

Norma Patteson Mills '60 Presented with Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters by Sweet Briar College

Norma Patteson Mills '60 receives honorary degree at Sweet Briar's 116th Commencement for a lifetime of generosity, leadership, and service.

SWEET BRIAR, VA, UNITED STATES, May 30, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- During [Sweet Briar's 116th Commencement](#) ceremony on May 17, Norma Patteson Mills '60 received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from the College.

In its 124-year history, this is an honor that the College has rarely bestowed on an individual. Following a lifetime of extraordinary service and generosity to many arts and cultural organizations, Norma is truly deserving of this special title.



Norma Patteson Mills '60 receives an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters

A native of Amherst, Va., Norma was interested in attending Sweet Briar from childhood. She entered the College in the fall of 1956 as a proud member of the Class of 1960, pursuing a bachelor's degree in psychology. She left Sweet Briar at the end of her junior year to marry the love of her life, Olan Mills, and move with him to his hometown of Chattanooga, Tenn., although she never forgot Sweet Briar.

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Norma Mills has a deep appreciation for the value and benefit of art and culture on the spiritual well-being, creativity, and intellectual lives of the people in the communities she serves.”

*President Mary Pope M.
Huston '83*

She completed her psychology degree at the University of Chattanooga and earned a degree from the Education for Ministry Program at Sewanee: The University of the South. Throughout their lives together, Norma and Olan have been philanthropic leaders and visionary donors to numerous nonprofits and institutions, including Sweet

Briar College. They have joined others in transforming the city of Chattanooga through their service and commitment to their community. In recognition of their extraordinary generosity to the College, which has supported a variety of vital purposes, Sweet Briar's Memorial Chapel was renamed the Mills Chapel in 2021.

In addition to her generosity, Norma has also dedicated her time to inspiring others to give by serving on several campaign cabinets for Sweet Briar. She served on the Sweet Briar College Board of Directors and is also a former member of the Alumnae Board. She and Olan have been regular attendees at events supporting the College. Furthermore, Norma was honored with the College's Outstanding Alumna Award in 2005.

As an active civic and church leader in her community, Norma's philanthropy and dedication have benefited Sweet Briar College and touched many lives. She has served on several church search committees and on the boards of numerous organizations, including the Chattanooga Children's Hospital Foundation, the Tennessee Aquarium, the AIM Center of Chattanooga, the Tennessee River Gorge Trust, the University of Chattanooga Foundation, the Episcopal Media Center, Sewanee, and the Hunter Museum of Art. Norma is the former president of the board of the Bright School, vice chairman of the Campaign for Sewanee, and co-chair of the Visiting Committee of the School of Theology of Sewanee.

For their extraordinary service to the Chattanooga arts community, Norma and Olan were presented with the Ruth Holmberg Arts Leadership Award by ArtsBuild in 2024.

"Clearly, Norma Mills has a deep appreciation for the value and benefit of art and culture on the spiritual well-being, creativity, and intellectual lives of the people in the communities she and her husband are part of," President Mary Pope M. Huston '83 said while presenting the degree during Commencement.

Norma's enduring connection to Sweet Briar is a powerful testament to the lifelong impact of a



Sweet Briar College: Where Bold Women Thrive, nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, is more than just a campus—it's a launchpad for fearless leaders, innovators, and changemakers.

Sweet Briar education. Her story reflects the values of leadership, service, and community that define the Sweet Briar experience. As our students graduate and go on to shape the world, they do so, standing on the shoulders of alumnae like Norma. To learn more about Sweet Briar College and how you can become part of this extraordinary legacy, contact Admissions at admissions@sbcc.edu or call 434-381-6142.

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