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One family's perspective on Furman's enduring gifts

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The Rinker clan, with the five Furman graduates on the back row. The couples, from left: David and Janice Rinker; Traci Rinker '89 Miller and husband Emmett; Marc '94 and Allison Rinker '96 St. John; Margaret Haskell '93 Rinker and Chris Rinker '94.

One family's perspective on Furman's enduring gifts

I have often been asked, "Why have you selected Furman to support with your time, energy and financial resources? Why does Furman matter to you well after your kids have graduated?"

After all, neither my husband, Dave, nor I attended Furman, at least not as students.

However, Furman has been an important part of my life since 1985, when our first child, Traci, enrolled as a freshman. Traci, a 1989 graduate, was followed by Chris '94, then Allison '96. Each of them considered other institutions, yet at decision time, they chose Furman.

As a parent, I was looking for three things in a college. I wanted a special place where my children could get an excellent education, where their spiritual formation would be nurtured, and where they would be encouraged to develop and strengthen values such as hard work, integrity and service to others. Furman provided all of this.

Furman also set high expectations. Each of our children (and the two Furman graduates who came into our family through marriage) met this challenge. They realized they had to if they wanted to graduate. And the qualities they developed at Furman have served them well since they left the university.

All were well prepared to continue their educations and excel in their careers. Our son,

Chris, and our son-in-law, Marc St. John '94 (married to Allison), went on to earn master's degrees and are now successful businessmen, one as an entrepreneur and one as an electrical engineer working for a government think tank. Our two daughters earned doctorates, and our daughter-in-law (Margaret Haskell '93 Rinker) is a medical doctor. All of them contribute daily, in meaningful ways, to the world. I believe all of this was possible because of the strong preparation they received at Furman.

But they learned much more than just physics and chemistry and psychology at Furman.

During their college years, they discovered the joy that comes through giving of themselves and serving others. They did so through Collegiate Educational Service Corps, now the Heller Service Corps. Today Traci, Chris, Allison, Margaret and Marc work in their respective communities to make life better for others.

Some of them provide medical and dental services for migrants and the underserved, some are involved with a children's home for abused and neglected children, and others help with the homeless and the mentally ill. This is in their "spare" time.

All of them could have earned their diplomas, caps, gowns and hoods elsewhere. But they won't wear their regalia throughout

their lives. Instead, long after the trappings of a graduate have turned to dust, they will wear creativity, kindness, love and service. It's these enduring gifts that Furman gave my children, and it's these gifts that they, in turn, will pass on to their children.

So, why does Furman matter? Furman matters to me because I have seen the impact this university has had on five very special people. Their time at Furman was life-changing and prepared them well for the challenges, magic and wonder the world has in store for them.

This is what I want for my grandchildren. This is what I want for the promising young men and women of the future. This is why Dave and I provide endowed scholarships through which our "extended family" can continue to grow forever.

— LEIGHAN RINKER

The author, a member of the board of trustees, received an honorary degree from Furman in 2004. Through the Marshall E. Rinker, Sr., Foundation, which David Rinker directs, the Rinkers provided the naming gift for one of the new buildings in the Charles H. Townes Center for Science. They also provide ongoing scholarship support through the university's Partners Program.