

Rick Pill '77: Honoring his family and his roots

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Like Mountaineers around the world, Richard Pill holds Morgantown dear to his heart.

Morgantown is where Pill, a 1977 WVU Law graduate, grew up. It's where his parents are from. It's where he got his education at Morgantown High School and West Virginia University, and it's where he grew into the person he is today.

"We learned the proper morals, work ethic and leadership skills from day-to day-life in my neighborhood, First Ward," Pill recalled. "Along with our parents, we had good teachers, church leaders and neighbors in First Ward helping us along the way."

Despite his strong Morgantown roots, Pill recalls feeling disconnected from the University community when he started his first undergraduate semester. Then, he and some friends joined Phi Kappa Psi. The fraternity opened doors to new friends and peer mentors who influenced Pill to improve his academic performance, grow his social network, gain leadership skills and get involved in public service projects. It also opened the door for him to attend the College of Law.



Multiple generations of the Pill family

"I had no intention of going to law school during that time, but when I was a junior, seven members of Phi Kappa Psi started law school, and they encouraged me to do the same," Pill said. "The direction of my life would have been totally different without the fraternity."

To honor his upbringing and support law students who share his connections to WVU and the town it calls home, Pill recently established a \$25,000 endowment at the College of Law.

The Richard and Thelma Pill Family Law Scholarship is primarily for WVU Law students who are members of the Phi Kappa Psi fraternity. Secondly, it is reserved for law students who graduated from Morgantown High School and lived in the First Ward. If no student meets these criteria, the scholarship can be awarded to a law student from the Eastern Panhandle. That's where Pill and his brother, David, have operated their law firm since 1977.

Pill & Pill, PLLC focuses primarily on real estate law with an emphasis in residential and commercial settlements. The firm's office is in Martinsburg, West Virginia. Attorney Amanda Steiner '01 works at Pill & Pill and, over the years, the firm has hired other WVU Law graduates and students.

David and Richard both earned their undergraduate degrees in business administration from WVU.

Richard finds that working with his brother is a rewarding experience.

“When a decision needs to be made, our meetings are short and to the point,” he said. “More time is spent helping people with their home settlements and less administratively. We get to share the hard work, tough decisions, and satisfaction of helping others. Not many people get to spend almost their entire life together with their sibling.”

Since he began working in the Eastern Panhandle, Pill has participated in WVU’s growth in the area in many ways, including serving for eight years as President of the Board of Directors for WVU Hospitals in Jefferson and Berkeley counties.

“I am particularly proud that WVU’s presence has grown in this region,” Pill said. “The presence of College of Law graduates continues to increase; our Eastern Panhandle Alumni association is doing well, and a growing number of high school graduates in this area are enrolling at the University.”

Pill’s service to his alma mater extends across many organizations, topics and interest groups. Since he graduated from the College of Law, he has been a member of the Woodburn Circle Society, WVU Hospital System Board of Directors and Mountaineer Parents Club and the visiting committee for the [John Chambers College of Business and Economics](#).

He served as president of the [Eastern Panhandle Chapter](#) of the [WVU Alumni Association](#) and was a member WVU Alumni Association board of directors from 1997 to 2002. He is also a member of the University’s [Board of Governors](#), and he is a current member of the visiting committee at the College of Law.

In 2005, Pill was named an [Outstanding Alumnus](#) for his service to the WVU community.

“Those experiences were so rewarding, and I got to see so many students improving their lives and helping others,” Pill said. “The opportunity to help our University by being on the Board of Governors is a particularly great honor. I am grateful for my wife Donna’s support of my continued to service to WVU.”



The Pills: Donna, Jessica, Christy, Shannon and Rick.

Pill has three daughters who have followed in the family's footsteps in some way or another. Shannon Gallo holds a bachelor's degree in journalism and a master's degree in Industrial Relations from WVU and Jessica Gingold holds a bachelor's degree in interior design from WVU. Shannon has served as president of the [New York/New Jersey Metro Chapter](#) of the WVU Alumni Association, and Jessica is currently vice president of the WVU Alumni Association's Eastern Panhandle chapter.

"Christy didn't get her previous degrees from WVU but has since redeemed herself," Pill joked.

Pill's daughter Christy attended the University of Richmond for her undergraduate degree and earned a master's degree in Strategic Communications from Columbia University before she graduated from the WVU College of Law in 2018.

During law school, Christy, now Christy Fisher, ranked first in her graduating class. She was a member of the [West Virginia Law Review](#), the National Moot Court Team and the [Veteran's Advocacy Law Clinic](#), and she was an extern in the WVU [Office of the Vice President of Legal Affairs and General Counsel](#).

She also served as a board member of the West Virginia Fund for Law in the Public Interest as well as the Monongalia County Habitat for Humanity. She is currently an attorney with the Fitzsimmons Law Firm in Wheeling, West Virginia.

A contributing factor to his daughter's success in law school and beyond, according to Pill, was the meaningful support she received from a scholarship that offset the cost of her legal education. It was this support that inspired him to create his own scholarship in his family's name.



"When I started law school, tuition was less than \$1000 a semester, and by working while in school, I was able to afford it. Now the cost is so much more," he said. "I want to not only support the law school that provided me with a fine education and the opportunity for a fulfilling career, but I want to help others have the same opportunity that was given to me and to my daughter."