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Staying connected

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Staying connected

Since becoming director of multicultural affairs at Furman in 1996, I have worked with the Alumni Office to develop more opportunities for black alumni to meet, mingle and reminisce about their experiences at Furman.

Recent gatherings indicate that our efforts are paying off. One of our best-attended meetings came in Atlanta last summer, when 24 alumni and several students gathered at the home of Angela Walker Franklin '81, a professor and administrator at Morehouse College School of Medicine and a former member of the Furman board of trustees. The momentum carried through to Homecoming 2005, when the annual African-American alumni drop-in celebrated the return of 35 alumni — one of our largest groups yet.

The success of these events illustrates a growing interest among black alumni in maintaining a connection to Furman. For younger graduates and students, these gatherings provide wonderful opportunities to network with more established alumni who can offer advice about careers and job opportunities. At the same

time, “seasoned” alumni benefit from the chance to meet the younger crowd and learn about their talent and potential.

During these meetings, we frequently share stories about our years on campus. For under-represented ethnic populations at any overwhelmingly white institution like Furman, academic and social life can be difficult. To combat our sense of isolation and uncertainty during our student days, we naturally tended to gravitate to each other for companionship and support.

Because our undergraduate experience was not always easy, many of us have perhaps kept alma mater at arm's length. But now that we've developed some perspective on our college days, many of us also realize that Furman helped us lay the groundwork for our futures and prepared us for life in the real world. And when one takes into account the giant strides the university has taken over the last 20 years, there's no question that the value of a Furman degree is increasing exponentially.

At our gatherings, I frequently talk about university initiatives designed to strengthen the college experience for students of color, who now make up approximately 10 percent of the student population. The university has made a strategic commitment not only to recruit more minority students, faculty and staff, but to develop programs that will foster greater cultural understanding and encourage interaction and dialogue among all groups on campus.

I have another important role as well: to listen to the thoughts and ideas of minority alumni and serve as their voice to the administration.

In addition, I usually provide an update on the Joseph Vaughn Scholarship, named in honor of the first African-American to attend Furman. Joe, a member of the Class of '68, was a true trailblazer, and the scholarship is designed for students who deserve the opportunity to change Furman for the better, as he did. Thanks to strong alumni support, three students to date have been awarded the Vaughn Scholarship. Many more will benefit as the scholarship fund continues to grow.

We enjoyed a busy year in 2005. Aside from the meetings in Atlanta and at Homecoming, we held events in Washington, D.C. (hosted by Bernard Durham '84) and Charleston, S.C. (with Louis Heyward '87 as host). For 2006 we have already scheduled meetings in Columbia, S.C. (Robert Capers '83) and Charlotte, N.C. (Charles Hunter '84), and we plan another summer gathering in Atlanta that will be coordinated by current trustee Stanford Jennings '84 and Sonya Scott Jackson '95.

We look forward to reconnecting with friends old and new at these events. If you are interested in helping to arrange a gathering in your area, please call (864) 294-3104 or e-mail me at idella.glenn@furman.edu.

— **Idella Goodson Glenn '84**
Director, Multicultural Affairs

The author recently received the Bobby E. Leach Award from the Southern Association for College Student Affairs. The award is SACSA's highest honor for diversity professionals and goes to a member who has contributed significantly to the development of multicultural relations on a college campus. To learn more about the Office of Multicultural Affairs at Furman, visit www.furman.edu/multicultural/index.htm.

