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# Meritorious professors: Three teachers earn top honors for 2002-03: Lessons in living: Fuller's students see big picture

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# See teachers earn top honors for 2002-03

## Lessons in living: Fuller's students see big picture

As **Trudy Fuller** was leaving for Furman's Commencement last May, her husband, Ronald, stopped her before she headed out the door.

"You're going to wear *those* shoes?" he asked, somewhat incredulously.

Trudy looked down, shrugged, then reminded him that graduation takes a while. "I want to be comfortable," she said.

So despite Ronald's subtle effort to dress her up for the occasion — he knew what was coming — that's how music professor Trudy Hines Fuller came to be wearing sensible shoes when she was called to accept the 2002-03 **Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Teaching**.

Given her background, you could expect such practical thinking from Trudy Fuller, who comes from solid, small-town Midwestern stock. Born in Sidney, Neb., she and her siblings (a brother and two sisters) were raised on a farm. She studied piano from an early age and later played the flute and saxophone in the high school band. She sang, too, but as she says, "There were no vocal teachers, and I just thought everybody sang."

For Fuller, formal vocal training began at the University of Northern Colorado, where she earned both bachelor's and master's degrees and discovered the joys of performing. The talented mezzo-soprano would go on to perform with a host of opera companies and symphony orchestras, while teaching at several colleges. After completing her doctorate at the University of Arizona in 1983, she came to Furman, where she has struck a comfortable balance between performing and teaching.

The knowledge she gleaned from her years of stage and concert experience has certainly paid off for her Furman students, many of whom have moved on to top graduate programs. Senior Craig Price says, "My lessons each week are something that I cherish, because not only do I learn something about singing, I learn something about myself — and about life."

Elizabeth Bishop '89 confirms Price's assessment. Says Bishop, a mezzo-soprano of growing renown who has sung with many major opera companies, "Some of the most important things Trudy taught me were not about singing.

"When you are told by your most important teacher that singing is sometimes not the most important thing you are doing, you learn perspective. When the person who knows your voice best tells you that you will have to wait years to know what your 'sound' will be, you learn patience. When you make an idiot of yourself in front of a person you trust and can laugh about it with her, you learn the value of humor.

"Most importantly, when you see a woman who certainly has the talent and intelligence to make a good career in the business redirect everything for one little boy, you learn not to confuse your job with your life." (Fuller's son, William, is now a businessman in New York, where he lives with his wife and son.)

Adds Bishop, "Everything Trudy taught me about singing was wonderful and right on the money, but everything else she taught me was just as valuable."

— Jim Stewart



## With Cloer's help, students discover the strength within

When you walk into **Tom Cloer's** office, the first thing that catches your eye is an old poster of *The Wizard of Oz* depicting photos of Dorothy, the Tin Man, Lion and Scarecrow.

"You see that picture?" says Cloer, pointing to the framed poster. "That's pretty much what I'm all about."

In an Appalachian twang that has not been dulled by his 29 years in higher education, Cloer explains how the wizard used trickery and a dash of deception to help the foursome realize they already possessed the very traits they so desperately sought.

"Each of them had it in them," says the education professor. "They just didn't know it. It took the wizard to get it out of them. I try to point out strengths to students that they did not know they had."

Cloer, recipient of the 2002-03 **Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Advising** (he won the teaching award in 1988), has been working his wizardry on Furman students since 1974. As director of the Academic Assistance Program, he often counsels students who are struggling academically or having trouble adapting to college life.

He begins by listening, probing for potential instead of pitfalls and making his charges feel good about themselves and about the university community. Only then, he says, can they learn and grow.

An opponent of standardized testing and a critic of cookie-cutter approaches to education, Cloer says that each student learns differently. When possible, he says, teaching techniques should be tailored to each pupil.

"As teachers and advisors, we have to help students see themselves as valuable and capable, and then responsible," says Cloer.

Says a student who nominated him for the award, "I met Dr. Cloer when I was just a freshman and trying to adjust from high school. He turned me from a C/D student my first semester to a dean's list student the next semester. Whenever I feel bad or do poorly on a test, he boosts my confidence and tells me that I should not worry. In such a competitive school as this, you need to hear that sometimes."

Cloer, who grew up on Stinking Creek in a rural, mountainous sawmill village in eastern Tennessee, is a living testimony to the positive influence that a teacher can have on a young life.

When he was 15, Cloer was expelled from school for growing a beard. He was working as a guide on Lake Norris when one of his former teachers, Mrs. McGhee, saw him loitering at a country store. She scolded him for not being in school and told him that he had enough promise to attend college.

"That was the first time anyone had even mentioned college to me," says Cloer, who holds degrees from Cumberland College, Clemson and the University of South Carolina. "Most people thought I would be a dust doodler [someone who works in a sawmill], but she saw potential."

Now, 43 years later, Cloer, like the Wizard of Oz, is using his own tricks to help students see and then realize their own potential. Furman is his Emerald City.

— John Roberts

