In the Kitchen at White Oaks

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Furman First Gentleman
Charles Davis got a
taste for the kitchen at
an early age when his
mother, Shirley, took a full-
time job as an antique store
office manager in tiny Farm-
ville, North Carolina.

After Charles arrived home
from school, Mrs. Davis would
telephone to dictate the din-
er for the evening and ask her
son to make late-afternoon
preparations. Oftentimes, the
tasks were simple: remove
something from the freezer or
chop vegetables.

As Charles grew older, he
began preparing simple dishes
like pasta and chili. Eventu-
ally he took on the role as the
Davis family dessert-maker.

“Over time, I sort of de-
veloped an interest in it. I just
grew to enjoy it and was good
at it,” says Davis. “So, here
we are.”

“Here” is the publication
of Davis’ cookbook, In the
Kitchen at White Oaks.

While Davis can prepare
a tasty beef bourguignon
and cheesy potato casserole,
he’ll tell you that his culinary
skills are more akin to Chef
Boyardee than Chef Tell. The
work also reflects his interest
in White Oaks—the president’s
home—and the people who
have lived there. It includes a
heaping of the home’s history
and about the first ladies who
came before.

White Oaks original
owners, construction mag-
nate and industrialist Charles
Daniel and his wife, Homozel,
oversaw every detail of the

home’s construction in the
late 1950s. Charles Daniel met
with architects from Atlanta,
imported Douglas Firs from
California for the framing,
approved intricate wood
carvings and worked hand-
in-glove with some of his top
construction workers.

Once completed, the home
was tastefully adorned with
celebrated works of art, an-
tiques, and other home décor
selected by Homozel Daniel.
Charles Daniel lived at White
Oaks until his death in 1964.
In 1992, the 9,750-square-foot
home was included in a

$21.4 million gift that was
bequeathed to Furman
by Homozel.

Since that time, five
Furman presidents and their
families have lived there. In
the Kitchen at White Oaks
includes contributed recipes
from the families of John
Plyler (1939–1964), Gordon
Blackwell (1965–1976), John
Johns (1976–1994), David
Shi (1994–2010), Carl Kohrt
(2013–14) and, of course,
Elizabeth Davis.

In the Kitchen at White
Oaks is part-recipe, part-
history book that celebrates
the 25th anniversary of the
Daniel bequest while giving a
respectful nod to the former
Furman first ladies. While
Charles Davis collected and
authored the book’s contents,
the cookbook was edited and
designed by Furman’s Univer-
sity Communications office.

The notion for the book’s
creation was hatched about
three years ago. As Davis set-
tled into his role as Furman’s
first gentleman, he began
preparing lunch and hosting
the spouses and partners
of university trustees at his
home during the board’s meet-
ings three times a year.

“After the second luncheon,
some attendees began asking
for copies of my recipes, and
then someone suggested that
I compile a cookbook,” says
Davis. “At first, I didn’t give
the idea much thought. But
when the requests continued,
I thought maybe it warranted
additional consideration.”

In the Kitchen at White Oaks
will be available for purchase
at Homecoming. The book may
also be purchased by visiting
furman.bncollege.com.

BY JOHN ROBERTS

In the Kitchen at
White Oaks

First gentleman’s part-history, part-recipe book
serves up a celebration of the president’s home and
those who lived there.