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As campaign approaches conclusion, university launches final push

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As campaign approaches conclusion, university launches final push

AS CHAIR of the board of trustees in October of 2007, Carl Kohrt stood at the podium in Timmons Arena and helped launch the largest fundraising drive in Furman’s history: the $400 million Because Furman Matters capital campaign.

Today, almost six years later, Kohrt is at the forefront of the campaign again — only now he is interim president of Furman, a position he assumed July 1 after Rod Smolla’s resignation. And just as he was there for the campaign’s beginning, Kohrt is looking forward to bringing it to its December 31 conclusion.

To date, Furman has raised $390 million toward its $400 million goal. As the campaign enters its final months, Kohrt says he is confident that alumni, parents and friends will step forward to help the university reach its completion.

When he talks of the campaign and its current and potential impact on Furman, Kohrt invokes a quote from the poem “The Bridge Builder,” by Will Allen Dromgoole. The poem tells the “pay it forward” story of an old man on a voyage. Kohrt says, “It represents a moment in my family’s life when we chose to be philanthropic in a larger way, and it suits the way we all should feel about why this campaign matters.”

“The Bridge Builder” follows the old man along a journey that takes him to the edge of a treacherous abyss. Once he makes it safely to the other side, he stops to build a bridge. An observer questions the man’s actions and motivations, to which the old man replies:

“Good friend, in the path I have come, he said, “There followed after me today
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
This chasm that has been as naught to me
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be;
He, too, must cross in the twilight dam;
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him!”

Kohrt says, “The many donors who have given generously to this campaign are helping to build a bridge, similar to the one Dromgoole describes, for those who have yet to come to Furman. But we are not yet across. Because Furman Matters is ultimately about our students. They are worthy of our investment. We are building the bridge for them.”

In recent years the campaign’s final phase has focused on four primary areas. The university has worked to strengthen support for and access to the Furman experience through such efforts as the Furman Standard (faculty development), Furman United (financial aid for students with unexpected economic need) and enhancements to international and study away programs (page 15). Furman’s efforts to renew its athletics program have led to increased scholarship support for varsity and club sports, plus major improvements to facilities for baseball, softball, golf, soccer and football (page 21).

The $7.75 million expansion and renovation of the Trone Student Center and the recent gift from John and Jeanette Cothran toward the Center for Vocational Reflection (page 15) have been key elements in Furman’s determination to transform the living and learning experience for students. The university has also worked to expand its ties and outreach to the community and region through campaign initiatives that support the Shi Center for Sustainability, the Herring Center for Continuing Education and the Riley Institute at Furman.

As the campaign proceeds toward completion, Kohrt says, “What we need most are funds to build the endowment that supports our programs for students and professors. Adding about $20 million to Furman’s endowment would be an incredible capstone.”

And when he thinks about the iconic image of the Bell Tower with Paris Mountain in the background — the image that adorned the original campaign marketing materials and served as inspiration through the last six years — Kohrt says it is representative of the heights to which Furman aspires. As he says, “If you don’t stretch, you will fall short. And we want to continue to stretch — and to rise.”

To learn more about the remaining needs of the Because Furman Matters campaign, contact mike.gatchell@furman.edu or visit becausefurmanmatters.com. Stories on these pages by Kate Hufner Dabbs ’09.