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Timmons leaves legacy of community service, love for alma mater

The university and the city of Greenville lost a staunch friend and exceptional leader December 31 when William R. Timmons, Jr., died at his home in Green Valley, near the Furman campus. He was 81.

The Greenville News described him as “a quiet man, but when he spoke everybody listened.” Furman president David Shi called him an “extraordinary philanthropist” and “one of the greatest figures in Furman’s history.”

Indeed, Bill Timmons’ contributions to Furman were exceptional. A member of the Class of ’49, he served six terms on the board of trustees and was a former chair of the board. In 1996 he joined with his sister, Jean Timmons Pelham ’42, and his brother and sister-in-law, Charlie and Kitty Wells ’48 Timmons, to provide the lead gift for the construction of Timmons Arena, the multi-purpose facility that serves as the home of Furman basketball.

In addition to funding scholarships and supporting many capital projects at Furman, Bill Timmons and his late wife, Connie, also contributed notably to the success of the annual LPGA Pro-Am golf tournament. In particular, a highlight of the Pro-Am each year has been the breakfast for the pros and their teams, hosted by the Timmons family at their home. In recognition of their support for this event, a portrait of Bill and Connie Timmons hangs in Furman’s REK Center for Intercollegiate Golf.

Says Martha Johns, wife of John E. Johns, former Furman president, “From the time we came to Furman, the entire Timmons family have been dear friends. We have an especially soft spot in our hearts for Bill, because he was one of the trustees who flew to Florida in the spring of 1976 to encourage John to come to Furman as president. Our friendship with Connie and Bill and their entire family has been pure joy for us.”

The Timmons family’s association with Furman actually dates from 1910, when William R. Timmons, Sr., enrolled at the university. His brother, Charles Edward Timmons, Jr., also attended Furman before volunteering for World War I, during which he was killed in action. His name is among those inscribed on Furman’s doughboy statue.

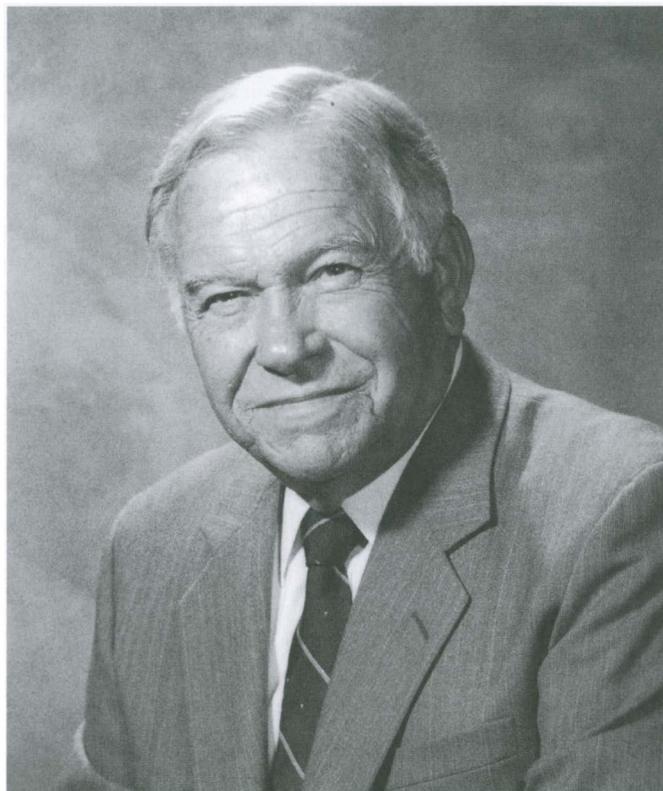
Bill Timmons, Jr., was born in Greenville in 1924, graduated from Greenville High and first attended the University of South Carolina. Drafted into the Army Air Corps in 1942, he served as a B-24 pilot and also as a teacher of pilots during World War II.

Shortly before the war’s end, however, he was diagnosed with polio and sent to a military hospital in Hot Springs, Ark. There he remained for two years, recovering to the point that he would eventually need only a cane for assistance.

As he told *The Greenville News* in 1993, in his typically matter-of-fact way, “It never really bothered me, hobbling around on one leg. All it meant was that I was a little slower walking than other people. . . . A good attitude can get you through it.”

That, and the help of a nurse named Corinne Jackson, with whom he fell in love during his recovery. They were married in 1947; Connie died in 1994.

Bill enrolled at Furman after their marriage, but his father’s



premature death interrupted his studies and led to his decision to leave school and join the family firm, Greenville’s Canal Insurance Company. As first vice president and secretary and eventually as company chair, he helped lead Canal to its current status as one of the nation’s largest companies specializing in insuring trucks and their cargo.

He would go on to serve as chair of The South Financial Group and of several other family-owned businesses, while making major contributions to the betterment of the Greenville community. He held leadership positions in the Greenville Association of Insurance Agents, the Board of Realtors, the Sertoma Club, the Chamber of Commerce and the United Fund (now United Way). He was a lifelong member of First Baptist Church, which he served as deacon, Sunday school teacher and chair of the building fund campaign for the new sanctuary.

Through the years Furman recognized his contributions to the university and the community by presenting him the Alumni Service Award, the Bell Tower Award and, in 1995, an honorary Doctor of Laws degree. Last fall he and Connie were inducted into the Furman Athletic Hall of Fame.

Bill Timmons is survived by eight children, 23 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Memorials may be made to Furman or to Greenville’s First Baptist Church.