An open letter from the Menard family:

Anyone who knows the Menard family knows how proud we are of our Midwestern heritage and the principles it's instilled in us. Chief among those is a dedication to hard work and our belief in the power of education to unlock the extraordinary human potential that lies within all of us.

We believe that big dreams can come true for those who are willing to work for them. In 1958 we started transitioning from farming and teaching to build our home improvement business from scratch, building it, as has been reported, "one two-by¬ four at a time." Since then, Menards' reputation for offering superior value has led to success far beyond our expectations.

We want to share in that success by investing in the future of the communities where our employees, customers and business partners live, learn and work. Our hope is to empower as many people as possible to have the opportunity our family did to use their innate abilities to learn, contribute and succeed.

When one person succeeds, we all succeed. By providing opportunities that help people realize their potential, we drive progress, because the more people who are creating value for society, the stronger we all become. So it's a win-win all around.

How do we do that? We think one good place to start is with higher education.

To tackle the tough issues facing this country, that are holding so many people back, requires big, bold ideas. And where do we find those? One place is at colleges and universities like the University of Wisconsin.

Who doesn't remember at least one professor or guest lecturer in college who exposed us to a new way of thinking or captivated us with previously unimagined possibilities? Who inspired us to dream? Who pushed us to do more than we thought we were capable of? That is the essence of learning. That is what leads to innovation. That is what moves society forward.

A seminal part of the college experience is hearing from people who have a diversity of viewpoints and track record of creating value for others. At Menards, we want to give more students the opportunity to have that experience and to develop a lifelong love of learning as a result.

From the beginning of time the one constant in the world is change. Thanks to the technological revolution we are all living through--and benefiting from--today's rate of disruption seems faster than ever, and it spares no one. We don't even cut two-by-fours like we used to.

To stay relevant, all of us need to embrace learning and new ideas so that we can create an America where nobody gets left behind. We hope our support of the University of Wisconsin will enhance the educational experiences of students, preparing them for future success and inspiring generational prosperity throughout communities across the Midwest to lead the way.

John Menard founded his namesake home improvement stores while he still was a student at the University of Wisconsin. Today, Menards has 325 stores and 41 manufacturing facilities located in 14 Midwestern states. In Wisconsin alone, Menards has 44 stores and 11 manufacturing facilities.

The Menard family's commitment to the University of Wisconsin will enable the school's Center for the Study of Liberal Democracy to launch a forum series that seeks to model for a student audience the potential for civil discourse and intellectual diversity. The gift also will help support two post-doctoral fellowships, up to five graduate summer fellowships, and a new visiting scholar position. The Center also will produce up to four journals that promote scholarship, study, and teaching in line with the Center and the school's mission, which is to encourage civil discourse and the study of the liberal tradition.