

Making dreams come true at FHSU

Fidelity Charitable describes a philanthropist as a person who gives time, money, experience, skills or talent to help create a better world. I find it so interesting how that definition intersects with the primary focus of our mission at Fort Hays State University, which is to develop engaged global citizen-leaders. FHSU provides affordable access to those who seek a top-notch higher education experience. Our caring and compassionate community helps students discover their true gifts. And our students go on to graduate and apply those gifts to create a better world.

Perhaps this all sounds a little hard to believe – but so did the idea of a small teacher’s college in western Kansas becoming one of the most affordable public universities in the United States – a university that this fall graduated students from all 50 states and 20 countries. Or how about the success of the Journey Campaign and its audacious goal to raise a hundred million dollars. By the way, we are currently on track to surpass our goal by Homecoming 2021!

Fort Hays State would not be what it is today without big goals and the compassionate philanthropists who fuel those goals. We have amazing alumni and friends who constantly ask, “How can I help?” Their help comes in many forms: the gift of time through service on boards, the gift of money through scholarships, the gift of experience through mentoring, the gift of donated labor and tradesmanship through projects such as the Downtown Pavilion and the gift of talent such as sharing beautiful music.

Without question, our philanthropists keep our university strong. They change lives. They make dreams come true. Their impact is real – I see it every day.

For instance, John Francis, Emeritus Trustee, called the FHSU Foundation when the pandemic began last March to ask what area of FHSU needed his financial support the most. He and his wife, Nancy, proudly gave to the President’s Strategic Initiatives Fund. He also wrote a letter to all of his fellow Foundation Trustees, current and emeritus, encouraging them to give to either the President’s Strategic Initiatives Fund and/or the Student Emergency Assistance Fund as a vote of confidence in FHSU and our students. His heartfelt letter garnered multiple gifts to both funds at a time when good news was hard to come by.

What about Bill Confer, father of Cindy Coldiron and David Confer, who was an ardent advocate of higher education? After graduating from Fort Hays State in 1955, he became a high school science teacher and encouraged all of his students to continue their education. He was always grateful for the education he received at FHSU. His children have carried on his legacy by establishing a scholarship in his honor.

Look no further than the centerpiece of campus life, the university quad, to see the physical impact of philanthropy at work. The Schmidt Foundation Center for Art and Design was made possible by many generous donors. “The Schmidt Foundation was excited to be a part of such a beautiful project,” said Gary Shorman, president of the Schmidt Foundation. “Bob and Pat Schmidt were not only avid supporters of Fort Hays State University, but they also loved art and those who create it. We believe FHSU’s Center for Art and Design was the perfect place to invest and to build a wonderful future for students who choose to enhance our lives with art.”

The Fischli-Wills Center for Student Success is another remarkable addition to our campus. Our students – current and future –will forever be changed by this cutting-edge student success and engagement facility. The building is named in honor of Richard Fischli and Dolores Wills-Fischli, whose journey with Fort Hays State began with two rural Kansas kids pursuing a college education. Richard and Dolores both earned bachelor's and master's degrees from FHSU in the 1950s. As lifelong K-12 educators, Richard and Dolores made an impact on thousands of students throughout their careers. Beyond the classroom, the Fischlis were known for giving what they could and truly understood the impact every dollar had on student success.

Dr. Dennis King started working at FHSU back in 1996 – the same year he made his first gift to FHSU. Over the last 20-plus years, he has worked across campus in multiple departments and has continued to give back along the way. When asked why he chooses to give back to Fort Hays State, even while he already gives so much of himself to his job each day, he said this: “If I can give a little bit and help individuals have the same success as I’ve had and have the same happiness that I’ve had, that’s what I want to do.”

Dr. Grady Dixon, dean of FHSU’s Werth College of Science, Technology and Mathematics, personally knows the impact of donors and scholarships. “My wife, Melissa, and I give back to FHSU for several reasons. We both benefited from donor-funded scholarships when we were students. I know the flexibility that donor gifts provide to faculty who work to enhance student experiences. As an administrator, I understand that many donors are more eager to give when they know that university employees are invested in the same cause. We strongly believe in the societal value of FHSU and higher education, in general.”

All of these people embrace the spirit of giving. When they got to where they were going, they did not forget to look around – and help others in need.

As 2020 draws to a close, I want to thank all of our alumni and friends for the impact they have had in their communities and especially our philanthropists, who continue to pay it forward to FHSU. I have been moved by your generosity.

If you are interested in fueling the success of FHSU this holiday season, please consider visiting <https://foundation.fhsu.edu/donate> or contacting the FHSU Foundation at 785.628.5620, foundation.fhsu.edu, or P.O. Box 1060, Hays, KS 67601. Thank you!

– end –