

Former basketball star Ray Taylor did his part to ensure coal mining safety, still inspires others

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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Ray Taylor is a former **Lewis and Clark Community College basketball star** who became involved in the coal mining industry and in his time did as much as he could to make sure miners remained safe.

Taylor, who went to **Southwestern High School**, today is retired and lives in Royal Lakes, IL.

When he left LCCC, he got married and went into the coal mining industry in Carlinville, and spent 37 years in the profession. He retired in 2009, after being transferred to Houston for **Exxon**. There he worked in an oil field for demolition for 17 months until he retired.

“When you think of coal mining, you think of the old days where people had picks and shovels picking coal out, but in the end we used machinery and equipment to mine the coal, then transferred it out on conveyor belts to the top surface. It was a good profession to be in all those years.”

Unlike so many coal miners of yesteryear, Taylor does not suffer from **Black Lung Disease**, a common name for any lung disease that develops from inhaling coal dust.

“We took a lot of safety precautions against Black Lung Disease,” Taylor, who was a manger who worked in mining safety, said. “We used an apparatus for dust control. When you think of rock dust it is a white powder. We had to spray continuously when we cut coal to make it white.

“When you are young and looking for a job, Black Lung Disease is one of those things that didn’t enter your mind. It was good pay and close to home and you didn’t give it much thought. Part of my job not only as a union individual supervisor was to keep my people safe and make sure we were doing the necessary precautions to keep them out of harm’s way. I put my heart into it and it paid off in the long run. I gained a lot of respect from the union guys and supervisors and it was a great livelihood.”

There are still some coal mining operations around the region, but many have shut down, Taylor said.

Taylor said he is thankful for his start at LCCC and his time at Southwestern High School. He said both prepared him for some of his later coal mining work.

He said he remains friends with some of the LCCC players, including **Greg Jones**, who became a school administrator and a high-ranking IHSA official. Taylor averaged close to double figures in basketball at Southwestern and continued his success when he entered LCCC.

“I ate and slept basketball when I was younger,” he said. “I was going to be a wrestler at Southwestern and one of the coaches came to me and got me involved in basketball. It was a gift that I picked up on very quickly and ran with it.”

Taylor lives and is retired in Royal Lakes and attends church in St. Louis. He doesn't mind the 50-mile drive for church services. He also is deeply involved with his family and his children and grandchildren and said at the moment, he couldn't love life more in retirement.