Parent leadership, support provide $45 million campaign boost

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Class of ‘13 ‘First Gift’ goes to Furman United

THE SENIOR CLASS GIFT is a Furman tradition that for years has represented the personalities and passions of the students who select it. Some classes have chosen to support such projects as the 9/11 Memorial, the patio at Cherrydale, the amphitheater and the Timmons Arena gate. Others have decided to establish scholarships or to designate their contributions to local charities.

For members of the Class of 2013, who began their college careers in the midst of the recession, their decision held extra resonance. They chose to support the Furman United Scholarship Fund, which allocates money to students at risk of not completing their educations because of unforeseen financial circumstances.

Last year alone, Furman United provided aid to more than 100 students. Class president Stephen Tagert says, “We all have known someone who has gone through financial difficulties on campus. We are a family, and we’re here for each other when things are tough.”

He adds, “I think it’s just as important to keep students at Furman as it is to lure students in through scholarships. It is much harder to come to Furman, enjoy its community, and then to give up the experience than it is to never have been able to come at all. Unfortunately, I also know some students who have had to leave because Furman United did not have enough funds, which is a reason I hope this gift will be successful.”

Tagert says the class renamed the project the “Furman First Gift” because it is their first act of giving back to the university. “It’s a reminder that we need to give to Furman after graduation if others are going to have the same wonderful experiences that we’ve had.”

The effort has received an added boost from Greenville’s Daniel-Mickel Foundation, which is matching each first gift of $25 or more with $100. In addition, a group of parents is matching every $50 contributed by other parents of graduating students. To date, the fund drive has raised approximately $56,000.

Contact ashley.baker1067@furman.edu to learn more, or visit furmanfirstgift.com.

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WHAT DOES IT TAKE to transform a $400 million campaign dream into reality? For Furman, a key ingredient is philanthropic parents. And while some may quake at the thought of being both donors and tuition-paying parents, Furman parents have demonstrated that they are a special breed of supporters.

When the university launched the Because Furman Matters campaign in 2007, parents joined the effort by establishing the Parent Campaign Committee (PCC) within Parents Council. The leadership team set goals, opened new doors and served as advocates for building the university’s endowment, supporting capital projects and providing more scholarship funds.

The results to date: Furman parents have raised more than $44.8 million toward the campaign. Says John Yates, a former chair of the PCC who is now on the board of trustees, “We are very proud of the role parents have played. We knew they would be helpful, but we were overwhelmed by their enthusiasm.” Their leadership is more evident now than ever, as eight current trustees are or have been Furman parents.

Exactly how can parents make a difference? A prime example is the renovated Trone Student Center, made possible by generous lead gifts from two sets of Furman parents: David ’77 and June Trone, and Class of ’83 members Robert and Margaret Platt Hill.

Lynda Panaretos, who chairs the Parents Council with her husband Jim, says, “The cost of tuition does not cover the total cost of providing the excellent educational experiences for our students, so we must do our part to support the advancement of the university. It’s worth it.” And as the campaign nears its December 31 conclusion, parents are likely to continue to play a crucial role in the final push toward the $400 million goal.

To learn more about parent fundraising efforts, contact judy.wilson@furman.edu.