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Making a Difference

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Making a Difference

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Wednesday March 8, 2017

By Eric F. Spina

A steady stream of students stopped by a table in Marianist Hall during lunch hour to scrawl personal thank-you notes on postcards to people who quietly and selflessly make a difference on our campus every day.

Our philanthropists.

Across campus, more than 500 red gift tags highlighted the impact of the generosity of alumni, friends, foundations, corporations, parents, faculty and staff. On the statue of St. Joseph carrying the boy Jesus, one tag fluttered in the stiff March breeze. Other tags could be found in labs, classrooms, the chapel, library, RecPlex, trees and benches — virtually every corner of our nearly 400-acre campus. Faculty and staff donors wore blue buttons proclaiming, "This is What a Philanthropist Looks Like."

On our first Philanthropy Day — a day dedicated to heartfelt gratitude — I have been reflecting on the impact of private support on the lives of our students and the future of our university.

That impact is both deep and meaningful. I'm filled with deep appreciation for all those who support scholarship funds, endowed faculty positions, research opportunities, curricular innovations and our learning-living environment.

Scholarship support is critical for fulfilling our Marianist mission of opening our doors to students from all walks of life. Last year alone, we established 24 new scholarship funds, and approximately 1,300 students received nearly \$5.7 million in scholarships from donors who I hope understand the profound impact they are creating. As I looked around at the students sitting with donors at the annual scholarship dinner in the fall, I felt energized by their passion, intellect, joy for life and faith in the future.

"It is because of my scholarships that I'm able to succeed here and become the person I am today," Carlos Rodriguez, a junior psychology and human rights major from San Antonio, told the dinner crowd. His aspirations? Carlos wants to change the world, and I believe he will. He dreams of creating a nonprofit organization that will work globally to ensure that the human rights of individuals with special needs are upheld.

Kirsten Simpson, of Cincinnati, fell in love with UD when she attended the Women in Engineering summer camp. Today, she's an ambassador for the School of Engineering, a peer mentor in the Office of Multicultural Affairs and an apprentice with Procter & Gamble.

She moved the audience with words from the heart: "I am learning to be capable, confident and competitively skilled to be an asset in my profession and community," she said. "I took that Women in Engineering experience from several years ago and have made the most of it. And you, the donors, have planted a seed in me and one day I pledge to plant it in someone else's garden of knowledge."

That's inspiring — and motivating. From my heart, I thank all who #MakeADifference.