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A combined 140 years: 2005 class of retirees compiled remarkable record of service to Furman: Block a consummate historian, lecturer

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Block a consummate historian, lecturer

John Block and I, both Chicagoans, arrived at Furman in the fall of 1968 along with fellow historian (and future dean) A.V. Huff and the so-called “new curriculum.” But John and I are from different Chicagos. He is the complete Southsider, loyal

to the White Sox and “connected” to a variety of worlds. I am a Northsider, doomed to follow the hapless Cubs.

John was actually making his second stop in Greenville. He had first come to Furman in 1959, intent on playing basketball and becoming a high school coach and history teacher. But his academic skills caused one professor to ask him, “Are you a basketball player who likes history, or will you become a historian who likes basketball?” John responded to the challenge and after graduation earned a Ph.D. in modern European history at the University of Wisconsin.

In his 37 years at Furman, John has been chair of the history department and vice president for intercollegiate athletics, while serving as a wise counselor to generations of students, colleagues and administrators. He was also the color man for Furman basketball during the glory days of the 1970s and early 1980s.

A former student once described John as “old school but definitely not old fashioned.” If this is accurate, he learned about professionalism, courtesy and the attention due students from two masters who were definitely old school but never out of fashion: the revered Furman historian Delbert Gilpatrick and the renowned Theodore Hamerow at Wisconsin.

To Furman alumni, John will always be the consummate classroom lecturer. His lectures always opened with questions: “Any old business? Any new business?” Then, with minimal notes, he would vividly describe events while providing penetrating verbal portraits of a succession of thugs and saints.

A sly and ironic sense of humor animated John’s lectures, along with his perennial astonishment at the misdeeds of his subjects. More than one student felt that John was fonder of the wayward characters of his tales than of the prim and proper. Indeed, Benito Mussolini always received more airtime than did Woodrow Wilson.

Famous for lecturing from a short grocery list of names, John said the scrap of paper kept him from devoting too much time to a single topic. Yet all was under control; the lectures always ended on the minute, while the course always covered the exact time span. It was no surprise when, in 1984, he received the Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Teaching.

“You can take the boy out of Chicago, but you cannot take the Chicago out of the boy.” John and his wife, Barbara Stone Block ’63, have an apartment in Chicago, so he can attend White Sox games to his heart’s content — and preserve his native accent. He and Barbara will also keep their home near the Furman campus, where they can enjoy their growing number of grandchildren and, we hope, remain a presence on campus.

— William J. Lavery, *Professor of History*



Harris a tireless model of true professionalism

It is 12:43 a.m., and colleagues and students are receiving e-mail messages from Hazel Harris. The midnight oil that fuels her office lamp never seems to run dry.

During her typical day, Hazel puts multi-tasking to shame as she carries out assorted duties — meeting with the academic dean, returning phone calls, chairing meetings, advising students, visiting local schools, handling an emergency at the Child Development Center, hosting a faculty seminar. She finally returns — in the dark — to her office, where she attacks the paperwork involved in her jobs as director of graduate studies, associate dean of summer sessions and director of the Child Development Center at Furman.

So it has been for Hazel Harris for most of the past 36 years — until her retirement this summer.

Hazel Wiggins actually began her career in education as a child, when she created a school in her backyard and taught her younger neighbors to read. After earning a sociology degree at Meredith College and her teaching credentials in history at Duke University, she taught high school social studies before returning to Duke as assistant director of the Master of Arts in Teaching Program.

She soon met and married Gary Harris, an elementary school principal, and went on to earn a doctorate from Duke in supervision and curriculum development. She and Gary joined the Furman education faculty in 1969; Gary retired in 1999.

Hazel’s students know her as a rigorous teacher, a supervisor with high expectations and a model of professionalism. She taught prospective teachers how to love their subject while caring for their students. She inspired them to push beyond limits, to love learning and to make a difference in the lives of young people.

As an academic advisor, Hazel provided meticulous guidance to Furman’s graduate students. She gained their trust and respect while investing her time, energy and talents to create programs that met their needs. Not surprisingly, she was named one of the 2005 recipients of the Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Advising.

Clearly, her enduring legacy to students extends to a host of areas: Teacher. Mentor. Advisor. Role model. Loyal friend. Tireless advocate.

It is 12:43 a.m. on a late summer morning, 2005. No colleagues or students are receiving e-mail messages from Hazel Harris. Her office is dark. The midnight oil in the lamp has finally dried.

Hazel is sleeping soundly in the new home in which she has spent precious little time over the past few years. She dreams of her grandson, Kevin, who is smiling gleefully at “Grand,” waiting for a game of ball or a romp with dogs Heidi, Tess and Bardy. Gary is likely wondering, “What in the world will Hazel think up to do next?”

No doubt her creative energy will keep sparking new ideas! Just wait and see.

— Lesley Quast, *Professor of Education*