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It's all about making and maintaining connections

Tom Triplitt '76
Furman University

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IT'S ALL ABOUT MAKING AND MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS

THE ALUMNI OFFICE spent much of the fall coordinating events all over the country to introduce President Rod Smolla to the Furman faithful.

He has been most generous with his time and genuinely excited to have the opportunity to travel and meet alumni,

parents and friends of the university. I have heard nothing but positive comments from the large crowds that have turned out to greet the new president.

And interestingly, I have seen many new faces at these events. Part of the reason, I believe, is that word of President Smolla's genuine warmth and ability to connect with others is getting around, and is encouraging folks to reconnect with Furman.

Many people have told me that President Smolla has been hitting home runs with his comments at these events, as he touches on such themes as civility, outreach and a commitment to recruiting and developing strong, well-rounded students. His attitude and energy have also invigorated the environment on campus.

Under his direction, Furman has launched a strategic planning process that will involve alumni, parents and friends. I feel certain you will be excited and pleased about the results that will emerge from this effort. Watch for news about it in the coming months. You may be asked to help.

WHY GIVE TO ALMA MATER?

Everyone knows that the Alumni Office is all about keeping alumni connected to Furman. But let me talk about another way to remain connected — and to make a difference.



Because the majority of this magazine's readers are Furman alumni, most of us were on campus during what were arguably the most formative years of our lives. We developed lifelong friends, and as time passes we tend to appreciate more and more the memories and experiences we created during our days at the Harvard of the South.

So how can we give back to an institution that did so much for us? One way is through making annual gifts to Furman. Annual gifts help bridge the gap between tuition and the actual cost to educate a student for a year. Currently, a full year's tuition and fees of \$38,088 (excluding room and board) cover only about 70 percent of the actual cost of a Furman education. For anyone who receives scholarship aid, the gap is considerably wider.

You can help make up the difference. Annual gifts go toward the operating needs of every department, program and activity at Furman.

You may designate your gift in a number of ways: to honor a favorite faculty or staff member, support a specific academic or extracurricular program, fund internships, research projects or service learning efforts, or provide scholarship aid. A gift to the Furman United program, for example, offers assistance to students whose ability to finance their educations has been adversely affected by the recent economic downturn.

With the value of a dollar being stretched more tightly than ever, it is becoming more difficult for some students to remain at Furman. This is where annual support really makes a difference. Today, thanks in large part to the generosity of annual donors, more than 75 percent of Furman students receive some sort of financial aid.

Gifts don't have to be designated for specific projects, either. Unrestricted donations allow Furman to use the contributions in areas of most urgent need.

Not that many years ago, Furman was recognized as a leader among liberal arts colleges in the percentage of alumni who made annual gifts to their alma mater. Those numbers have slipped slightly, and we would like to see the university move back among the national pacesetters.

By making your gift on-line, you can receive the Furman donor badge. Use it to show your dedication to Furman by posting it on your Facebook or Twitter page. Doing so could help encourage others to follow your lead.

Visit www.MyFurmanGift.com to make an on-line gift.

WEBSITE NOTES

We hope you visit the Alumni Association website (<http://alumni.furman.edu>) frequently, but in case you haven't stopped by recently, we've added a few items to the page.

You can still submit class news, search for classmates and create an e-mail forwarding address. But you can also order a set of Furman pearls or a Furman cycling jersey. You can even download the fight song as your ring tone.

So check out the ever improving, ever expanding Alumni Association website to see what's new.

— TOM TRIPLITT

The author, a 1976 graduate, is director of the Alumni Association.