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## Paying It Forward

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# Paying It Forward : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Tuesday September 3, 2019

## Paying It Forward

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By Eric F. Spina

If there's an art in "paying it forward," Bill and Margie Klesse have perfected it.

When Margie's father died after her first year at the University of Dayton, Brother John Lucier, S.M., chair of the chemistry department, reached out to her, making sure she had a campus job to help pay tuition.

Later, when Bill, whom she describes as "the best friend in my whole life," needed tuition money to finish his senior year in chemical engineering, Margie turned around and helped him — then married him a week after graduation in her Pittsburgh hometown.

Today, the San Antonio couple is giving back to a place that brought them together and made such a difference in their lives — as a way to help more young people enter STEM fields.

Their generous \$5 million commitment will help us attract talented, intellectually curious students, no matter their ZIP code or family's income level, to fields of study that will make America more innovative and competitive. It's a forward-thinking gift, one that supports our vision of creating more robust scholarship programs and deeper hands-on learning experiences.

Thanks to their support, we are creating the Margie and Bill Klesse Scholars Program and Margie and Bill Klesse Undergraduate Summer Research Fellowships. Both programs give preference to students majoring in chemistry and chemical engineering, the degrees received by Margie and Bill, respectively, in 1968. It's their second major gift to their alma mater. In 2017, we dedicated the Margie and Bill Klesse Soccer Complex, a magnificent practice facility for men and women's soccer that they funded.

"I was well prepared when I left Dayton — and I would say I did ok," says Bill, who arrived on campus 55 years ago from New Jersey in a station wagon filled with his seven siblings and parents. A self-described "average" student, he learned discipline, teamwork, and leadership on UD's soccer field, where he started every game, co-captained the squad, and earned MVP honors twice. Margie was a Flyerette — and one of the few women majoring in the sciences at that time.

For nearly 46 years, Bill was employed by Valero Energy Corp. and its predecessor companies, rising to chairman of the board and chief executive officer before retiring five years ago. Margie, secretary and director of the Klesse Family Foundation, spearheads community and philanthropic causes. They're the proud parents of three daughters, all doctors — another mirror into why they are such advocates for STEM fields.

In my close interactions with Bill and Margie over the past three years, I've been impressed by their selflessness, remarkable sense of service — and belief in the importance and power of education. Both are highly accomplished, family-oriented, and passionate about their country, their community, and their faith. The University of Dayton is blessed to be a place where they see value and want to make a difference.

"We want to be part of Dayton going forward, and we want to help young people," says Bill, who recently joined UD's board of trustees.

Adds Margie: "To see people contribute to something close to their hearts might give impetus to someone else. If you can spur just one other gift, you've already done more than your gift."

That's paying it forward, the Klesse way.