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Pay it forward

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Furmanathletics

Pay it forward

Scholarship is Borch's way of providing opportunities to others

If you want to know the secret to Chris Borch's success, how he was able to start with nearly nothing and build a successful, multimillion dollar company with offices all over the world, you have to go back to his days at Furman, when he was a member of the track and cross country teams.

Borch, a 1978 graduate, came to Furman from Charlotte, N.C., as a "decent" runner, but there were certainly no college recruiters beating down his door. In fact, when he and his teammates participated in a four-mile time trial his first evening on campus, Borch finished dead last, well behind the others.

"It was pretty bad," he says, laughing at the memory. "The others were telling me I must have set a record for the slowest time trial ever."

But Borch didn't give up. He loved to run, and he especially loved the constant feedback and measurement that running provided. His times improved steadily as his work ethic increased, and in the final cross country event of his freshman year, he finished in second place for the Furman team. Later, in the spring, he would set a school freshman record in the three-mile run (13:51).

"I loved that you were constantly being challenged by your teammates and the program itself, and that you had every expectation that you could improve, and you did," Borch says.

But maybe what he loved best of all were the blue Onitsuka Tiger running shoes, a gift that coach Bill Keesling provided to the entire team Borch's second day on campus.

"Some of my greatest memories were those early morning runs, when I would run across the dew-covered golf course in those blue shoes," Borch says. "It's hard to believe that was nearly 30 years ago."

Borch still runs three or four times a week, but there's simply no time to train the way he used to. For one thing, he has a wife and four children (ages 5 through 14). And then there is a very successful company to run.

Borch is executive director and president of Micro-Mechanics, a company he founded in Asia in 1983 with \$1,200 and one employee. The company, which designs, manufactures and markets parts used in the assembly and testing of semi-conductors, now has more than 300 employees and offices in Singapore, Malaysia, China, Thailand, the Philippines, Taiwan, Switzerland and the United States. In recognition of his success, Borch was one of the finalists in the Business and Industrial category for the 2005 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

"That was one of the first life lessons that running taught me," says Borch, who lives just outside San Jose, Calif. "If you set a goal and work hard and don't give up, then you can achieve success. When I finished school and started a career, I did the same things I did when I was running at Furman, just on a different plane."



Chris Borch has made a point of preserving his blue shoes for posterity.

Borch, who majored in economics, is so sure that his experiences at the university paved the way for his business success that he has endowed a scholarship at Furman, aptly named the "Blue Shoes Track Scholarship." The annual scholarship will provide support to Furman's distance runners.

"At the end of my freshman year, I received a partial scholarship, and that is what allowed me to stay at Furman," Borch says. "I always knew I wanted to make it possible for somebody else to have the same opportunity I had."

The Blue Shoes fund received a big financial boost April 1 when Furman hosted the inaugural Blue Shoes Mile, an event that attracted more than 100 participants, most of whom were alumni from the 1970s. All told, the event raised nearly \$200,000 to support the scholarship. It was, according to director of athletic development Ken Pettus, the single biggest athletic fund-raising event in the university's history.

Borch and his 14-year-old son, Kyle, came from California for the weekend, and there was no missing them in the mile run. They were the ones in the blue Onitsuka Tiger running shoes, which Kyle was able to locate on the Internet even though the company no longer makes them.

"What else were we going to wear?" Borch says.

— Vince Moore

To learn more about the Blue Shoes Scholarship, e-mail ken.pettus@furman.edu or call the Paladin Club office, (864) 294-3469.