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Volunteer leadership propels growth of gift societies

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Furman campaign

Volunteer leadership propels growth of gift societies

The most significant measure of success for the Furman Fund in recent years has been the substantial increase in alumni participation. For the past three years, more than 50 percent of alumni have made unrestricted contributions to the Furman Fund — a record of support matched by few colleges and universities.

But as the university has built its donor base with the help of dedicated volunteers and committed alumni, the Furman Fund has also developed another success story: a surge in contributions at the society level.

In 1993, Furman reorganized and expanded its unrestricted giving societies to better recognize alumni and friends who make substantial gifts to Furman. These unrestricted gifts greatly enhance the university's ability to provide scholarship support to deserving students and funding for Furman's strategic initiatives and engaged learning programs.

The Richard Furman Society was established in 1988, with 10 charter members making unrestricted gifts of \$10,000 or more to Furman. Since that time, the RFS has expanded to 55 members who provide enough annual support to match the benefits of an endowment of over \$12 million. The RFS, co-chaired by trustee Jim Ney '64 and his wife, Carol Nichols Ney '67, hopes to have 61 members by the end of the 2000-2001 school year.

| Furman Fund Societies | | |
|------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| | Donor level | Chairs |
| Richard Furman Society | \$10,000+ | Jim '64 and Carol Nichols Ney '67 |
| Founders Circle | \$5,000 | Les Hudson '61 |
| Trustees Circle | \$2,500 | Jack and Becky Guynn |
| Presidents Club | \$1,000 | Furman Cantrell '61 |
| Fountain 500 Society | \$500 | Wanda Justus Pearman '87 |
| Bell Tower Society | \$250 | Melanie Black Wessinger '83 |
| Gateway Society | \$100 | Michael Garcia '95 |

The major reason for the growth of the Richard Furman Society and other gift societies is effective volunteer leadership. An example: Furman Bisher '38 and his wife, Lynda, attended a dinner in Atlanta hosted by the Neys, who introduced the guests to the RFS. By the end of the evening, the Bishers and several others had decided to join. Shortly thereafter, the university received a letter from Furman Bisher, who had previously funded an academic-athletic scholarship and the Bisher Endowment for Journalism. He wrote, "Please consider me a member of the Richard Furman Society from now on."

All Furman Fund gift societies, starting with the Gateway Society (\$100 donors),

have made tremendous progress in the last several years. Of the unrestricted gifts received by the university in 1999-2000, more than 83 percent were at society levels.

The growth of these gift societies helps Furman build an endowment and a financial foundation that enables the university to attract more and more deserving students. Collectively, these gifts provide the margin of excellence that sets Furman apart.

— Phil Howard
Director, Furman Fund

For information on Furman's gift societies, contact Howard at (864) 294-3475 or 1-800-787-7534.

Parents step forward in support of campaign

"Our daughter's college experience is everything we'd hoped for. The personal contact with faculty and administration enhances her education and her life at Furman. We are so proud of Libby's adjustment to college and young adult life and so grateful to Furman."

For Kristine and James Piontek and their daughter, Libby, Furman has clearly been the right choice. And it wasn't made casually; the family, which hails from Liberty, Mo., visited 20 colleges, including Stanford, Washington University, Holy Cross and Wake Forest. But Furman best met the criteria on Libby's wish list: excellent academics, energetic student body, good location, opportunities for personal contact with faculty and staff, safe atmosphere, and a friendly, residential campus.

The Pionteks have demonstrated a keen interest in the growth of the university as a whole. They say, "We believe Furman has a very bright future."

To underscore their confidence, they

joined the Richard Furman Society, which recognizes individuals who contribute \$10,000 or more annually to Furman. This kind of investment supports Furman's strategic plan and represents a ringing endorsement of its goals and objectives.

The Pionteks' commitment is just one way in which Furman parents have stepped forward during the Forever Furman Campaign. Another example: Jeff and Anne Donahue of Baltimore, Md., members of the Parents Council Executive Committee, committed \$25,000 for a room in the James B. Duke Library to honor their son Tim, a sophomore. The Parents Council Executive Committee has endorsed the renovation of the library as Furman's top priority, and the Donahues are heading the fund drive among parents to support this \$25 million project.

Then there's Leighan and David Rinker of Atlantis, Fla. The Rinkers are former heads of the Parents Association at Furman, where three of their children graduated (Traci '89, Christopher '94, Allison '96). Today Leighan sits on the board of trustees,

and aside from taking the lead in the creation of the Partners Scholarship Program, she and David have donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to the library through the Rinker Challenge (see story, page 29).

Furman parents' sense of responsibility for the university's advancement is evident in many ways. They may volunteer to call the parents of incoming freshmen, host a summer send-off for new students or sponsor a hospitality tent during freshman Orientation. As for financial support, gifts to Furman from parents reached an all-time high of \$436,162 in 1999-2000.

Approximately 38 percent of the Parents Association made a gift to Furman last year. The goal for 2000-2001 is to increase parent participation to 50 percent.

The Parents Association consists of parents of all currently enrolled students. For information call Judy Wilson, director of Parents Programs, at (864) 294-3717, or visit www.furman.edu and follow the quick links to the Parents Association page.