training" plan morphed into a rewarding 40-year journey in the field. Allen's work ethic and skills quickly led to promotions, and he played a pivotal role in transitioning Arthur Andersen of the Carolinas to Grant Thornton.

The Power of Teamwork

Reflecting on his time at UNC, Allen emphasizes the importance of teamwork. His experiences in intramural sports taught him that success is often the result of teamwork not individual accomplishment. Allen shared an important often used quote that summarizes the culture at UNC, "Play for the name on the front of the jersey, not the name on the back." The culture of teamwork fostered at UNC has served him well in his professional life, where he continues to seek connections with fellow Tar Heels.

Giving Back to UNC

As an active member of the Leadership Council, Allen is motivated by a desire to give back to the university that shaped his career and his successes. He believes in increasing UNC's brand awareness and attracting top-tier faculty to enhance the student experience, particularly in the field of tax at Kenan-Flagler Business School.

Vision for the Future

Allen is excited about the continued growth for the UNC Tax Center, advocating for collaborations between academics and practitioners to enhance research and its real-world applicability. He is committed to empowering the next generation of leaders, believing that when experts collaborate, remarkable advancements can occur towards a shared goal.

Advice for Current Students

For current students aspiring to similar success, Allen offers three key pieces of advice:

- **Work Smart, Not Hard:** Initially, hard work is essential to gain knowledge and experience. As you progress in your career, find ways to work smarter, more efficiently.
- **Learn from Mistakes:** Turn failures into learning opportunities. Also don't mistake activity for achievement; focus on outcomes.
- **Value Teamwork:** Remember, it's not about individual glory, but rather the success of the team. Team success is always more rewarding than individual success.

Allen's journey from Granite Falls to a successful career exemplifies the power of education, teamwork and the bonds formed at UNC. His ongoing commitment to the university and its students is a testament to the lasting impact of his experiences at Carolina.