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## A Purple and White Proposal

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**I**t was a simple but clever engagement ruse. Robert Stearns '11 would propose to Suzanne Clark '11 on Labor Day weekend 2012 by telling her they'd be meeting friends in the North Carolina mountains. But on the way there, Robert suggested they stop at Furman to walk around campus a bit and do a little reminiscing.

That's when Suzanne's antennae went on alert. As they walked around Furman Lake, Suzanne noticed Robert was a tad on the nervous side.

"Yeah, I was jumpy – to the point where I was worried she'd notice the ring box in my pocket," Robert says.

Suzanne was definitely wise to the ploy when Robert insisted she walk on his other flank so he could better disguise the ring, but she gave a knowing smile and just went with it.

"So, in completely original fashion," Robert says facetiously, "we went over to the Bell Tower to look for our bricks with our names on them. And I got down on one knee."

Robert says he pretty much blanked out on what he said after that, but apparently it went well. The two were married in 2013 and have two young sons. At press time, another son was on the way.

Furman is inextricably part of their bond with one another. Their alma mater is also the root of friendships they forged through Greek life. "Some of our best friends



## A PURPLE AND WHITE PROPOSAL



*Robert '11 and Suzanne Clark Stearns '11*

BY TINA UNDERWOOD

in the world are our fellow Furman alumni," says Robert, who participated in ROTC and majored in political science.

Members of Young Benefactors at Furman, the two look for opportunities to return to campus.

"We enjoy going back when we can, going to games and

staying connected through the network," says Robert.

With fond memories of his professors and late nights at the library, Robert, a Birmingham, Alabama, native, considers his liberal arts and sciences experience foundational to his vocation as a sales executive at Atlanta-

based Angel Oak Capital. Now, with some offices opening back up as COVID-19 restrictions have eased, Robert is on the road a fair amount with the financial services firm, where he's in charge of Mid-Atlantic sales.

Suzanne, who is from Atlanta, found herself changing majors at Furman up until her junior year, when she settled into health sciences.

"I'm immensely grateful for the direction Furman gave me in my career choice," says Suzanne, who went on to earn her master's degree as a nurse practitioner at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and served several years in surgical intensive care and orthopedic surgery roles.

The shift to health sciences in her third year at Furman was an ambitious one, she says, but the support and encouragement she received from the faculty made it all possible. "I had great relationships with those professors – Dr. Bill Pierce, Dr. Julian Reed and so many others. They prepared me well for the master's program."

At their Atlanta home, Suzanne and Robert are busy with their growing family. Bennett, 4, is gearing up for the pro tour, developing his golf game since age 3. And, well, it remains to be seen what Rhodes, 2, and boy number three will bring to the world. At any rate, Suzanne says she's happy Robert has a built-in foursome for the golf course. ♦