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Converse University Mourns Loss of Walter S. Montgomery, Jr.

SPARTANBURG, S.C. (October 5, 2023) – The Converse University community is mourning the recent loss of steadfast Converse supporter Walter S. Montgomery, Jr., on October 3. Montgomery was a Life Trustee, a recipient of the prestigious Dexter Edgar Converse Award, and was widely known for his leadership, generosity and involvement – both at Converse and in the Spartanburg and surrounding communities. Walter’s wife, Betty James Montgomery, is a 1972 Converse graduate.



“Our Converse community is deeply saddened by the loss of Mr. Montgomery,” said President Boone J. Hopkins. “We are grateful to have experienced Walter’s unwavering leadership, guidance and support through the years at Converse. Our thoughts are with the Montgomery family, and we wish them comfort during this difficult time.”

From insightful leadership to the establishment of no less than five student scholarships, the Montgomery family has a long legacy of championing Converse with their time, talents and financial generosity. Walter S. Montgomery, Jr. was the fourth generation to have served Converse, and his four children are also Converse supporters. His daughter-in-law, Brelan Riddle Montgomery ’06, continues the family’s service as a member of the Board of Trustees.

Walter is a descendant (great-grandson) of one of Converse’s founders, John H. Montgomery, who served on the Board of Trustees from 1889-1900. Walter himself served on the Board of Trustees at Converse for 29 years – from 1967-1996 – and on its Investment Committee. In 1999, Converse presented Walter with an Honorary Degree, Doctor of Laws, and in 2008, Walter and Betty received the Dexter Edgar Converse Award. The couple have served as Friends of the Petrie School of Music, Art Patrons, 1889 Charter Members, and Steinway Donors; they are also members of the Miss Gee Legacy Society, which is comprised of individuals who support the mission and traditions of Converse and who share a desire to leave a lasting legacy to Converse.

The Montgomery name has long been instrumental in the success of Converse and its community of students and alumni. Situated in the center of the campus, the Montgomery Student Center was so named at the time of its construction in 1960 in honor of the Montgomerys who had served as Trustees.

Education is another passion of the Montgomery family. A graduate of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and the School of Business Administration of Harvard University, Montgomery and his beloved and devoted wife, Betty, have selflessly given Converse their time and expertise during their own tenures as Board members. Among the bountiful expressions of support given to Converse by Betty and Walter S. Montgomery, Jr. themselves are:

- Key shepherding of Converse’s Steinway Initiative, which resulted in Converse being the first women’s college to be named to the roster of All-Steinway Schools; the Steinway piano in the lobby of the Montgomery Student Center was given by Walter in honor of Betty
- Support of Friends of the Petrie School of Music
- Multiple scholarships for Converse students
- Lead donors for renovations of the Montgomery Student Center, a hub for student activity
- Support for the Converse Valkyries athletic program through contributions to the Athletic Booster Club and by hosting student-athletes for home-cooked meals
- Investment in The Heath, Converse’s senior apartment-style housing
- Support of the campaign to renovate Pell and Dexter Halls, creating vibrant living spaces for freshmen to have a great first-year experience, and
- Support for Twichell Auditorium renovations.

The Converse community is profoundly thankful for the support, leadership, friendship and community service of Walter S. Montgomery, Jr., and those who knew Montgomery are grateful for his unwavering dedication to Converse and the entire Spartanburg community.

About Converse University

Converse University empowers students to become transformative leaders who see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly. Converse was founded in 1889 by citizens of Spartanburg, SC, who aimed to create an educational experience for women, and in fall 2020 it welcomed its first undergraduate co-educational incoming class. The University encompasses the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the School of Business and Data Science, the School of the Arts, The Graduate School, and the Converse College for Women. Converse students experience deep scholarship, transformative mentorship, experiential learning, and wonderful support for and belief in each other. Through this unique formula, Converse is a creator of opportunity for its students through a personalized education that also includes the professional and technical skills graduates need to be successful in their careers.

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