

*Dr. Noel Mann notes he has many lifetimes to discuss...at least three or four. He retired with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, he made it through fourteen of sixteen steps in the astronaut selection process, and he has a patent from the Gulf War. As a scientist, he created a new molecule while employed in the polymer science department of the University of Southern Mississippi. As a religious leader, he has pastored churches for twenty-two years. Currently, he's the only full professor in the chemistry department at William Carey University.*

## PROFESSOR SPOTLIGHT

by Rachel Clevenger

# A Lifetime of Service at William Carey University

## The Beginning of Many Lifetimes

Born on Christmas Eve, Mann's parents named him Noel—which is pronounced the way one might expect for a Christmas-themed name. A high school dropout, Mann became the youngest person to go to college in Mississippi at age 16 and the youngest to teach college in Mississippi at 22.

Dr. Charles McMasters, former soldier and current optometrist, has known Mann since the 1980s, and he remembers Mann as a smart and responsible person who constantly looked for opportunities to better himself. That push has held true for decades. James K. Taylor, the Supervisor of the Recycle Center at Camp Shelby in Mississippi, has known Mann for decades; more importantly, he has served with Mann in both the military and the ministry.

Serving others in the military seems to lend itself to staying in a life of service after military retirement, even if the focus shifts. One of Mann's most important lifetimes, clearly, is his life as a servant of the church. Almost everyone who spoke of Mann mentioned his devotion to God before all else. "He's a Christian," Taylor explains, "so he has all those values." Taylor notes that Mann is compassionate, intelligent, and trustworthy.

## Serving Others in Military and in Church

Another Petal citizen, Brian Lee, first met Mann when he was doing some electrical work for him. While Lee was busy recruiting Mann to come to his church for a visit, he had no idea Mann led his own church; he notes that Mann had some fun with him for a while before filling him in. "He's just a tremendous person," Lee explains, "and a wonderful asset to the church."

Police officer Smokey Hatfield, who is also the assistant music director at Lynn Ray Road Baptist Church in Petal, has known Mann for several years, and considers Mann a blessing to their church, where he serves as a Sunday School teacher and a choir member. "I have had the privilege of hearing Dr. Mann preach God's word on many occasions," Hatfield adds. "His ability to reach anyone on any level is unparalleled."

Hatfield adds that anyone who spends time with Mann "knows he is for real" in that he consistently demonstrates "a genuine love for our country, his fellow man and above all else the Lord." Noting that small children and animals can be reliable tests of character, because "they know if you are just going through the motions," he adds that Mann is especially popular around children of the church, who are drawn to his kindness.

Hal Marx, Mayor of Petal, Mississippi, praises Mann's level of civic engagement—explaining how Mann and his wife have worked to revitalize an area of their city, purchasing and renovating multiple properties to improve the area. Mayor Marx adds that Mann does "what citizens should do," in that he's not just complaining but offering solutions and being "involved in a positive way." Marx believes Mann is the model that civic leaders would hope other citizens would aspire to.

## God in the Chemistry Classroom

As an educator, Mann retired from Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College before going on to work in a lab at University of Southern Mississippi for several years. Next, he worked with high school students at Presbyterian Christian School and finally landed at William Carey University where he is a full professor in the Chemistry department.

Phil Smith is a Chemistry Teacher at Presbyterian Christian School who worked closely with Mann. Smith says of Mann, "He loves science, loves the Lord, and has a real love for kids—helping them find their way."

Working with high school students together for several years, Smith saw how Mann was able to connect his dedication to science with this dedication to God and the way "science speaks





to God's creation" in the way He puts "atoms and molecules together to order the universe."

Ron Edwards, now a pharmacist, was one of Mann's former students at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, and he recalls how Mann was not only one of the most intelligent professors he had ever met, but also how passionate and caring Mann was in the way he approached his work, his students, his faith, and his life.

### Part of a 100-Year-Plan

Dr. James W. Rawlins, Professor of Polymer Science at The University of Southern Mississippi and director of the Thames-Rawlins Polymer Science Research Group, was also a student of Mann's. Rawlins took General Chemistry and Organic Chemistry with Mann at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, the latter of which was an elective.

He jokes that no one takes Organic Chemistry as an elective, but Mann convinced

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him it would be good for both of them; Mann needs the class to hit the numbers to not be canceled, and Rawlins was good at science. In fact, Rawlins's wife teases him about being a "car mechanic that fell in love with chemistry."

Later, Rawlins decided to pursue a doctorate at Southern, and he rekindled his relationship

with Mann after many years. When Mann learned that Rawlins was starting his own lab, he asked, "How about I come work in your lab?" Rawlins responded, "How about you start next week?"

It was in this lab, where Rawlins notes that one might imagine there are no advancements



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to be made in an area where some principles have remained unchanged for over one hundred years, that Mann created a new molecule, carbonated vernonia oil.

Rawlins jokes that Mann must have had a "100-Year Plan," a comprehensive list of all of the things Mann likely planned to accomplish during his lifetime. One of Mann's wishes was to one day work for one of his own students. Rawlins was able to help Mann cross that wish

off his list, when Mann worked in Rawlins's lab for nearly three years. Their relationship continued when Mann then accepted a job at Presbyterian Christian School, where Rawlins's children attended.

### A Lifetime at William Carey

Dr. Garry Breland, Academic Vice President at William Carey University, praises Mann's career and its impressive span—from his

"noteworthy career" in the military, to his many contributions as a chemist, to his skills as an educator. Breland notes, "He combines a passion for chemistry with genuine concern for students. Dr. Mann is a Renaissance man with varied interests and abilities and sets an excellent example for others both personally and professionally."

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Another member of the William Carey leadership, Dr. Scott Hummel is Executive Vice President and Provost, as well as Professor of Religion. Hummel knows Mann in several capacities. As a provost, Hummel sees the profound difference Mann is making in the classroom; he also sees what a wonderful



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What many students don't realize is that Mann, in one of his other lifetimes, is also an athlete. Recently, he participated in the Senior Olympics of Mississippi; then, in June of 2017, he participated in the National Senior Olympics in Birmingham, Alabama. He finished second in the state, eighteenth in the United States, and in the top one hundred in the world—in a competition where over eleven thousand athletes from thirteen countries were present.

ambassador Mann is for Carey, when Mann volunteers to work at Welcome Orientation Weekend, where he helps the students become excited about going to college and excited about learning.

On a personal level, Hummel has seen what Mann is like from a parent's point of view, when Mann taught one of Hummel's children. Hummel's oldest daughter graduated from

Carey, and Mann was one of her favorite professors. He notes that Mann is always engaging with his students, whether it's time outside of class they need for extra assistance or if they need encouragement at the 5K race over Homecoming weekend.

Hummel jokes that the kids are motivated to run faster in the 5K even, saying they can't "let Dr. Mann beat them," but beat them he does.

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He finished second in the state, eighteenth in the United States, and in the top one hundred in the world—in a competition where over eleven thousand athletes from thirteen countries were present. This year, he has qualified for the World Senior Olympics in Utah and the National Senior Olympics in New Mexico in June 2019.



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Clevenger earned her M.Ed. degree from

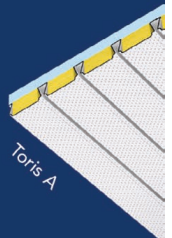
Mississippi College. After finishing her

PhD in Composition and Rhetoric, she taught and served as the University Writing Center Director for Birmingham Southern College and University of Alabama at Birmingham. Most recently, she taught Business Communications at Samford University.



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