

“Philanthropy is my lifeblood”



Kurt Nohl has two daughters and one son; here in the picture, his daughter Brigitte von Burg-Nohl.

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When Kurt Nohl was an engineering student at ETH, he enjoyed the hands-on lessons. After graduating he dove headfirst into working life, where this ability served him well – the highlight of his career was managing his own company. Today he promotes young talents at ETH who are working to bring about a better world.

What excited you as a child that still interests you today?

KURT NOHL – My relatives owned a farm with a lot of animals, which I felt a connection to. I was allowed to plow the fields with my cousin, and that gave me my great fondness for nature. That has stuck with me until today and is one of the reasons I’m involved in supporting a nature conservation project.

You studied Engineering at ETH Zurich. What was your best subject?

I wasn’t a model student – I was more hands-on! I really liked the hydraulics experiments in my physics classes, for example. The link between theory and practice was always important to me. You can’t have one without the other. That’s why I really appreciated our class trips to production facilities, which gave us insight into the big picture when it comes to industrial processes. The sense of community and the synthesis of theory and practice stayed with me throughout my career.

What does having a degree from ETH mean for you?

I plunged into working life after graduating. My father arranged an internship for me in England to refine my language skills.

During my career, I was proud of my ETH degree, which along with my English skills opened a lot of doors for me.

Tell us a story from your time at ETH that you would also tell your children.

I was a regular at the Weisser Wind restaurant and guild house in the Zurich old town, where I spent countless hours socializing and mingling.

What does philanthropy mean to you?

Philanthropy is my lifeblood. It means a lot to me to support young talents who want to help our world evolve and make it a little bit better. In doing so, they also make a valuable contribution to Switzerland in particular.

What other activities are you involved in besides ETH?

Currently, I'm mainly focused on my family, which now spans four generations. That's my way of making an important contribution to the future. I follow the maxim of not putting myself in the foreground but instead gladly helping out where I think it makes sense to do so.

Kurt Nohl studied from 1950 to 1955 at ETH Zurich (called the Polytechnikum at the time). He got married in 1958 while working for Georg Fischer, an industrial company in Schaffhausen. His wife wanted to be closer to home, however, so she showed him a vacancy at the industrial group Schappe in Basel. Nohl got the job, marking his switch to the textile industry – the sector in which he later ran his own company. Over the course of his career, he witnessed the boom of the Swiss machinery industry and the crisis in the Swiss textile industry.

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