

## Reconnecting with the Academy: Young Leaders Giving Back

Interview by  
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**L**ieutenant Colonel Cathy Barrington '97 is currently the 319th Missile Squadron commander at F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and her husband, Lieutenant Colonel Bill Barrington, Jr. '95, is the 90th Missile Maintenance Squadron commander at F.E. Warren.

As graduates of the U.S. Air Force Academy, the Barringtons recently made a generous five-year commitment in support of the Air Force Academy Fund and the new Center for Character and Leadership Development. They took a moment to share their thoughts on the importance of contributing to a culture of support at their alma mater.

**Please tell us a little about your background, and what inspired you to attend the Academy?**

**Cathy:** Bill and I were both drawn to the Academy by our shared childhood dream of becoming astronauts. We come from modest backgrounds—I was raised in a very small town called Barnesville, Georgia, and Bill grew up in Glen Burnie, Maryland, a suburb of Baltimore. Bill and I were determined to go to college, but we lacked the funds and weren't sure how to make it happen.

Both of my parents were in the Air Force, and Bill's family has a long tradition of Army service, so applying to the Air Force Academy was a natural next step. While we will probably never be astronauts, the Academy provided us with a valuable, much-needed opportunity to receive a top-notch education.

**How did your experiences at the Academy shape you?**

**Cathy:** First and foremost, the Academy is where Bill and I met, through Drum and Bugle Corps. Our participation in Drum and Bugle Corps let us travel and see different Air Force bases, which was



amazing. Also, being from the East Coast, we really enjoyed hiking and skiing in the Rocky Mountains. We had so many good experiences at the Academy while pursuing our studies: Bill majored in Space Operations, while I majored in English.

Of course, graduating from the Academy propelled us directly into our careers and many exciting opportunities. Bill graduated in 1995 and was stationed at Cape Canaveral where he launched Atlas rockets. We were married after I graduated in 1997, and then I went to Vandenberg for a year for Intercontinental Ballistic Missile training. Bill and I were finally stationed together at F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming, and we've been in the ICBM business ever since. Fortunately, we have compatible career fields and had the support of many leaders over the years that helped ensure we were stationed together. We greatly appreciate being able to serve our nation, while staying together and growing as a family.

**Bill:** Speaking of those opportunities, we have been able to train and work throughout the country, at one point returning to Colorado when we were stationed at Peterson Air Force Base. While at Peterson, I was selected to be an AOC at the Air Force Academy—serving as Stalag 17's AOC for two years. Cathy continued to work in a space control program at Peterson, moving into the commander's action group at HQ Air Force Space Command. Then, we both returned to F.E. Warren where I took command of the 90th Missile Maintenance Squadron, and Cathy took command of the 319th Missile Squadron this year.

**What inspired you to decide to commit to supporting the Academy?**

**Bill:** My time as an AOC at the Academy was a turning point for us—being back around the Academy, having season football tickets, and interacting with the

cadets just re-blued and energized us to give back. It drove home an appreciation for everything the Academy has given me; I am where I am today because of what I learned in my four years at the Academy.

**Cathy:** Bill and I realized that everything we have—our two sons, the opportunities that we’ve had in the Air Force, the wonderful things we’ve been able to do—is because of everything that started with day one at the Academy. We are very passionate about the school, passionate about the opportunities it provides, and we are so grateful to have been able to experience it all and to graduate into even more opportunities.

Also, practically speaking, we see the Academy experience from a different perspective than when we were cadets. We are deeply committed to the Academy due to our personal experiences, and we are committed as professionals and leaders. We are both squadron commanders now, which makes us graduates *and* customers of the Academy. Brand new, freshly-graduated lieutenants enter as part of the Air Force nuclear enterprise, and we heap a ton of responsibility on their shoulders. We need them ready to hit the ground running as soon as they start their commissions; we expect perfection at all times. We trust that they graduate from the Academy with every critical tenet and principle for leadership in place—to do what is hard but necessary, to do the right thing when no one is looking. We see giving to the Academy as an ongoing investment that we get to work with and help develop.

**Bill:** Actually, we wish we had started giving earlier in our careers. It was one of those situations where we always said, “We’ll get around to it,” without realizing how rewarding the whole experience is. It opens up more avenues for us to be actively connected to our Academy and Air Force community. We feel that we are joining others in making a positive impact.

**Speaking of impact, are there areas of support that you feel are especially important at the Academy?**

**Bill:** I am very passionate about the Center for Character and Leadership Development, as I worked with them extensively while I was an AOC. Seeing the effect of its programs firsthand, I believe that it’s a great mission that goes a long way to build the leaders of character that we need as a nation. The CCLD has received tremendous support this year, and I would like to see that continue.

**Cathy:** The more I advance in my career, the more understanding and appreciation I gain for the daily challenges that the Superintendent faces in ensuring a good education for the cadets at the Academy. So, the Superintendent’s Fund—which allows

the Superintendent discretion to allocate funds as needed—is very important. Back in our cadet days, we received a lot of our funding for Drum and Bugle Corps from the Superintendent’s Fund, and I imagine the same still applies for many other cadet activities and programs. We have great leaders at the Academy, and we like the direction that we are going. Our family is committed to giving back, to help provide wonderful opportunities for future generations of cadets, and we hope our sons will be Academy cadets someday, too. It will be their choice but, speaking from experience, we know it will be amazing if they do! ✓

## Graduate Participation: Your Gift Matters

**EVERY GIFT** from graduates to the Air Force Academy Fund is important to the Academy.

Graduate giving has a powerful impact on the mission of the Academy, providing support for “margin of excellence” programs for cadets such as: international immersion, cadet clubs and intramurals, undergraduate research, character development programs and seminars, and distinguished speaker’s series. These gifts also provide important graduate services, like: the class legacy program, chapter programs, career services, class ring maintenance, and *Checkpoints* magazine.

Additionally, graduate participation rates in giving back to the Academy are significant for many other important reasons:

**Graduate giving participation rates factor into national rankings like the U.S. News & World Report:** Participation raises the Academy’s national ranking—a key criterion in most higher education ranking methodologies. Therefore, these gifts, regardless of size, *actually increase the value of your degree.*

**Graduate giving participation rates are used for peer benchmarking:** Rates are measured by all colleges, universities, and service academies and are often viewed as a primary benchmark of institutional pride. Compared to our sister academies, Air Force Academy participation is modest at 11%, with Navy participation rates at 24% and Army rates at 29%.

**Graduate giving participation rates can help attract other important forms of funding:** Participation is a measure by which many corporations and foundations rate graduate involvement, which is a key consideration when making major gifts and grants to the Academy.

A gift of any size to the Academy elevates the overall graduate giving participation rate. No gift is too small to make a difference.



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