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A lasting connection

Furman University

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Furman reports

A lasting connection

Max Heller's introduction to Furman came in 1938. While working as a stock boy at Greenville's Piedmont Shirt Co., the young man, who had only recently immigrated to the United States, was told that "a judge wants to see you."

Heller, who had escaped the growing Nazi oppression in Austria with the help of Mary Mills, a Greenville friend, didn't like the sound of this summons. He wondered, "Why would a judge want to see me?"

The judge, however, was John L. Plyler, president of Furman. Intrigued by Heller's story and impressed by his work ethic, Plyler became a mentor to Heller and arranged for him to take English lessons. "It was most touching," Heller recalls, "and it's something you don't forget."

The Plyler-Heller connection was the start of a lasting relationship between the Heller family and Furman. Max and his wife, Trude, whose family immigrated from Austria during the war, would go on to become business and community leaders in Greenville, with Max serving on the Greenville City Council and as the city's mayor in the 1970s.

Through the years they have maintained close ties to Furman, establishing scholarships and supporting many university programs. Both have been awarded honorary degrees, and Max now serves on the board of trustees.

But the Furman cause with which they have been most closely associated is Collegiate Educational Service Corps. And now, through the efforts of civic and community leaders in Greenville, CESC will henceforth bear the name of Max and Trude Heller.

On November 7, at a gathering attended by scores of local dignitaries, the university announced that a \$1.5 million endowment will ensure the operation and continued growth of the Max and Trude Heller Collegiate Educational Service Corps.

Greenville civic leader Minor Mickel Shaw helped to spearhead the drive to endow CESC in honor of the Hellers.

CESC named in honor of Trude and Max Heller



Trude and Max Heller have spent their adult lives giving back to Greenville. The endowment for the Heller Collegiate Educational Service Corps will ensure the program's viability.

To date, more than \$1 million has been raised toward the \$1.5 million goal.

Shaw said, "Max and Trude Heller have inspired generations of Greenville citizens with the story of their lives and the way they live. We could not think of a more appropriate way to show our thanks to them than to establish an endowment to underwrite and give a personal name to Furman's CESC, one of Greenville's oldest and largest corps of volunteers."

CESC, founded in 1965 by former Furman administrator Betty Alverson, began with six students serving three agencies. Today an average of 800 students per week volunteer to work in one of 45 agencies in Greenville, providing assistance to social service groups, nursing homes, hospitals and schools.

The much-honored organization has received the South Carolina Governor's Award and has twice been one of four finalists in the National Center for Voluntary Action's annual award "in recognition of outstanding volunteer service and achievement." During the early years of CESC, Max Heller, as mayor of Greenville, helped the organization establish many of the agency relationships that it maintains to this day.

Heller and his wife were clearly moved by the recognition. At the announcement, Max told the crowd that a "miracle" — the

chance meeting with Mary Mills and her friends from Greenville that led to his escape from his Nazi-occupied homeland — helped shape his philosophy of "sharing oneself with others."

And that, he said, is exactly what CESC does. After praising Alverson for her work in building the organization, he spoke directly to the students in the audience.

"All of us search for a way to understand what our role in life is," he said. "How do we serve? And how do we serve God? In my opinion, the best way is to serve his children. And what you in Service Corps do — you're doing God's work."

"You have made people better, and you have become better people while learning what life is all about."

Furman officials said they would also name for the Hellers a room in Furman's forthcoming conference center, which is still in the planning stages. In addition, the Hellers were presented a "letter box" containing good wishes from many friends and family.

If you would like to write the Hellers, send your letter to Trude and Max Heller; 233 North Main Street, Suite 200, Greenville, S.C. 29601. For one student's perspective on the impact of the Heller Collegiate Educational Service Corps, see page 48.