

# A Lifetime of Learning ★ WILLIAM D. & JAN MOUNGER '48



From reinvigorating the Mississippi Republican Party in the early 1960s to rescuing a renowned international ballet competition, Mr. William D. Mounger has always been motivated to take the lead in affecting change. Mr. Mounger claims that it is this

tendency that led to his role as prime benefactor of West Point's Department of English & Philosophy. "If one person does it, it opens the door for others to help..." But once you learn more about Mr. Mounger, you realize there is always more to the story.

Mr. Mounger states that there were no "textbook or admirable reasons" that he attended West Point. In fact, when he was offered an appointment and learned that it was located in New York, a thousand miles from his home in Jackson, Mississippi, he turned it down. After a second appointment, via a family friend (father of Doug Kenna '45), and recruitment from the football coaches, Mr. Mounger decided to attend the Academy.

He was one of the 27 football players in the legendary recruiting class of '44. Unfortunately, the team that later produced two Heisman Trophy winners didn't include him. He was told the devastating words that he was "kind of small." This only served to inspire him to make it through the subsequent four years. He readily admits that he didn't enjoy his time at West Point and he challenges any grad to claim otherwise. However, this did not diminish his appreciation for the experience and education the Academy afforded him. Mr. Mounger

has spent a lifetime keeping that connection alive. He has attended every Class of 1948 reunion and served on the Academy's Board of Visitors, and served as its Chairman in 1988 and 1989, through a Congressional appointment from President Reagan. Mr. Mounger is also a Trustee Emeritus of the West Point Association of Graduates and most recently, he served as an Honorary Cabinet Member for the *For Us All Campaign*.

His latest connection to West Point has been through the Department of English & Philosophy. Though Mr. Mounger struggled through his own Plebe English class, he translated this weakness into a lifetime love of language. After graduation, he unearthed his Plebe Webster Dictionary with the intent to improve his writing and vocabulary. "At that time (1950), I determined that I would increase my vocabulary by researching the doubted meaning of any word that I read. Over the years, I have underscored thousands of words, which I have reviewed incessantly, thereby increasing my vocabulary immeasurably. Consequently, I began to read books on etymology and many other publications concerning the origins of the English language. Over time, my original Webster's became so frayed with use that around 1972 my wife, Jan, gave me a new leather-bound Webster's College Dictionary to which I dutifully transcribed from my Plebe Webster's all my previously specified words—that dictionary has also become so tattered that it is now almost unusable."

Realizing that West Point instilled this lifetime love of learning, Mr. Mounger started directing his philanthropy to the Department of English & Philosophy's Academic Enrichment Program Endowment. As one of the first major donors to the department, Mr. Mounger's giving will be recognized through the naming of the West

Point Writing Center. Established in 2013 to tackle writing challenges throughout the Corps, the Writing Center enables cadets and faculty across the Academy to advance their study of critical thinking, academic argument, writing within and across the disciplines, and professional communication. The Mounger Writing Center enhances the resources available to all cadets to assist in the development of their thinking and writing. It is successfully filling a need in the overall cadet education. In 2013, 175 cadets took advantage of the center, and in the fall of 2015 alone, nearly 300 benefitted from its resources.

According to COL David Harper, Head of the Department of English and Philosophy, "Mr. Mounger's generous interest in improving writing instruction will have a tangible positive impact on generations of Army officers. The Writing Center is the engine behind West Point's drive to produce world-class communicators who will win not only on the kinetic battlefield, but in the more important arenas where ideas compete. This is a legacy in keeping with the spirit of Mr. Mounger." ★



West Point Writing Fellows visit the White House Briefing Room.