

FORTY-YEAR CLUB MEMBER MAKES \$100,000 GIFT TO RMCC FOUNDATION



During the May 23 reception for members of the Mena High School Forty-Year Club, Dr. Wayne Hatcher, Rich Mountain Community College (RMCC) President, recognized Dr. Walter Geyer for his gift of \$100,000 to the RMCC Foundation. The Dr. Walter and Gladys Geyer Endowed Scholarship will provide two scholarships each semester, one for a student majoring in aviation and one for a student seeking a degree in communications. The two scholarships will grant each student \$1000 per semester beginning the fall semester of 2010.

Dr. Geyer is a 1936 graduate of Mena High School. His wife, Gladys Anderson Geyer, graduated in 1935. They made their home in Mena until 1964 when they moved to Ft. Worth, Texas.

Walter was a pioneer in aviation in Mena, having owned one of the first area planes, a Piper Cub that he purchased from a Hot Springs man prior to the beginning of World War II. Part of the purchase agreement was that the owner would teach him to fly. After completing the flying lessons, Walter flew the plane from Hot Springs to Mena by following Highway 88 from the air. He landed the plane in a cow pasture. Today that cow pasture is occupied by the U.S. Post Office and Mena High School.

During WWII, Walter served as an Air Force pilot, flying B-29s on bombing missions over Japan from the island of Saipan. Following the war, he returned to Mena where he taught flying lessons with his brother, Hartzell, at the Mena Airport which consisted of a grass-covered runway, with a single hanger and a wind sock. Many of the early pilots from Polk County were taught to fly by the two brothers.

Walter and Hartzell began the first air ambulance service in Polk County in the 1950s. As owners of the Geyer Funeral Home, later the Geyer-Quillin Funeral Home, the service was a natural expansion of their business.

Although a successful businessman, Walter had always dreamed of becoming a physician. In midlife, he began commuting to Henderson State Teachers College in Arkadelphia to take pre-med classes. At the age of 42, he entered the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock. After graduation in 1964, Walter moved his family to Ft. Worth, Texas where he interned and practiced family medicine until he retired at age 80. He continued flying as a recreational pastime in a Beechcraft Bonanza and later a Travel-Air. He made many trips to Mena to visit family and friends.

Walter is a strong believer in the value of education. "I desperately wanted to go to college when I graduated from Mena High School," he says, "but in those post-depression years, parents could not afford to send their kids to college in another city where they had to pay, not only tuition costs, but room and board as well. It is wonderful that Mena now offers its graduating seniors the opportunity to attend college while living and working at home."