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A tribute to a true ambassador for Furman

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A TRIBUTE TO A TRUE AMBASSADOR FOR FURMAN

There was a grand funeral held in Daniel Chapel on Furman's campus May 16. It was for the president of the Alumni Association — Randolph Williams Blackwell '63, who died May 13 after a brief illness.

Just a few weeks before, Randy had spoken with the board of trustees at its spring meeting, recapping the year's activities. He had only recently been in my office to plan our fall meeting. He was excited about finding volunteers to work in the organic garden near Cliffs Cottage, the *Southern Living* sustainable home.

Randy was the quintessential alumnus. He was from a great Furman family. His father was Gordon W. Blackwell, eighth president of Furman. Both of Randy's children are alumni, and his son, Frank, also serves on the Alumni Association Board of Directors. Two of his three siblings are alumni, and his late brother Gordon had been a member of Furman's board.

Randy had the unique ability to make you feel that you were one of his closest friends. He had hundreds of them. His positive attitude and enthusiasm made people feel good.

As the president of the Alumni Board, his goal was to help all Furman alumni, but especially the Alumni Board, know more about the wonderful things going on at Furman, from Asian Studies to sustainability to athletics to admissions. He was amazed when a professor or staff member would spend time with the board, sharing their enthusiasm for their work at Furman. Randy would catch their enthusiasm and try and share it with everyone else.

Clare Folio Morris '83, who succeeds Randy as Alumni Association president, says, "Randy was one of those larger-than-life people you rarely meet in your lifetime. He brimmed with bonhomie (so appropriate to Furman — right?), and you couldn't help but bask in the glow of his flat-out, full-tilt enthusiasm.



"In the short period of time that we had to know each other, I grew to love him and his beautiful wife, June, very much. Furman is a better place because of Randy Blackwell."

Chris Brown '89, president-elect of the Alumni Association, shared these thoughts:

"It is hard to find the words to express how saddened I am over Randy's death. I developed a deep sense of admiration and respect for Randy once I was elected to the Alumni Board. He was so generous with his time and support when I came on the board, and that support continued as we began to work together on the Executive Committee the past two years.

"He was a 'feel good' person in the sense that I always felt better about myself after having been with him. He had a gift for making others feel special, and it is a trait I have tried to emulate in my own life. I was always impressed by his true passion for Furman and how he loved to talk about it. He was an ambassador for our alma mater in so many ways.

"His leadership and devotion to Furman and our board will be greatly missed. He will be a hard act to follow."

In a fitting tribute to Randy, the farm stand that sells produce from the university's organic garden has been named in his honor. As Angela Halfacre '91, Furman's director of sustainability, says, "Randy planted the first plant in the new organic garden in 2008, and he has been a tireless advocate for our sustainability efforts. His enthusiasm, kindness, energy, friendship, and welcoming and open nature have been particularly appreciated by Furman's Center for Sustainability.

"His ideas and support for our efforts to reach out to the community about sustainable practices and ways of thinking have been a model for our students and all the Furman family. His tireless desire to support the organic garden has helped Furman make great strides in sharing the message of sustainability in real and lasting ways with our students and the greater community. Randy will be sorely missed."

But Randy would not want for us to mourn for him. Instead, we should honor his memory by getting excited about all of the great things happening at Furman now.

The best tribute to him would be for all alumni to capture a bit of his enthusiasm by participating in the annual fund, attending an athletic event, telling a high school student about Furman, volunteering to help on campus, or hosting an alumni event.

The possibilities are as endless as Randy Blackwell's love for Furman!

Memorials may be made to the Randy W. Blackwell Memorial Fund at Furman, 3300 Poinsett Highway, Greenville, S.C. 29613.

— TOM TRIPLITT '76

The author is director of the Alumni Association.