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## Family Tree: Both sides of Blackwell clan boast deep Furman roots

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## Family Tree

### Both sides of Blackwell clan boast deep Furman roots

Gordon L. Blackwell '60 is the third generation of his family to attend Furman. His father, Gordon W. Blackwell, graduated from Furman in 1932, later taught at the university and eventually returned as president from 1965-76. Grandfather Benjamin, a Baptist minister, graduated in 1903 and gave the yearbook the name *Bonhomie*.

So it would seem reasonable to assume that in the Blackwell household in Raleigh, N.C., Gordon L.'s Furman roots run the deepest. But in actuality, the Blackwell with the strongest Furman lineage is Gordon's wife, Ceil Watson Blackwell '62.

Ceil's great-grandfather, Joel Towers Rice, a businessman in Belton, S.C., sent eight of his nine children to Furman and the Greenville Female College (later Greenville Woman's College). Among them were Ceil's grandfather, Leon Rice '05, and Rena Rice, an 1896 GFC graduate who would marry Bennette E. Geer, president of Furman from 1933-38. Ceil's uncle, Earl Rice '41, also served on the Furman board of trustees.

"When people meet us they always assume that Furman is my college because of my dad, but the Rice family goes back farther than the Blackwells," says Blackwell, a past president of the Alumni Association who now serves as a Furman trustee. "A lot of Rices have attended Furman through the years."

Gordon and Ceil are also doing their part to carry on the Rice-Blackwell tradition at Furman. They have endowed scholarships, are members of the Richard Furman Society and made several major contributions to the Forever Furman campaign.

One of their gifts will eventually endow the Gordon W. and Elizabeth L. Blackwell Professorship, named for the former president and his late first wife. Other gifts, designated for the expanded and renovated library, include the Elizabeth L. and Gordon W. Blackwell Atrium, as well as several reading areas.

"The library is at the very heart of the academic life of the university, so I felt it very appropriate that my parents be honored there," says Blackwell.

The Blackwells have also provided support for the Max and Trude Heller Collegiate Educational Service Corps (see page 26) and for the construction of Benefactors Circle, which honors donors of \$1 million or more to the university.



BECKY KIRKLAND

Gordon and Ceil Watson Blackwell have a remarkable record of service to Furman.

And the future bodes well for a continuation of the Blackwell tradition at Furman, as all three of the couple's children — Beth Blackwell Swartz '83, Celia Blackwell McCauley '85 and Gordon, Jr. '90 — are also Furman alumni. Beth is a teacher, Celia is in commercial real estate sales and Gordy owns two computer consulting businesses.

"We never pressured the children to attend Furman. We told them they could attend any school that accepted them," says Blackwell. "We were surprised that they all went to Furman, but we're glad they did because it helped us reconnect with the school."

Blackwell explains that after graduating from Furman, he lost touch with the university. But his enthusiasm for alma mater was rekindled through his children.

"I saw what a tremendous educational experience they each received. We saw it in their maturing," he says. "All of my children have been very successful in their careers, and we came to realize the importance of the individual attention they received at Furman."

A veteran businessman and entrepreneur, Blackwell, who earned an M.B.A. degree from Harvard University and has founded two successful development companies, says he appreciates Furman for another reason: its ability, as a liberal arts institution, to prepare students for success in today's rapidly changing, technologically driven economy.

"The world today is changing so quickly. The leaders of tomorrow have to be flexible and quick learners," he says. "A narrowly focused or specialized education does not provide a person with the tools needed to be a successful leader in today's business climate."

— John Roberts