

Chicago Sun Times

Dave's back

INDIANA | Letterman returns to Ball State for dedication of building named for him

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MUNCIE, Ind. -- Giving hope to underachievers everywhere, former academic washout David Letterman returned to his alma mater Friday to see a sophisticated \$21 million communications building dedicated in his name.



David Letterman and his mother, Dorothy Mengerling, laugh Friday during the dedication of the \$21 million David Letterman Communication and Media Building at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind. Letterman, a Ball State grad, grew up in Indianapolis.

"It would have been half that," Letterman quipped, "but they had to use mob concrete."

Encourages 'C' students

Students at Ball State University swarmed the area outside the new David Letterman Communication and Media Building to see the school's best-known grad accept the honor and shout, "Lemme see the 'C' students! Keep plugging, kids!"

Though remembered as a witty presence on campus radio during his student days, Letterman admittedly put little effort into classroom work and told the crowd he graduated in 1970 with a 2.0 grade point average -- "an *ugly* 2.0."

With his mother, Dorothy Mengerling, 86, alongside him on stage, he recalled that she had urged him to switch to trade school, a better path for making money. "Mom," he said, "I think you can relax now."

Also present was 3-year-old Harry Letterman, who earlier had spotted the costumed Ball State mascot Charlie Cardinal and declared, "Daddy, there's a dancing parrot!"

Before the ceremony, the CBS "Late Show" host toured the building and had a closed-door Q&A session with a group of handpicked students. Among them was Al LeVine, a Glenbrook North graduate who won a \$10,000 scholarship subsidized by Letterman.

AP)

TOP 4 QUIPS

A few of Letterman's "Top 10 Good Things About Having Your Name on a Building":

- On weekends, maintenance crew lets you ride on the floor buffer.
- When people say Letterman is cold and empty, they might be talking about the building.
- Cool to hear exterminator say, "Letterman's crawling with rats."
- Unlike me, it should still look good when it's 60.

"He was the C student who always wanted to have a fun time," LeVine said. "Guess that's half of college. And he became successful."

This was a rare campus visit for Letterman, 60, who hadn't set foot there since a homecoming visit in 1979. But he has been generous, helping Ball State launch an upgraded radio station in the '80s.

And his "Late Show" joshing of Ball State has done wonders for the school's name recognition. During a football losing streak by the Cardinals in 2000, he delivered running reports on the team's progress and had basketball great Magic Johnson give the players an on-air pep talk. And just last month, a top 10 list of "Signs You've Chosen the Wrong College" included the entry, "Most famous alum? David Letterman."

Though he pretends on TV to crave recognition, even insisting for a time that Ball State needed a David Letterman Stadium, in real life he had to be talked into lending his name to the communications complex.

'Anything is possible'

"Dave is very modest," said Ball State spokesman Tony Proudfoot. "I'm not sure he felt he deserved it."

On Friday, he seemed humbled by the honor. "If reasonable people can put my name on a \$21 million building," the comedian said, "anything is possible."