Priceless Gem

Furman University

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Priceless Gem

Some people subscribe to the notion that the only thing you get out of life is what you take.

Ronald Hyatt, a 1956 Furman graduate and longtime professor at the University of North Carolina, has never been one of them. His philosophy, indeed his *modus operandi*, has been that you get the most out of life based on what you have to give.

In recent years, Hyatt's body, if not his spirit, has been slowed by cancer. But he still makes the campus rounds, checking in with friends, ever optimistic and upbeat. Although he is officially retired, he maintains an office at UNC and plans to teach a course this fall.

Earlier this year, Hyatt's contributions to the university he has served for four decades were recognized when he was presented one of UNC's most select honors.

When athletic director Dick Baddour invited Hyatt to attend the North Carolina-Maryland basketball game February 26, Baddour told Hyatt that he would be called to the floor at halftime to pick up a letter of appreciation. But that was only half true.

Hyatt was actually there to receive the Priceless Gem Award, an honor the UNC athletic department bestows only on rare occasions — and only to those who have made a significant impact on the institution.

It was a big deal, as the people Baddour invited to share the moment made clear.

They included two of Hyatt's closest friends, UNC president emeritus William C. Friday and Charlie Adams, longtime head of the North Carolina High School Association, which named Hyatt one of the state's 50 most influential people in high school sports over the last half century. They were joined by UNC basketball coach Roy Williams, who worked and studied under Hyatt as an undergraduate in the 1970s, when Hyatt headed the intramurals program.

The citation accompanying the award stated, "Dr. Ron Hyatt, senior professor in the Department of Exercise and Sport Science and the director of the Program for Public Policy in Sport, is a shining light in North Carolina high school and collegiate athletics. Since coming to Chapel Hill to earn a master's degree nearly 50 years ago, he has distinguished himself as a gentleman, scholar and pioneer in the study of sport."

Baddour and Hyatt, who earned his doctorate at UNC, go back a long way — to 1968, when Baddour attended the National Guard's Officer Candidate School and Hyatt, who served 41 years in the Guard before retiring as a colonel, taught his leadership class.

"Whether he is in front of a class or in front of your desk," Baddour says, "there is just one Ron Hyatt: always creative, always full of energy, always full of ideas and always showing tremendous enthusiasm."

"That's the way he talks. That's the way he teaches. And that's the way he treats people."

Friday told *The Chapel Hill News*, "Ron Hyatt is the kind of person that has made Chapel Hill what it is. He's always interested in the student, always giving of himself in every operation that the school asks him to do."

Hyatt, a native of Latta, S.C., worked at several high schools and colleges in North Carolina before going to UNC in 1966. From 1992 until illness forced him to step aside several years ago, he was the faculty marshal.

The Priceless Gem Award is one of more than 20 honors Hyatt has received from various groups in recent years. Among the most prestigious is the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, which recognizes extraordinary service to the state of North Carolina.

But "Hunkie," as he was known at Furman, says the honor he values most is the first H.R. "Red" Dobson Award, which he received last fall at a golf tournament to raise money for the Furman basketball team. Dobson was a 1925 Furman graduate and standout athlete who returned to Furman in 1946 and became a beloved physical education teacher and director of intramurals. He taught at Furman until his death in 1959.

"Red Dobson was my mentor, father figure and employer," says Hyatt. "He personified that which is best about Furman and that which was best about a life well lived in service to others."

Hyatt has done extensive research into Dobson's legacy both at Furman and at Camp Pinnacle, a North Carolina camp founded by Dobson in 1927. Many Furman students were campers and later counselors at Pinnacle.

Hyatt's memoir of Dobson will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Furman* magazine.

Much of this story is excerpted from an article in the April 26 issue of *the University Gazette*, a University of North Carolina publication. Used with permission.