



Stronger Together

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On October 1, 2022, The University of Alabama will enter its seventh year of a 10-year capital campaign directed to raise \$1.5 billion in philanthropic support. As of June 30, 2022, UA had already raised over \$1.1 billion campus-wide in The Rising Tide Capital Campaign. And generous donors had contributed over \$8.5 million to support the Capstone College of Nursing, pushing the College to over 71 percent of its campaign goal.

What a privilege it has been to witness the continual outpouring of support from individuals, families, foundations and corporations, as they dig deep and explore ways to make impactful gifts to promote the education of future healthcare heroes. A term we often use in fundraising is “stretch giving,” which refers to donors finding creative means to surprise the institution and exceed expectations, simply

because they feel driven by their passion to partner with UA for positive change. Stretch giving is defined less by a dollar amount, and more by the result that gift will yield. We are excited to share a few interesting stories of donors who pulled together in creative ways to make stretch gifts: from answering the call to meet (or in this case, exceed) a foundation’s challenge for matching funds, to pooling together young professionals with a common goal, to striving together as faculty and staff to identify our own roles in UA’s Capital Campaign. I am thrilled to give our readers just a peek at the beautiful ripple effect I observe every day as donors’ giving sets in motion the power of The Rising Tide!

STRIKING THE PERFECT MATCH

Many people have touching stories about nurses— how they assisted with the delivery of their first child, offered much needed care and interaction when a family member was not allowed visitors, or even provided home healthcare to an aging parent. For Richard Urrutia, he credits his entire happiness and success to the influence of nurses.

I recently had a chance to spend some time with CCN alumna, Donna Rietta Urrutia, and her husband, Richard, and consider it an honor to share a glimpse into this family’s philanthropic journey; one that led them to help fund an in-state full-tuition scholarship at the Capstone College of Nursing.

Donna’s grandparents immigrated from Sicily. While neither her parents nor grandparents attended college, it was very important to them that she and her siblings earn college degrees. Supported by her family, Donna decided to move away from home and attend The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.

Fortunately, she found a home away from home in her sorority. After joining her freshman year, she found excellent mentors there like Cathy Dunkin Boardman and Arlene Ellis Ferlisi, upperclassmen pursuing BSN degrees at the Capstone College of Nursing.

Donna shared about how she made her decision to go into nursing. “When I was in college, there was a nursing shortage, as there is now. I had friends, like Cathy and Arlene, pursuing degrees in nursing. No one in my family was a nurse, but I knew that a degree in nursing would guarantee me a job after graduation. That was what was important at the time.”

Donna’s freshman year at UA was great— she was smart and committed to her studies and adjusted well to living away from home. But in the fall of her sophomore year, Donna faced one of the greatest setbacks of her life. “Dad was diagnosed with cancer in October and passed away that following January.” Her father had just turned

60, and Donna was only 19. Spending time with her father in the last few months of his life and helping care for her grieving mother after his passing placed a strain on Donna’s course work just as she was about to apply to the upper division of nursing school. Donna even considered transferring to UAB to be near her mother. But her mother knew what she was contemplating and took action immediately by calling Donna’s roommate, Angela D’amico Melazzo and begging her to convince Donna to stay in Tuscaloosa. Donna says, “It was years later before Angela told me that mom had made that call and stressed to Angela that my graduating from nursing school at UA had always been my parents’ dream.”

Between Angela and Donna’s mother, they were able to convince Donna to continue her studies in Tuscaloosa, but next was the question of how she could afford to stay, especially given that her father had been the family’s primary financial supporter.

As Donna was searching for a way to pay for college, she learned that a local hospital was offering scholarships to nursing students who were willing to commit to practice there after earning a degree. Donna was selected to receive free tuition and books in exchange for a two-year commitment to the hospital. Donna remembers finding out about her award, “That support provided the financial assistance I needed right when I needed it most, allowing me to stay enrolled at Alabama.” It was that gift that planted the seed that Donna hoped to one day want to support a student just like her.

Richard Urrutia also attended UA and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in 1984 in Commerce and Business. He has five siblings and remembers well what it felt like to have to support himself by working while pursuing his college degree.

The first time I met Richard was when Donna invited him to tour the nursing school with other Board of Visitors members and their spouses. It was exciting to see Richard on the tour— he was truly enthusiastic about the simulators, the technology and the practice laboratories. He made it clear from that first meeting how important nurses were to him. However, I did not know the depth of his appreciation for nurses until it was shared with me when he made the decision to fund a scholarship in Donna’s name. Richard told me, “If it was not for nurses, I would not be in my relationship with this beautiful nurse from Birmingham. I am in the position I am in life now and owe my success to nurses.”

While Richard has several stories of how nurses came to his aid when he was sick or injured, he was speaking primarily about how he and Donna met – introduced by none other than a nurse. At the time, Donna was



ALUMS UNITE TO INSPIRE FUTURE GENERATION

“The amazing part of The Rising Tide campaign is that generosity seems to breed generosity and the joy we see donors share is truly contagious,” said Karen Love, chair of CCN’s Capital Campaign committee. “The Rising Tide is showing us that we as individuals can join together to make a lasting mark.”

Recently, the College saw the impact that could be made when individuals come together. Dr. Ernesto Perez, CCN DNP alum and owner of NAP CRNA Professionals in Florida, encouraged Dean Prevost and me to reach out to professionals seeking support for future CRNAs.

“I wanted to do this since I started teaching,” said Dr. Perez. “I appreciate Anita and Dean Prevost taking the seed I planted and seeing it through.”

Since UA does not offer a CRNA degree, I tabled the discussion until I had a chance to visit with Justin Carroll, CCN BSN alum and Senior CRNA at Children’s of Alabama.

After meeting with Justin to discuss this idea, he invited Dean Prevost and a team of his fellow CRNAs to meet and discuss ways they might create a fund to motivate aspiring CRNA students.

“It has been my privilege and honor to assist in making Ernesto’s vision come to fruition,” said Justin. “I am so grateful for the incredible display of generosity from my fellow CRNAs.”

“It is my hope that we can continue to watch this fund grow and to possibly establish similar funding for students who have interests in other nursing specialties. This is such a wonderful time of giving for CCN and the entire University and I’m humbled to be a part of it.”

Not long after the dean’s meeting with Justin and his colleagues, an inaugural group of donors pledged \$32,000 to help establish the Aspiring CRNA Award: Jeremy Blount, Justin Carroll, Morgan Escue, Megan Escue, Philip Fikes, Donna LaBresh and Krista Niedermeier. The endowment of this fund is pending final approval by The University of Alabama System Board of Trustees.

“I was impressed to see the collaborative effort that took place in the creation of this fund,” said Dean Prevost. “From Ernesto planting the seed with his suggestion, to Justin arranging for the campaign dinner to allow us to flesh out the details, to the expedient response from the group. It was a perfect example of how this Campaign is helping alumni find creative means of making an impact at the College.”

working as a surgical nurse at UAB and was colleagues with Nancy Bynon, who happened to be Richard’s friend from his hometown, Dothan, Ala. After much prodding for the two to meet, Richard and Donna finally agreed to let Nancy set them up on a blind date.

Remember, this was before social media, so short of a printed photograph, Donna and Richard knew little at all about who they were about to meet; and both tried, unsuccessfully, to cancel at the last minute. But, meet they did, and the rest is history. And, what a history!

What Donna first picked merely as a solid career choice has offered her much flexibility and reward. Donna has enjoyed a career as a surgical nurse and pharmaceutical sales representative.

Donna and Richard have three beautiful daughters, Anne-Marie, Gabrielle and Elizabeth, all of whom graduated from The University of Alabama. They are also proud grandparents of four with another grandchild on the way. They reside in Santa Rosa Beach, Fla., but spend much of their time at their home in Birmingham, Ala., as well.

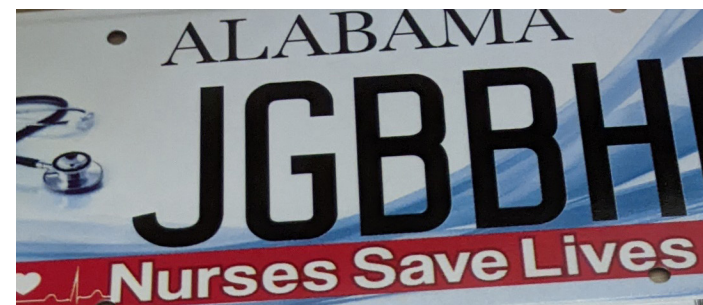
They love Alabama, are football season ticket holders and support UA in various ways. For example, Donna joined the Capstone College of Nursing’s Board of Visitors in 2014, alongside her college mentor, Cathy Boardman.

Through the years, Donna and Richard have found various ways to give back to several charitable and nonprofit organizations; but when the Urrutias were approached with an idea last summer, the couple was inspired, ultimately making their family’s largest philanthropic gift to date.

We all know the strike of a match can quickly start a fire. In the case of this giving journey, a different kind of match ignited a flame and awakened a family’s desire to make a difference in the lives of others.

Last July I received a call from Dr. John Ziegler, Executive Director of the Alabama Nurses Foundation (ANF).

Dr. Ziegler shared that over the years, ANF has provided scholarships related to nursing education and community grants for qualifying projects initiated by nurses. He also shared that the popularity of the “Nurses Save Lives” specialty auto license tags has grown every year in significant proportions. Consequently, the ANF has been able to increase scholarship awards and



will be adding new programs for research grants and benevolence assistance to nurses.

“We were beginning to work with nursing schools throughout the state,” said Dr. Ziegler. “I contacted Anita last summer offering for the foundation to match \$25,000 if CCN could find a donor willing to contribute at least that sum.”

Because the Urrutias had shared their desire to one day fund a scholarship, John’s call prompted me to reach out to them; and what would ultimately lead to their largest charitable contribution to date began with a simple text message. I will admit it felt a bit unconventional to reach out with this idea via text. But, while ANF’s offer was on the table, I took a risk and texted Richard about the possible match just to determine if the timing was right. Shortly after that initial text, I learned that Richard already had an idea brewing— he wanted to find a way to fund a full tuition scholarship for an Alabama student and honor Donna while doing so.

When I shared this with Dr. Ziegler, he fanned the flames, sharing that ANF would now match up to \$50,000 establishing the Donna Rietta Urrutia and Alabama Nurses Foundation Endowed Nursing Scholarship.

The Urrutias’s gift came in the form of stock, and together with the pledge from ANF, the scholarship will be funded at a little over \$250,000. This is one of the few scholarships at CCN that should one day fully cover the tuition of an upper division in-state nursing student, based on current tuition at UA.

“When I shared with Anita about the other scholarships, I think her first thought was that UA should not be outdone by another institution,” said Dr. Ziegler. “I am partially joking, I do know that it was important to the Urrutias— and to the foundation—that we had an opportunity now to fund a full in-state tuition scholarship.”

“Dean Suzanne Prevost, Mrs. Hamlett, and CCN made the process seamless. My passion is for nursing students and I feel like I am blessed to help the foundation partner with other donors to leave behind a legacy by funding the education of our future healthcare heroes.”

While discussing how the offer of the foundation’s match motivated him, Richard said it was the fact that the fund would provide a full-tuition scholarship so quickly and that his family would have a chance to help someone just like Donna had been helped.

“Maybe the recipients will not have to work like I did,” said Richard. “I hope our scholarship will help them just focus on their studies.”

Donna added, “We are put on this earth for a reason. I really did not want attention for making this gift and it took Anita a little coaxing to convince me to share our



story and what led Richard and me down this path.”

“When I was in school, outside financial support provided what I needed so I could stay at Alabama and earn my nursing degree. Because of that support, I was able to fulfill my parents’ dream for me. I cannot imagine what would have happened had I not had that funding. I knew what it was like to receive.”

“Now, I know the joy of being a benefactor and I think it is important to share that joy so that others might be motivated by it.”

Donna continued, “I look back on our family’s gift to CCN and can genuinely say that when you give back and help others, it really is one of the most rewarding feelings you will ever have. Not for any personal glory, but because you witness the impact you are making in students’ lives. My hope is that cycle will continue, and that one day the students we support will pay it forward to help future students’ dreams come true.”

OPPOSITE PAGE: Sales of the “Nurses Save Lives” car tags contribute to ANF’s ability to support nursing education and other nursing initiatives. ABOVE: Donna and Richard with their granddaughter Abigail at the President’s Mansion during the 2021 football season.



CCN EMPLOYEES IMPACT STUDENTS THROUGH THE RISING TIDE CAMPAIGN

The faculty and staff at the Capstone College of Nursing give of their time, energy and talents to provide extraordinary learning opportunities for our students. Together, they overcome challenges and thrive as a campus community, coming together to support one another and giving promise to the community and beyond.

Each year, UA highlights the importance of employee giving through its We Are UA Campaign. The focus of this campaign is to encourage staff and faculty to celebrate the joy of philanthropy regardless of the size of each donation. During We Are UA, employees are challenged to identify their passion areas and find ways to support them.

As Dean Prevost expressed, “I always want the people at the College to recognize how much I appreciate them giving of their time and service to go beyond the normal course of their job descriptions, especially over the last two years. I am convinced we have the hardest working group of faculty and staff on campus. So, when I was told that CCN’s recent participation rate was higher than the campus-wide rate, my heart was full of pride. We are incredibly grateful to see UA employees also recognize the impact of giving of their financial resources.”

While we celebrate that every single gift can have impact, we are delighted to recognize a few CCN faculty members who recently created named annual funds to support nursing students.

Mary Browning Grammer Annual Nursing Scholarship

Dr. Abby Grammer Horton is an Assistant Professor at CCN. Dr. Horton strives to support CCN undergraduate nursing students throughout their nursing school experience. She is committed to her students’ success by providing academic resources beyond the classroom through faculty mentorship and financial assistance via nursing scholarships.

Drs. Abby and Chris Horton established the Mary Browning Grammer Annual Nursing Scholarship in memory of Abby’s late grandmother who inspired her, even as a young child, to pursue a career in nursing. This scholarship was created to fund first-generation in-state students in the upper division of nursing.

The Merrill Family Nursing Student Emergency Fund

Dr. Mark Merrill worked in the pediatric intensive care unit at Children’s of Alabama before earning a direct commission and serving a total of 22 years in the United States Air Force. Dr. Merrill held various clinical and executive leadership positions throughout his military career with expertise in medical ethics, disaster management, education and training, readiness exercise evaluation, resilience, preceptor

development, and aircrew training and standardization. In his final assignment, and before joining CCN in August 2020, Dr. Merrill held the position of Chief Nurse Executive for the 501st Combat Support Wing, based at Royal Air Force Alconbury, United Kingdom.

Dr. Merrill’s memories of attending nursing school as a young father and balancing the expenses related to earning an education while supporting a growing family led he and his wife Elizabeth to create The Merrill Family Nursing Student Emergency Fund. This annual fund will support nursing students facing extraordinary expenses that could compromise their education.

Dr. Haley Franklin Townsend Annual Undergraduate Nursing Scholarship

Dr. Haley Townsend, an Assistant Professor at CCN, has a passion for identifying and meeting needs in the College and the community. In 2021, in collaboration with other CCN faculty members, she helped launch Project Wellness in Motion which aims to promote health and wellness in rural Alabama using mobile clinics.

Dr. Townsend recognized that many of our students attend on academic scholarships that expire after eight semesters, so she and her husband Brody created the Dr. Haley Franklin Townsend Annual Undergraduate Nursing Scholarship to fund in-state students in their last semester of study.

One of the most beautiful parts of my job is to hear donors’ unique stories and then watch as those stories motivate others to find, and fund, an area of need that they are passionate about.

Whether we call this a “ripple” effect, a “spark” or just old-fashioned inspiration, it is evident from these stories that the joy associated with giving is contagious; that donors are experiencing first hand what it feels like to contribute to the power of The Rising Tide!

The best part- this is only a snapshot of the impact being made by generous donors at the Capstone College of Nursing and across UA’s campus, and we still have three more years to go! There has never been a better time to dream big for our students!

To make a gift to one of the funds highlighted here, or for more information about establishing a new fund, contact me at ahamlett@ua.edu or 205-348-9876. To learn more about The Rising Tide Capital Campaign, visit risingtide.ua.edu.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The Townsends and their scholarship recipients: Mr. Brody Townsend, Mackenzie Clanton, Victor Martinez, and Dr. Haley Townsend. Below: Scholarship recipient Jovie Edwards with donors, Drs. Abby and Chris Horton.

