

# The University of Texas of The Permian Basin



## Motivated—and Motivating Others—to Give



When The University of Texas of the Permian Basin (UTPB) began offering upper-level mechanical engineering classes, Midland native and businessman Mark Nicholas established the Mark Nicholas Endowed Presidential Scholarship in Engineering.

Things evolve: This certainty is among the many lessons Mark Nicholas has gleaned from his personal and professional life.

When the sports enthusiast photographed Midland Senior High School soccer matches, it led to him taking photos of some of those same athletes who then went on to play at The University of Texas of the Permian Basin (UTPB). That volunteer job led to others: Mark offered to photograph UTPB athletes at swim meets, baseball games, volleyball games and cross country meets. This is a hobby Mark enjoys because, in photographing the sports that don't typically command a staff photographer, he is able to provide parents and friends lasting images of their loved ones at the height of competition.

Mark's philanthropic involvement at UTPB progressed along a parallel track. He was taking photos at a swim meet and noticed that the timing system the team usually borrowed for such events wasn't being used. Mark, who was born and raised in Midland and has worked in the engineering and construction business there for more than 25 years, asked for permission to raise money to purchase a system for the university. He then approached local businesses for support. "We raised enough money to allow the swim team to purchase its own system. We raised about \$40,000—it wasn't a lot of money, but it was money they didn't have."

Shortly after that successful campaign, UTPB President David Watts asked Mark to join the university's development board—a group of people "who come together for the collective good of the university," says Mark. He enjoys serving as a board member because it gives him the opportunity to meet "like-minded people" who are passionate about performing arts, nursing, engineering—a variety of academic studies offered at UTPB.

Mark received his bachelors and master's degrees in engineering from UT Austin. He notes that to successfully raise money for a university—or any organization—you must focus on motivation. "If I can tell a story and connect people to their passions and then let them know how they can contribute, they usually do so," he says.

When UTPB began offering upper-level mechanical engineering classes in 2009, Mark found his own motivation and established the Mark Nicholas Endowed Presidential Scholarship in Engineering. The scholarship made good on a promise that he and other area engineers made to the university and UT System leaders: "We said we would find the money for scholarships and professors once the engineering program launched," Mark recalls. His company, the Nicholas Consulting Group, also joined other oil and gas companies to fund the Petroleum Engineering Professorship.

Mark will continue to advocate on behalf of UTPB and its students, because what he gets in return is beyond measure.

Such acts of philanthropy inspire others to give and financial support is essential to the growth of UTPB's programs. For his part, Mark will continue to play matchmaker for the university. "I hear about needs and then I find someone to help meet those needs." It's a responsibility he gratefully accepts because when he advocates on behalf of UTPB and its students, what he gets in return is beyond measure.

"When you start hearing about the impact you can make in a person's life, it sticks with you," he says. "People will benefit from the gifts we give long after we're gone. This is going to continue."