

## Why George Landegger Thinks Investing in Alabama Writers Is A Good Idea

When John Johnson, president of Alabama Southern Community College, began dreaming about a literary center on his campus in Monroeville, he knew that he wanted to include a major award that recognized Alabama writers.

“I thought it appropriate that we recognize the very best of Alabama’s writers with an award of merit that carried a cash prize, as well as a commemorative work of art,” Johnson said.

Through contact with novelist Harper Lee’s family in Monroeville, he obtained permission to name an annual writing award recognizing Alabama’s Distinguished Writer of the Year after the world-famous author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Johnson asked the Alabama Writers’ Forum to select the writer to receive what would become the state’s premier recognition for literary arts.

In tandem with this award, Johnson conceived of a literary scholar’s award and asked the Association of College English Teachers of Alabama (ACETA) to serve as the selection committee and to name the award. Thus the Eugene Current-Garcia Award was born, honoring one of the most distinguished and admired members of Auburn University’s English department faculty.

With the awards established and the judges in place, Johnson faced the challenge of funding the awards and paying for the cast bronze clock tower that he planned to commission from renowned Alabama sculptor Frank Fleming.

“My first thought was to offer George Landegger, chairman of Parsons & Whittemore, which owns the locally based Alabama River Pulp companies, the chance to be the award’s corporate sponsor. I was well acquainted with the Landegger family’s philanthropic efforts and of Mr. Landegger’s community leadership in this regard. So it seemed natural to offer him the opportunity to support the Harper Lee Award.”

Johnson said that the industrialist’s immediate response was “Yes!” to



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*George Landegger with  
Harper Lee Award recipient  
Sena Jeter Naslund and  
president of Alabama Southern  
College Dr. John Johnson.*

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*Jeanie Thompson, executive director of the Alabama Writers' Forum, congratulates Sena Jeter Naslund.*

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*George Landegger with the Frank Fleming-designed Monroe County Courthouse clock tower sculpture given to the Harper Lee and Current-Garcia award winners.*

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*Eva Landegger with granddaughter Helena and Sena Jeter Naslund.*

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*Current-Garcia Award winner Bert Hitchcock with Janice Lassiter of the Association of College English Teachers of Alabama and Anne Boozier of the Alabama Humanities Foundation.*

sponsoring the Harper Lee Award for 1998, adding that he was grateful for the opportunity to honor Harper Lee and the best writers in the state. Thus Johnson found it less difficult to persuade other entities to pitch in and fund the Eugene Current-Garcia Award, which was supported the first year by Barnes and Noble, and in the subsequent two years by Alabama Power Foundation.


In 1998 the inaugural Harper Lee Award for the Distinguished Alabama Writer was given to fiction writer and jazz historian Albert Murray. The second and third years saw novelist Madison Jones and fiction writer/poet Helen Norris honored. Literary scholars recognized in the first three years included American literature specialist Claudia Durst Johnson, Alabama

literature scholar Philip K. Beidler, and modern American fiction expert Donald R. Noble.

When the fourth year rolled around, Johnson again found himself looking for a corporate sponsor for the literary scholar award. But he didn't have to look far. At the fourth Alabama Writers Symposium, held this past May in Monroeville, Johnson announced George and Eva Landegger's commitment to funding the pair of awards for the next five years. During the awards luncheon presentation of the Harper Lee Award to Sena Jeter Naslund, author of the internationally acclaimed *Ahab's Wife, or the Star Gazer*, Alabama Writers' Forum executive director Jeanie Thompson presented Eva Landegger with a signed first edition of *Ahab's Wife*.

## Parsons & Whittemore

George Landegger is chairman of Parsons & Whittemore, one of the world's largest producers of market pulp, the raw material used in paper-making. Parsons & Whittemore has two pulp mills in Alabama and one in Canada. Chairman George Landegger and his family own the company. Landegger's father, Karl, came to the United States from Austria in 1938 and bought Parsons & Whittemore, then a small pulp-trading firm founded in 1909. Parsons & Whittemore also produces newsprint through its Alabama River Newsprint joint venture with Canada's Abitibi-Consolidated, the world's largest newsprint maker.



### Alabama River Pulp and Alabama Pine Pulp Companies, Claiborne, Alabama

Alabama River Pulp and Alabama Pine Pulp companies are wholly owned subsidiaries of the Parsons & Whittemore Organization, and are known worldwide as producers of quality softwood and hardwood market pulps. The Claiborne Mill Complex (in Monroe County) is recognized as the largest pulping operation in North America and as one of the world's largest single pulp and papermaking sites. The manufacturing facilities are noted for their efficient application of the industry's most advanced engineering and environmental technology.

The two pulp mills and its woodlands division employ some 600 people with an annual payroll of about \$50 million. Combined, the mills produce over 800,000 tons per year. The pulps are used by papermakers across the globe for numerous products, including fine writing papers, copy paper, towels, tissues, coffee filters and a variety of other products.

In addition to supporting the Harper Lee and Eugene Current-Garcia Awards, the Alabama River Companies also show support for a variety of community programs, including the following:

- sponsoring the Monroe County Adult Literacy Council and providing a facility in Monroeville for its use;
- purchasing IBM's Writing to Read computer labs for kindergarten students in public and private schools in Monroe, Conecuh, and Clarke counties;
- donating \$500,000 to Reading Alabama's successful campaign to raise \$5 million to purchase the Writing to Read computer labs for kindergartners in public schools through Alabama. P&W Chairman George Landegger organized this effort and serves as President of Reading Alabama, Inc.;
- contributing to the Monroe County Library and remaining a longtime supporter of *To Kill A Mockingbird* Teachers Literary Workshops and Young Writers Series sponsored by the Monroe County Heritage Museum;
- initiating the start up of Our Place Teen Center to help teens in rural counties have a safe place to gather by donating \$350,000 for building the facility and by serving serves as the project's major sponsor.

"For your support of this award, we would like to present your family with signed copies of books by all of the Harper Lee Award Recipients to show our deep appreciation for your recognition of Alabama writers," Thompson announced at the ceremony. Eva Landegger then spoke briefly, underscoring her love of writing and her family's commitment to the literary arts in Alabama.

Parsons & Whittemore Chairman George Landegger has actively supported literacy throughout the state and has enlisted strong cooperation from influential business leaders like Alabama Power Company's Elmer Harris and Retirement Systems of Alabama's David Bronner. But both Landegger and his wife, Eva, know from personal experience that once children learn to read, the key to continued success lies in their developing a love for reading. This is why the Landeggers place such high value on writers.

"We recognize that parents and teachers play the key role of equipping a child with the basic reading skills," says Eva Landegger. Yet Mrs. Landegger maintains that once children learn to read, they must be continually exposed to stimulating reading material. "That is why writers are so important. Whether it's a classic novel like *To Kill a Mockingbird* or a biography of a favorite sports hero, as children experience an assortment of literature at progressive reading levels they discover their particular interests and expand their knowledge. This sparks a passion for reading and instills an appreciation for education that continues into adulthood and can last a lifetime," she believes.