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ADVERTISING AGENCY SUCCESS, COMMUNITY SERVICE EARN ALUMNI AWARD FOR ATLANTA’S DAVID FITZGERALD

DAYTON, Ohio — “When in doubt, do the right thing.”

Without a doubt, that philosophy makes up the core of David Fitzgerald, who founded Atlanta’s Fitzgerald & Co., one of the fastest-rising advertising agencies in the country. It’s why it’s one of the company’s written core beliefs.

Fitzgerald encourages fun and fresh thinking while keeping the company’s 135-member creative team focused on developing campaigns that “exceed expectations everyday” for clients that range from Coca-Cola to the Island of Aruba.

“The last sentence in our mission statement reads, ‘And most importantly, we have fun doing what we do,’” he told South Magazine in 1998. “No one takes themselves too seriously around here. If they do, they don’t last long. It’s kind of like the body rejecting the organ. ... In addition to the ‘fun’ part of our mission, one of our operating values is perspective. It reads: ‘We all have a higher calling; we’re not curing cancer here.’”

For Fitzgerald’s creation of one of the most-respected advertising agencies in the Southeast and his devotion to community service, he will receive the University of Dayton’s School of Business Administration’s Lifetime Achievement Award, its highest honor, Tuesday, Nov. 14.

According to ADWEEK, Fitzgerald’s company “has fostered the reputation of being an ethical, humane shop — a gentleman’s agency.” Fitzgerald & Co., a fully integrated marketing communications company headquartered in Atlanta, reports $135 million in billings annually and has been tabbed Atlanta’s best agency in the Atlanta Business Chronicle’s annual survey of the advertising industry. Adweek Southeast has named the agency the best in the Southeast and selected him to head its fantasy “Atlanta Super Agency.”

“He’s consistently been acknowledged as a leader, not only in the day-to-day workings of the business but as a real force in the industry in terms of integrity, in terms of (taking) an

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OFFICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
300 College Park  Dayton, Ohio 45469-1679
(937) 229-3241  (937) 229-3063 Fax
www.udayton.edu
honorable approach in what sometimes can be a dicey business,” says Jim Paddock, executive vice president and chief creative officer. “A lot of people play it fast and loose in advertising as well as other businesses. Dave’s never been like that. Dave never will be like that.”

Lisa Galanti, who started the agency with Fitzgerald in 1983 and now serves as executive vice president and managing director, describes his reputation as “incomparable, stellar.” Adds Paddock: “He lives his morals. He lives his beliefs in the way he deals with people, in the way he runs his business, in the way he serves his community, in the way he deals with friends. His honor, his integrity, his truth pervade everything he does.”

Sam Gould, dean of the School of Business Administration, describes Fitzgerald as a servant-leader and an extraordinary entrepreneur. “He’s been involved in just scores of social agencies and volunteer work in the Atlanta area. He brings out that servant-leader model associated with UD graduates,” Gould says. “He built from scratch what’s been described as the finest advertising agency in the Southeast, and he’s done it in a very unassuming way. He unleashes creativity in people. It’s my impression that people just love working there.”

Colleagues admire — and appreciate — the way Fitzgerald hires creative people, then gets out of their way. “Dave’s approach to business is simply something you don’t find in this business. He’s a person with enough confidence, enough intelligence and enough heart to hire great people and let them do what they do,” Paddock says. “That’s unheard of. It’s so simple. It’s so smart. Dave has the talent to understand people’s capabilities and allow them to maximize their capabilities.”

In his characteristically disarming way, Fitzgerald says he never had “a burning desire” to start his own agency nor an “ego-driven desire” to see his name on the door. The first line of his company biography sums up what’s most important in his life: He claims to be “the father of four perfect children.” When pressed, he describes himself as a “reluctant entrepreneur.”

But in 1983, when the Marriott Corp. offered Fitzgerald $2 million in billings to leave Green & Burkhard and start his own company, he saw “the opportunity of a lifetime.” In 15 years, billings rose to $63 million annually before the agency was acquired by Interpublic Group of Companies in 1998. With Fitzgerald still firmly at the helm as president and CEO, the agency continues to score major accounts, just recently winning the ad portion of a $33 million account to launch a consumer education program for the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio and a $10 million account with the online travel company Travelot.com.

As the company has expanded, Fitzgerald has not shrunk the amount of time and pro bono work he devotes to causes close to his heart. Since 1994, the firm has donated creative talent to promote the National Black Arts Festival. Fitzgerald earmarks money the company
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would have spent to entertain its vendors during the Christmas season to Our Lady of Perpetual Help Home, a nursing facility in Atlanta that provides care for the terminally ill who lack money for medical care.

At UD, Fitzgerald serves on the board of trustees and the School of Business Administration’s advisory council. He’s donated $75,000 toward the Hoben Learning Laboratories in the newly renovated Miriam Hall, and his company has provided $60,000 in pro bono creative work for an image ad campaign running in the *Dayton Daily News* this fall. The ads tout UD’s technological, curricular and research innovations. One headline boasts, “Our student-run portfolio grew 28 percent last year. Kids these days.”

Fitzgerald, who received a management degree in 1971 and an MBA in 1973 from UD, calls former dean Bill Hoben his hero and mentor and credits him for providing him a springboard to success. “He’s always had time and an ear, and he still does today,” he says.

As a trustee and a member of the business advisory council, Fitzgerald says he has a keener appreciation today of UD’s mission and niche in the marketplace.

“UD is not in the business of producing graduates, it’s in the business of growing people.”

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For media interviews with **David Fitzgerald**, contact Tina Campbell at (404) 504-6901.