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## A look back, a look ahead: 60 years of leadership at Furman

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## A LOOK BACK, A LOOK AHEAD: 60 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP AT FURMAN

Since Furman was established in 1826, the university has been blessed with exceptional leadership. Each decade, despite various trials and tribulations, Furman has emerged with creative new ideas and moved forward in a positive manner. The past 60 years, especially, have brought about remarkable changes.

I have had the unique opportunity to know, both professionally and personally, the four presidents and first ladies who have guided our university during this period. I have witnessed their commitment, love, dedication and ability to move Furman into the national limelight.

**John and Bea Plyler** served Furman from 1939 to 1964. John Plyler, a 1913 Furman graduate, was a man of vision and was always looking toward the future.

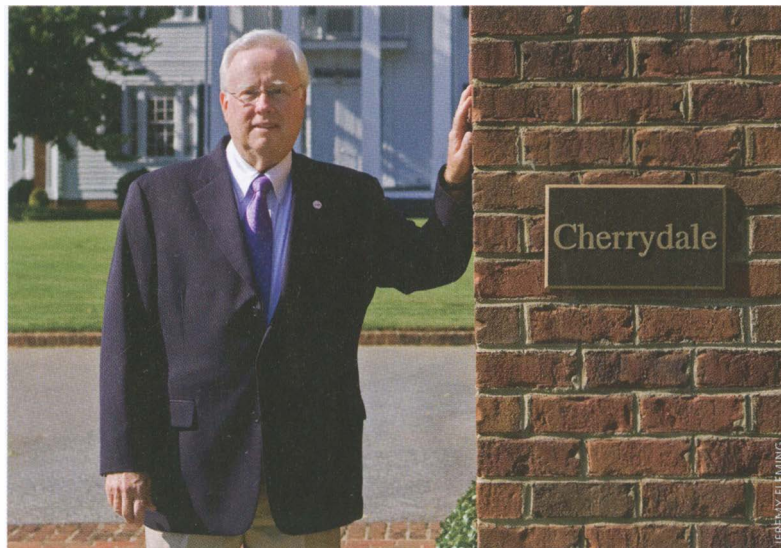
He was responsible for selecting the current site of Furman's campus and for shepherding the monumental move from downtown Greenville to the place we all enjoy today. This year, in fact, we are celebrating the 50th year of full-time classes on the "new" campus.

Dr. Plyler had wonderful dreams, many of which have become reality today.

My parents, **Gordon and Lib Blackwell**, followed the Plylers and served from 1965 to 1976. Gordon Blackwell's goal for Furman was "greatness by national standards."

A 1932 Furman graduate, he was responsible for securing the chapter of Phi Beta Kappa and pushed for innovative changes in the academic curriculum. Under his leadership, the Furman faculty grew in strength, numbers and prestige.

I heard him say many times, "The heart of an outstanding university is the faculty." He wanted Furman to have the most outstanding faculty in the United



States. I know he would be proud of the talent and dedication of today's professors.

**John and Martha Mauney Johns**, both 1947 graduates, followed and were a great team from 1976 to 1994. John Johns was a public relations expert and an accomplished fund-raiser. He was a true people person who knew how to rally the university community together.

He was also a strong leader who skillfully and determinedly guided Furman through some of the most difficult times in its history, especially the separation from the South Carolina Baptist Convention.

For the last 14 years Furman has been fortunate to have **David Shi '73** and **Susan Thomson Shi '71** at the helm.

David Shi is an exceptional administrator who has provided visionary leadership as the university has upgraded its facilities. At the same time he has boosted Furman's stature and helped propel the university into the forefront of such movements as engaged learning

and sustainability. In true Furman tradition, he has built on the best qualities of those who preceded him.

These extraordinary leaders brought their own distinctive styles to bear on the challenges and opportunities presented to them, and each built a stronger university without compromising the fundamental values on which Furman was founded.

It has been a privilege for me to know them for so many years. It is also a privilege and honor to serve for the next two years as president of the Furman Alumni Association.

But I am not in this alone. All 26,000 members of the Alumni Association are vital to Furman's growth and success. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your generous and ongoing support for alma mater.

This year, as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the move to the new campus, we have the chance to put the spotlight on Furman. We have the opportunity to stay connected, and I challenge each of our alumni to participate in this yearlong celebration. The campus is calling for your return and support.

As we move forward with the "Because Furman Matters" campaign and with a new academic calendar and curriculum, the university's future has never been more promising. I believe that Furman has reached my father's goal of "greatness by national standards."

And if the last 60 years are any indication, the best is yet to come.

— **RANDY BLACKWELL**

*The author, a 1963 Furman graduate, assumed the presidency of the Alumni Association this fall.*