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2-28-2014

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Recommended Citation

Miller, Austin, "Van Devenders Share Special Moment with Mannings" (2014). *University of Mississippi News*. 6672.

<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/umnews/6672>

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Van Devenders Share Special Moment with Mannings

Successful businessman and his family give back to Ole Miss

FEBRUARY 28, 2014 BY AUSTIN MILLER

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Billy Van Devender and members of the Manning family.

In partnership with the University of Mississippi's Department of Athletics, School of Engineering alumnus Billy Van Devender (BSCE 71) and members of the Manning family have made significant contributions to the **Forward Together** campaign to rename the indoor football practice facility the Olivia and Archie Manning Athletics Performance Center.

The surprise announcement was made when the Van Devender and Manning families were gathered on the Ole Miss campus to attend the

movie premiere of "Book of Manning."

"It was very emotional," said Van Devender, a Jackson resident who was Archie Manning's college teammate and roommate. "My wife, Mollie, and I were there, and my children were there. Archie and Olivia did not know that it was going to be named after them. They walked in the room, and there were a lot of moist eyes in the room. Everybody was excited and emotionally charged. They were very appreciative of it. It's a great tribute to them.

"I've always believed that, 'to whom much is given, much is expected.' Everyone says they want to give back, and that's what I'm trying to do here. I feel strongly that we have the right leadership at Ole Miss, and I know that head football coach Hugh Freeze is not only interested in winning football games, but he's also genuinely interested in the student-athletes who we're recruiting and playing football. He wants them to be good examples and good citizens when they leave Ole Miss."

A three-year letterman (1968-70) at the "Monster Man" position for coach John Vaught's Rebels team, Van Devender graduated from the university with an undergraduate degree in civil engineering. He was also a member of the campus chapter of Chi Epsilon engineering honor society.

"My engineering education helped me become more disciplined in my approach to problem solving," Van Devender said. "It also assisted me in relating technological information with human resources."

Van Devender later received a master's degree in business administration in 1973 from Southern Methodist University and then joined the Central Intelligence Agency.

After four years with the CIA, Van Devender moved back to Mississippi to begin his business career in the oil and gas industry, followed by investments in real estate development and the forest products industry. His family is primarily in timber management and lumber manufacturing.

The Ole Miss chapter of the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame honored Van Devender with its Distinguished American Award in November 2013.

"I was not a great football player," Van Devender said. "But I enjoyed it, and it taught me a lot about discipline, hard work and perseverance, and those are the keys I believe to being successful. I have been able to use the gifts that God has given me and have developed a systematic way to approach challenges that has helped me be successful in my business career and life in general. Of course, my wife, Mollie, and my children have always been very supportive.

"That's the reason why I want to instill those things in our student-athletes and be an example for those who have graduated from Ole Miss, not only in their careers, but those who participate in athletics. I want Ole Miss to be successful. I want our administration, athletes and students to be successful."

Van Devender has great confidence in the leadership of Chancellor Dan Jones and Athletics Director Ross Bjork. He noted their character, integrity and willingness to do the right thing in academics and athletics.

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Campus Briefs

Students Learn 'Real Politics' in Washington, D.C., Winter Session

OXFORD, Miss. – Eleven University of Mississippi students spent their winter break learning about the people who work behind the scenes of the American government in Washington, D.C. Lead by Jonathan Klingler, assistant professor of political science, the students of Pol 391: Applied Politics met not with candidates, but with the people who make candidates'

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Ole Miss In the News

Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to abate. The Federal Reserve's

The alumnus is also excited about the future, as he said the Forward Together campaign is going to take Ole Miss into the 21st century and serve it well for the next 100 years.

"It's fantastic to see all of the facility improvements," Van Devender said. "They make the campus look even more beautiful. The arena, parking garage and the addition to the stadium are certainly things that we need to keep the momentum going and continue to have money and ideas flow into Ole Miss. Those three areas are important to our growth and moving forward."

Van Devender and Manning have enjoyed a longtime friendship that began when they arrived at Ole Miss as freshmen. Van Devender was Manning's best man at his wedding, and he and Mollie have been to several games over the respective collegiate and professional careers of Cooper, Peyton and Eli Manning, including all four Super Bowls.

"It has had a tremendous impact on me that we were good, close friends. Watching Archie, the way he performed, how humble he was and how he was always looking out for other people provided a personal role model," Van Devender said. "He never boasted about himself and was always careful in the way he conducted himself. He is a true Southern gentleman. I learned a lot from being his roommate, from his personality, to his character, to his faith.

"We have had a really good life – both of our families. There is a lot of love and respect for one another, and that's the basis of our relationship. We will continue to be friends for the rest of our lives and I'm glad we were able to enjoy this moment together at Ole Miss for the Manning Center dedication."

To learn more about making a gift to support University of Mississippi and School of Engineering, please contact University of Mississippi Foundation Kevin Gardner at kevin@olemiss.edu or 662-915-7601.

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