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## The meaning of citizenship

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# Furman philanthropy

## The meaning of citizenship

*Gift from Pipers to help promote ethics across curriculum*

Even before John and Ethel Piper “had two nickels to rub together,” they devoted time and resources to improving the communities in which they lived.

Soon after moving to Greenville from Bedford, N.Y., in the late 1960s, Ethel Piper became involved in the League of Women Voters and Head Start and became a volunteer with the Urban League and Guardian Ad Litem, a state-funded child advocacy program. John devoted much of his time to the United Way. As their financial fortunes improved, the Pipers lent their support to programs impacting the disadvantaged, especially children.

They regard their latest philanthropy — a \$500,000 gift to Furman to promote ethics throughout the curriculum — as one of their most important. It will, they hope, inspire others to embrace their community-centered philosophy, one that promotes equality, morality, social justice and volunteerism.

Funds from the Piper gift have established a seminar program called “Liberal Arts and the Creation of Moral Citizens” that will help professors develop methods to incorporate ethics into existing courses.

“The seminar,” explains project director Carmela Epright, “will examine the meaning of citizenship in a liberal democracy, explore various theoretical approaches to the development of citizens, and investigate different (teaching) approaches to raising ethical issues in the classrooms.”

Several follow-up meetings will be held throughout the 2006-07 academic year. The program will culminate with a weeklong seminar next June in which participants will outline their strategies to fold ethics instruction into their courses.

Epright, who teaches philosophy, says that more than 30 professors applied for the seminar’s initial 12 positions. Each participant will receive a \$5,000 stipend. The seminar will be led by Epright and fellow philosophy professor Erik Anderson. She plans to conduct a faculty seminar every three years.

Epright was a visiting scholar at the Institute for Applied and Professional Ethics at Dartmouth College last spring before crafting the ethics project at Furman. In addition to the seminars, she plans to invite outside scholars to campus and to sponsor public workshops and lectures that will inspire others to “commit to trying to determine how to make the world better — more just and fair and ourselves less self-centered and myopic.

“Our plan is to make this a continuing and evolving project,” she says. “Dartmouth runs one of the model programs in ethics across the curriculum. However, Furman’s intensive faculty seminar makes our program unique, as does our aim to create programs that transcend the narrow confines of the campus and impact the larger community.”

The Pipers, who were introduced to Furman through the popular Furman University Learning in Retirement (FULIR) program, became concerned with elevating ethical considerations in future leaders several years ago and began researching ethics instruction in higher education.



*Ethel and John Piper received the Humanitarian Award from the Urban League of the Upstate for their community activism.*

“Traditionally, ethics has been a course hidden away in the philosophy department,” says John Piper. “There has been a lot of effort in the last 20 years to improve this, but we talked to professors at various schools and some were not doing well.”

With the help of Betsy Moseley ’74, Furman’s director of planned giving, the Pipers found an enthusiastic audience for their idea in Epright, an applied ethicist. Together, they developed a rough plan to mainstream ethics into the Furman curriculum, a plan that took more definitive shape after Epright’s stay at Dartmouth.

John Piper, a native of London, England, earned degrees from Trinity College and Massachusetts Institute of Technology before launching a long career with Kemet Corporation. He says that ethical decision-making should be stressed across all professions, and particularly in corporate environments.

“Management gets lessons on worker safety, sexual harassment and how to avoid lawsuits, but unless there is a problem you’re not going to get a lesson on how to be an ethical citizen,” he says. “You have to be concerned with making a profit and performing well, but you need to consider all the stakeholders as you make decisions.”

While the Pipers have focused many of their philanthropic efforts on programs for the disadvantaged, they hope this latest gift will have a more lasting impact by encouraging tomorrow’s leaders to look at the world and their environment from a different perspective.

“We want to help people make changes that will have a positive impact on the community,” says Ethel. “We might see a little of this take hold in our lifetime. That would be the best present I could get.”

— John Roberts