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Full Speed Ahead

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Full Speed Ahead

Furman's track and running programs are building on the momentum generated by the Blue Shoes Scholarship fund drive.

Shortly after Chris Borch joined the Furman track and cross country teams as a freshman in the mid-1970s, he finished last among his teammates in a four-mile time trial. But by the spring of that same school year, he had set a freshman record of 13:51 in the three-mile run.

Borch is obviously accustomed to rapid progress, and the 1978 graduate has wasted no time pushing into high gear the Blue Shoes Track Scholarship program he and his wife, Andrea, founded just one year ago.

Last year's inaugural Blue Shoes weekend raised \$200,000 and was the single biggest athletic fund-raising event in Furman history. This year's Blue Shoes extravaganza, which took place over a Friday and Saturday in early April, raised another \$575,000, bringing the scholarship fund's total to \$1.8 million.

Perhaps even more significantly, the weekend included a surprise announcement for plans to construct a \$2.5 million, 6,000-square-foot track house at Furman's Irwin Belk Complex for Track and Field. The additions will include track and cross country locker rooms for the men's and women's teams, coaches' offices and a warm-up area for athletes.

It will also contain a 2,000-square-foot laboratory for Furman's internationally recognized Institute of Running and Scientific Training (FIRST). Because of its innovative approach to training, FIRST has been featured in *Runner's World* and the *Wall Street Journal*, among other major publications.



Ken Pettus, director of athletic development, says, "The weekend was incredibly successful and the Blue Shoes program has been everything we dreamed it could be. We were hoping the scholarship fund would reach \$5 million by the year 2011, and we are well on our way to achieving that goal."

The 2007 Blue Shoes weekend kicked off with a Friday dinner that attracted 400 people to hear speaker Dave Wottle, the 1972 Olympic gold medalist in the 800 meters. It included a panel discussion on distance running featuring Wottle, several members of the FIRST faculty, and Amby Burfoot, a former Boston Marathon winner and editor of *Runner's World*.



Alan Webb's attempt to become the first person to break the four-minute mile in South Carolina drew a big crowd to the Irwin Belk Complex for Track and Field April 7. His success, and the overall success of the Blue Shoes weekend, inspired the university to dream bigger for next year's event. Photos by Charlie Register.

On Saturday, more than 3,000 people came to the campus to watch premier U.S. miler Alan Webb and 11 other top runners compete in the ASICS Blue Shoes Elite Mile. Webb's remarkable time of 3:57.83 in cold and windy conditions was the first sub-four-minute mile ever run on a South Carolina track and was featured on the front page of *The Greenville News*. Other events included a five-kilometer run that drew more than 550 participants, as well as Furman Invitational meets for both high school and college teams.

The Blue Shoes program provides scholarship support for Furman's distance runners. Borch named the scholarship for the blue ASICS "Onitsuka Tiger" running shoes he and his teammates were given after he arrived at Furman his freshman year.

While it is difficult to imagine what the Blue Shoes event can do for an encore in 2008, Borch and Pettus are already thinking about what might come next. There is the possibility of Elite Mile races for men and women, as well as a few events featuring top sprinters. Borch would also like to see the Furman Invitational meet enhanced with the addition of some of the nation's top-ranked college programs.

"It has been very satisfying that we've been able to accomplish so much

in a relatively short period of time," says Borch, who is executive director and president of Micro-Mechanics, a California-based company. "We're bringing interest back to Furman's track and field program, and people seem to be having fun with what we're doing. I think it's already gotten bigger than any of us imagined." |F|

— VINCE MOORE

