

Berrong Gives \$250,000 to SWOSU for Engineering Technology Department

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Southwestern Oklahoma State University's Department of Engineering Technology in Weatherford will benefit from a generous \$250,000 gift from Winnie Ola Berrong (second from left) of Weatherford. Accepting the gift on behalf of the SWOSU Foundation is SWOSU President Randy Beutler. Berrong's two living sons-Ed Jr. (left) and Brad (right)-were also at the presentation. The gift will be used to establish an endowed fund known as the Ed & Winnie Ola Berrong Chair for Engineering Technology. The fund will be placed in the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education queue for a \$250,000 match by the State of Oklahoma through the Endowed Chairs program, which would make the fund total \$500,000. The late Ed Berrong is shown in the picture behind Winnie Ola.

Winnie Ola Berrong of Weatherford has given \$250,000 to the Southwestern Oklahoma State University Foundation to establish an endowed fund for the SWOSU Department of Engineering Technology on the Weatherford campus.

The fund, known as the Ed & Winnie Ola Berrong Chair for Engineering Technology, is being established to encourage excellence in faculty, teaching and leadership.

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"On behalf of the entire SWOSU community, we greatly appreciate the support and generosity of Winnie Ola Berrong and the late Ed Berrong," SWOSU President Randy Beutler said. "This is a tremendous gift that will greatly benefit our students, the Engineering Technology program and the university as a whole."

Beutler added, "As SWOSU moves forward with our commitment to excellence in higher education and our duties and obligations to our students, faculty and the taxpayers of this State, we are thankful that community-minded people like the Berrongs are continuing to step up and make sure that our institution is truly the 'premier regional university' in Oklahoma and our region."

The Berrongs have been and continue to be long-time supporters of SWOSU. Ed (Sr.) passed away in 1998 at the age of 83, while Winnie Ola continues to live in Weatherford.

The gift to SWOSU is not the first one for the Berrongs. The Berrong family established an endowed chair for the SWOSU Music Department. The gift of \$250,000 was matched by the State Regents for Higher Education to create an endowment of \$500,000. In 2007, the music hall was renamed the Ed and Winnie Ola Berrong Music Hall in honor of the Berrongs. The family has also provided a large scholarship endowment through the SWOSU Foundation.

Both Ed and Winnie Ola are SWOSU graduates. Ed grew up on a farm southeast of Hinton and worked his way through college picking cotton and mowing lawns. On the weekends, he would hitchhike home to work for the Hinton Grocery.

Ed Berrong-always a leader, worker, and competitor-was college class president his freshman, sophomore, and senior years and was president of the Student Council his junior and senior years. Berrong was a four-year veteran in debate and was elected president of the Senate, a men's organization which was devoted to the study of parliamentary procedure.

Ed graduated in 1937 from Southwestern and began working on his law degree at the University of Oklahoma. He taught history and government at Watonga from 1938 to January 1941. At midterm, he became an elementary principal in Clinton. He later accepted an appointment at Chickasha as resident project manager of the National Youth Administration. At the age of 25, he became the youngest NYA area director in the nation.

In 1943, he returned to law school in Oklahoma City, attending night classes and working for Armour and Company during the day. Having completed all coursework, he was licensed to practice law by the State Bar Association. Also in 1943, Ed volunteered in the United States Navy as an apprentice seaman. After 30 months, he was commanding officer of Sub-Chaser 769 operating in the South Pacific and Southwest Pacific theaters.

Following the war, he was in charge of the veterans training program at Southwestern State College. After serving two years with the veterans training program and turning down the state director position, he and Art Shotts bought the Frank Eaton real estate and insurance agency in 1948. When Art Shotts bought the local Ford dealership, Ed bought out Shotts' interest in the real estate and insurance business in 1950.

In 1949, he was elected mayor of Weatherford for three consecutive, three-year terms.

After serving four months of his fourth term as mayor, Berrong resigned after being elected state senator in a special election to succeed K.C. Perryman, who had moved out of the district. Beginning in 1958, Ed served 22 years in the Oklahoma State Senate where he served as chairman of many of the senate committees including the appropriations committee.

Ed married Winnie Ola Post in 1938. Winnie Ola grew up at Eastview in Greer County.

She came to Southwestern at the age of 16 in 1933, and graduated in 1936, at the age of 19, at which time she began her teaching career in Retrop, Oklahoma. She taught in Sayre while Ed was in the Navy during WWII. After Ed returned, they moved to Weatherford where Winnie Ola taught for five years. She retired from teaching to raise their three sons-Ed, Jr., Mark and Brad. All three sons expanded the business endeavors that were started by their father.