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Better Together

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

It was love at first sight. When my family and I visited Greenville, as I prepared to become president of Furman University in 2014, we could sense the energy and vibrancy of the place. There was no doubt that Greenville was exceptional. Its bold vision was there for all to see.

Early on, I knew it was important to bolster Furman's place in Greenville. For more than 100 years, when the university's campus was located downtown, Furman and Greenville were basically one and the same. What was good for one was good for the other, and there was no distinction between where the university ended and the city began.

That, of course, changed – at least spatially – when Furman moved a few miles down Poinsett Highway in the early 1960s to spread out on a larger campus. Now, some 50 years later, I could see it was time for the university to make a special effort to renew and grow our bond with our city.

Thanks to our many partners, we're well on our way.

For example, we've joined with M. Judson Booksellers downtown to create Furman on Main, just a short distance from the old downtown campus. We've partnered with the Bon Secours Wellness Arena, the Greenville Drive and the Upcountry History Museum to support local organizations and have greater visibility in the city. And we worked closely with the Southern Conference to bring the first and second rounds of the



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*Furman is proud to be
Greenville's hometown university.*

BY ELIZABETH DAVIS

NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament to Greenville in 2017, showcasing our town for a national audience.

Recognizing a shared entrepreneurial spirit, Furman joined forces with the Greenville Chamber of Commerce's NEXT SC program and VentureSouth, leading to the creation of Furman's Office for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. Launched last fall, the office is teaching Furman students the fundamentals of entrepreneurship and serving as a catalyst for the burgeoning

entrepreneurial ecosystem of the Upstate.

In the same spirit, we have strengthened our educational programs aimed at addressing community needs and building on local strengths. Furman now offers a Master of Science in Community Engaged Medicine, as well as a Master of Arts in Strategic Design.

The Riley Institute, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary, has done incredible work locally and throughout South Carolina. Its Diversity Leaders Initiative has prepared nearly 2,200 civic, educational and

business leaders to address the important issues in their communities. Our Institute for the Advancement of Community Health and Shi Center for Sustainability play similar roles in addressing local issues in health and the environment.

Perhaps one of the university's greatest impacts on the community has been the Heller Service Corps. For the past 50 years, more than half of our students each year volunteer their time to work with local agencies like the Brutontown Community Center and Greenville Free Medical Clinic.

And then there is the university's economic impact on the community, which has grown over the years. In fact, a study this spring by Furman's Department of Economics found that the university's annual economic impact on Greenville County and the surrounding Upstate counties is more than \$297 million a year. Furman supports almost 2,200 jobs in Greenville County alone.

We're a little place doing mighty things. And so much of this is powered by the deep connections in and with our community. We'll continue to nurture this powerful and important relationship, as we celebrate more than 160 years of being Greenville's hometown university.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth Davis".

A version of this essay appeared in the September 2019 issue of the Greenville Business Magazine.