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Furman University

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## Frank Little, former chair of music, dies

**F**rank Little, chair of the music department at Furman from 1982 to 1987 and most recently president of the Music Institute of Chicago, died February 22 at the age of 69.

A native of Greeneville, Tenn., Little was a principal tenor with the Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Metropolitan Opera. His international appearances included performances at La Scala in Milan and Opera Communale in Florence.

A graduate of East Tennessee State University, which in 1992 presented him its Outstanding Alumnus Award, Little earned a master's degree from the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati and a doctorate from Northwestern University. While at Furman he brought members of the nation's major orchestras and prominent opera stars to campus for master classes and recitals, and he worked to attract such ensembles as the Chicago Symphony and the Leningrad State Symphony.

John Beckford of the Furman music faculty says that Little "brought much imagination and vision to the department. He often urged us to consider the impossible when considering objectives for our program. He allowed us to think big and supported our efforts to do so."

### Ray C. Roberts, Jr.

As this issue of the magazine went to press, we learned of the death May 5 of Ray C. Roberts, Jr., Frederick W. Symmes Professor of Economics from 1969-94 and vice president for academic affairs and dean in 1994-95. A tribute to Roberts will be included in the summer magazine.

## Gordon L. Blackwell's generosity touched many

**G**ordon Lyles Blackwell, Sr., a member of the board of trustees and former president of the Alumni Association, died March 13 in Raleigh, N.C. He was 67.

The oldest of four children, Blackwell was the son of the late Gordon W. and Elizabeth Lyles Blackwell, president and first lady of Furman from 1965 to 1976. He graduated from Furman in 1960 and went on to become a leader in the field of affordable housing for senior citizens and low-income families.

A recipient of the Alumni Service Award, Blackwell and his wife of 45 years, Cecilia "Ceil" Watson Blackwell '62, have been generous supporters of Furman. They endowed the Blackwell-Rice Scholarship program and provided funds to name the library atrium for his parents, as well as four reading areas in the library for other members of their family. In addition, they have been members of the Richard Furman Society and the Partners scholarship program.

The March 16 issue of the *Raleigh News & Observer* contained an article about Blackwell's life. Written by Thomas McDonald with help from researcher Lamara Williams Hackett, a portion of the article follows and is reprinted with permission.

By the time he was a teen-ager, Gordon Lyles Blackwell, Sr., displayed a knack for entrepreneurship.

After Hurricane Hazel rocked the state of North Carolina in 1954, Blackwell started a tree company to help remove damaged trees from Chapel Hill yards.

During his undergraduate days at Furman, Blackwell was known as "The Sandwich Man." "He would buy sandwiches from a deli and go sell them in the dorms," said his wife, Ceil.

Blackwell, a resident of Raleigh for more than 37 years, was nationally recognized for his efforts to build low-cost housing for the elderly and low-income families. He and his associates built more than 10,000 apartments in seven states.

Family members and former business associates described Blackwell as passionate about providing homes for librarians, police officers and school teachers as well.

"He would visit the complexes, and



the people living there would love him," said Betty Bridges, a former executive vice president of Blackwell's company, The Regency Housing Group. "They loved him because that generosity of spirit always showed in his attitude."

In 2001 The Regency Housing Group was the second-largest developer of low-cost apartments in the United States. "Someone once referred to him as the 'Godfather' of affordable housing," Bridges said.

Away from the office, Blackwell, who held an MBA degree from Harvard Business School, was involved in causes related to low-cost housing. He served as a director of the National Council for Rural Housing and Development and was a former director of the N.C. Low Income Housing Coalition.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by his three children and their families: Beth Blackwell Swartz '83, her husband, Tony, and their daughters, Elizabeth and Amanda; Celia Blackwell McCauley '85, her husband, Scott, and their daughters, Erin, Sara and Ashley; and Gordon Lyles Blackwell, Jr. '90, his wife, Barbara, and their children, Alex and Carmen. He is also survived by his brother Randy '63 and by his sisters, Blair Cooper (M.A. '73) and Millie Yarborough '71.

Memorials may be made to the Blackwell/Rice Scholarship at Furman, 3300 Poinsett Highway, Greenville, S.C. 29613.