

**UNIVERSITY RELATIONS**

Schofield Hall 201 | 105 Garfield Ave  
Eau Claire, WI 54701  
715-836-3331 | [mahnkecm@uwec.edu](mailto:mahnkecm@uwec.edu)

University of Wisconsin  
**Eau Claire**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

Wednesday, Sept. 16, 2020

**CONTACT:**

Corry Mahnke

(<mailto:mahnkecm@uwec.edu>)

## **\$3 million Gift to Expand UW-Eau Claire Education, Research About First Amendment Rights**

(Eau Claire, WI) University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire students and faculty soon will have new opportunities to engage in research, coursework and programming through a new initiative around the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment rights.

John Menard — a 1963 UW-Eau Claire graduate and one of Wisconsin's most successful business leaders — is contributing \$3 million to support the new five-year initiative. The UW-Eau Claire Foundation will receive and manage this generous gift.

[The \\$3 million in funding will expand the opportunities available through UW-Eau Claire's Center for Constitutional Studies](#), now renamed the Menard Center for Constitutional Studies. The center is a non-partisan organization created in 2016 that aims to educate the campus community on issues that relate to the U.S. Constitution.

The center, housed in the political science department, also operates as the university's point of access when the media or members of the public seek information or research on issues related to the U.S. Constitution. It invites speakers and hosts events that relate to American constitutional law and politics and supports and organizes faculty and student research around U.S. constitutional law and politics.

"This new support provides an incredible opportunity for our students and faculty to lead and engage in critical research and programming around First Amendment issues, topics that are crucial to every American," says UW-Eau Claire Chancellor James Schmidt. "As I have said many times in my past six years as Chancellor, we all benefit from a fuller understanding of what the U.S. Constitution requires and protects when it comes to free speech and tolerance, and universities clearly have an important role to play in furthering this understanding.

"We are very grateful to the Menard family for supporting us as we work to be a leader in promoting research, education and community outreach in these important matters."

**--CONTINUED--**

## UNIVERSITY RELATIONS

Schofield Hall 201 | 105 Garfield Ave  
Eau Claire, WI 54701  
715-836-3331 | [mahnkecm@uwec.edu](mailto:mahnkecm@uwec.edu)

University of Wisconsin  
**Eau Claire**



### **(PAGE 2-2-2 MENARD GIFT, continued)**

---

Specific details regarding the initiative are below. A portion of the gift from the Menard family will bring Dr. Cornel West, Professor of the Practice of Public Philosophy at Harvard University and Professor Emeritus at Princeton University, and American attorney, legal scholar, and George Washington University Law School Professor Jonathan Turley to campus in 2021 for a discussion about free speech and the U.S. Constitution.

Menard founded his namesake home improvement stores in 1960, while he still was a student at UW-Eau Claire. With more than 325 stores and 41 manufacturing facilities in 14 Midwestern states, including 44 stores and 11 manufacturing facilities in Wisconsin alone, Menards now is one of the largest home improvement retailers in the country, employing 60,000 individuals.

A statement from the Menard family to the UW-Eau Claire campus is available on the [university website](#).

“Our family has deep roots at UW-Eau Claire and we are excited to support the important work and research happening on campus related to the U.S. Constitution,” said the Menard family. “Investing in the future of the communities where our employees, customers and business partners live, learn and work is a core value. Our hope is to empower as many people as possible to have the opportunity our family did to use their innate abilities to learn, contribute and succeed.”

While Menard might be the best known Blugold in his family, he’s far from the only one. His parents, John Sr. and Rosemary (both now deceased), were 1938 teacher education graduates. Rosemary also earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in education from UW-Eau Claire in the 1970s.

### **Funding provides additional faculty, offers new opportunities**

With the gift, which comes in addition to \$747,000 in new funding from the Charles Koch Foundation, UW-Eau Claire will hire two new faculty members; offer new courses; create new speaker forums and series that provide multiple points of view; offer research symposiums; support faculty; and make possible new educational programming.

Two additional faculty will make it possible to develop new courses aimed at giving even more Blugolds opportunities to study and discuss constitutional rights, says Dr. Eric Kasper, professor of political science and director of the center.

**--CONTINUED--**

## UNIVERSITY RELATIONS

Schofield Hall 201 | 105 Garfield Ave  
Eau Claire, WI 54701  
715-836-3331 | [mahnkecm@uwec.edu](mailto:mahnkecm@uwec.edu)

University of Wisconsin  
**Eau Claire**



### **(PAGE 3-3-3 MENARD GIFT, continued)**

---

In addition, the political science department and center will increase support of faculty and faculty-student collaborative research that relates to constitutional rights, he says.

“The goal is to create more opportunities for faculty and students across a variety of disciplines to engage in research that focuses on the freedom of expression and tolerance as they relate to historical developments, current constitutional questions, and the interpretation of constitutional rights by the U.S. Supreme Court,” Kasper says.

The gift will also enable the center to expand its focus, including new programming that specifically relates to the First Amendment. “Understanding issues around the freedom of expression and tolerance is always important, but this is especially true at a time when the American public is deeply polarized,” Kasper says. “While the initiative most directly concerns the First Amendment and its protection of the freedom of expression, the concept of tolerance also relates to other constitutional rights, such as the freedom of religion, the right to privacy, the rights of the criminally accused, and equal protection of the law.

“With this increased support, the center can better promote more understanding of these rights — a good in itself — as well as the roles they can play in improving the state of American politics,” Kasper stated.

The center will work closely with UW-Eau Claire’s Political Research Institute to create a state-of-the-art research center, according to Dr. Geoff Peterson, professor of political science and chair of the political science department.

The research center will produce The Civil Liberties Scorecard, a report that will be generated from national survey research that measures how much Americans know about their civil liberties, with a focus on First Amendment freedoms.

“These surveys will ask respondents questions relating to what their civil liberties are, how they are protected, their feelings on how well those rights are protected, and the value they place on them,” reports Peterson. “In addition to these civil liberties-focused questions, surveys can include other questions of regional, state and national interest, such as political opinions, lifestyle choices or health-related topics.”

**--CONTINUED--**

## UNIVERSITY RELATIONS

Schofield Hall 201 | 105 Garfield Ave  
Eau Claire, WI 54701  
715-836-3331 | [mahnkecm@uwec.edu](mailto:mahnkecm@uwec.edu)

University of Wisconsin  
**Eau Claire**



### **(PAGE 4-4-4-4 MENARD GIFT, continued)**

---

Students will participate in conducting these surveys, providing them with educational and employment opportunities. Data collected in the surveys and quantitative research can be used by the center in its programming, by other departments and programs on campus, and by various entities outside the university, Peterson added.

Additional programs and outreach also are planned, including special trainings for middle- and high-school teachers and students on First Amendment-related topics, he says. "With our expanded mission, the center and UW-Eau Claire are poised to become regional and national leaders on the freedom of expression, tolerance and related constitutional rights," Peterson adds.

**--END--**

*For more information, please contact Political Science Department Chair Geoff Peterson ([petersgd@uwec.edu](mailto:petersgd@uwec.edu)), or Menard Center for Constitutional Studies Director Eric Kasper ([kasperet@uwec.edu](mailto:kasperet@uwec.edu)).*

*Established in 2016, the mission of the non-partisan Center for Constitutional Studies (CCS) is to promote research, education and community outreach on matters related to the Wisconsin Constitution and the United States Constitution.*

<https://www.uwec.edu/academics/college-arts-sciences/departments-programs/political-science/about/center-constitutional-studies/>