

Big man, big idea



KU ARCHIVES

Roberts in the 1950s

It was the first gift of its kind at KU, from a man who had hoped to graduate 50 years before. He never finished his degree, but he wanted to celebrate his golden anniversary anyway.

In June 1958, Chancellor Franklin Murphy announced that Roy Roberts, a driving force as president of the *Kansas City Star*, had given \$200,000 to KU Endowment. The purpose: KU's first endowed fund for distinguished professorships.

Roberts, born in Muscotah, Kan., had come to Mount Oread with the class of 1908. His father died during Roberts' senior year, and he dropped out one semester short of graduation to support his family.

Known for his cigar, his rotund figure (which he thought made him more photogenic) and his unflagging energy for news reporting, Roberts guided the *Star* to five Pulitzer Prizes over 56 years.

In a letter outlining his ideas about the professorships, Roberts told Murphy that recipients could come from any academic field and that it was entirely up to KU to choose them. "I do not even want to be consulted about it," he wrote.

Today, three faculty members hold the Roy A. Roberts Distinguished Professorship: Susan Kemper, psychology; Thomas Taylor, ecology and evolutionary biology; and Daryle Busch, chemistry.

—Kirsten Bosnak



Susan Kemper's "Language Across the Lifespan Project" addresses ways that aging affects the processing of spoken and written language. She is among more than 100 KU faculty members who hold endowed professorships funded by donors through KU Endowment.