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An alum's perspective on annual giving

Furman University

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An alum's perspective on annual giving

Furman alumni are a distinctly supportive group, even in tough times. In this Q&A, Kevin Spears '92, volunteer chair of Furman's Annual Giving Council, describes how philanthropy makes a difference at Furman and discusses his motivations for giving back. Kevin is a free-lance organizational consultant in Atlanta.

What drives your financial commitment to Furman? Why is it important to you to support the university?

>> I received a scholarship when I was a student. Those funds were donated by people who had a real commitment to Furman. It seems appropriate and right that, as an alumnus, I should reciprocate by helping to provide similar assistance for current students.

Sometimes people say, "Well, I didn't get any scholarships or financial aid, so I'm not going to give." My response is that I don't know exactly how much financial benefit I received as a student, but I do understand that other people helped make Furman possible for me. It's as though somebody I never met paid thousands of dollars of a student loan for me.

Some alumni may not fully understand how an annual gift helps Furman. How would you explain this to them?

>> Annual gifts provide funding for the existing budget. Because tuition doesn't cover the entire cost of the Furman experience, annual gifts provide the difference.

One thing I appreciate is that I can choose the area that I want my dollars to support — scholarships, Paladin Club, engaged learning, sustainability, any program that receives budget

support. In 2009-10 Furman will need to raise \$4 million to balance the budget. That's a daunting figure, but even small gifts can really add up.

Other alumni considered a Furman education to be a worthy cause for their philanthropy. I would hope that we do the same now that the shoe is on the other foot.

What are the biggest challenges for Furman in reaching its annual giving goals?

>> There are two primary challenges. Furman operates on a fiscal year that begins July 1 and ends June 30. If alumni make a gift or pledge early in the fiscal year, fewer dollars will be spent on mailings and phone calls asking for financial support. It's a win-win situation for the university and for donors. The other challenge is to encourage, even persuade, younger alumni of the value of including Furman among the causes they support.

How can alumni provide immediate support for today's students?

>> ■ Enclose their 2009-10 gift in the envelope provided in this magazine.

■ Give a few dollars more than their usual annual gift and designate the extra dollars for the Furman United fund (www.furman-united.com).

■ Consider endowing a scholarship or becoming a Partners Scholar sponsor. Contact john.kemp@furman.edu or call (864) 294-3717 to learn how.

■ Thank the members of the Association of Furman Students, Student Alumni Council and Class of 2009 for their support for current students. Encourage them to maintain their spirit of giving as alumni.



COURTESY KEVIN SPEARS

Furman students help Furman students

In these tight economic times, Furman students are pitching in to support the \$400 million Because Furman Matters campaign's efforts to boost retention and scholarship aid.

The Class of 2009's gift of \$45,050, presented at graduation in May, went to establish a scholarship to benefit a graduate of Bridges to a Brighter Future, a three-year Furman program that serves Greenville County high school students who live below the poverty line and show great academic potential. Bridges serves students from all 14 public high schools in Greenville County, plus a charter school.

The Bridges program was recently named one of the nation's best summer programs by the National Center for Summer Learning at The Johns Hopkins University. The Excellence in Summer Learning Award recognizes programs that accelerate academic achievement and promote healthy development for young people.

To learn more about Bridges and its work, visit www.furman.edu/bridges.

Tying in to the theme of students helping students, the Student Alumni Council voted at the conclusion of the 2008-09 academic year to create a SAC Scholarship. The initial donation of \$20,000 was raised through a variety of SAC-sponsored projects. SAC established the award hoping to motivate other student organizations to give back to Furman during this period of financial stress.

Along the same lines, the Association of Furman Students, the university's student government, has committed a portion of its 2009-10 budget toward scholarship support. AFS voted to allocate \$25,000 toward student aid through a program called "Students for Students."