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A Debt of Gratitude

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A Debt of Gratitude

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Wednesday August 31, 2022

By Eric F. Spina

Rick Omlor '79, retired president and CEO of YSI Inc., lives three doors down from University of Dayton students, a vantage point that gives him a bird's eye view of student life. He likes to chat with students hanging out on their front porches on a beautiful sunny day. Little do they know that they are talking to the chair of the University of Dayton's board of trustees.

To say that our new board chair keenly understands UD and its Marianist culture is an understatement. His passion for his alma mater is undeniable, and his roots run deep.

How deep? "Brother Paul's Café," a popular student dining facility tucked in the arcade that used to run between Chaminade and St. Mary halls, was named after his great uncle, a Marianist. His father and two siblings were the first in the family to graduate from UD, and Rick and his brother followed in their footsteps. Besides chairing UD's board, where he's served as a trustee since 2011, he presides over the board of directors of OnMain, a collaborative venture between UD and Premier Health for transforming the former Montgomery County Fairgrounds into a walkable, welcoming urban neighborhood.

Rick is quiet, humble, and thoughtful, but he supports grand ideas. When he worked at the helm of YSI, he lived by cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead's motto: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world."

As longtime chair of the facilities committee of the board of trustees, he led a thoughtful and long-term analysis of the project before encouraging the administration to pursue the largest construction project in its history — a \$76 million transformation of the University of Dayton Arena, funded about half through private support, including a significant donation from Rick and his wife, Liz. The two are often spotted at men's and women's basketball games. Today, he's helping the University boldly transform for the times.

"We're very blessed to have Rick as board chair," Provost Paul Benson told colleagues at the annual President's Council retreat at Maria Stein earlier this month. "It's never about him. It's about the value of the work to be done."

I appreciated that Rick carved out time to join administrators for part of our two-day retreat, which included an assessment of where UD is positioned in higher education and some blue-sky thinking about what UD's future could be if we elevate our distinctiveness and keep our eye squarely on strengthening our mission and identity.

"The mission is very important to me," Rick told us. "Every time we do something, I ask myself, 'Does this meet Catholic, Marianist values?'"

Rick told us that he initially struggled as a student before finding his spot on the dean's list, thanks to caring faculty like Robert Mott and Bob Wolff. "I want to repay the University," he said quietly. "A lot of my professional and personal success I attribute to UD."

We're the ones who owe a debt of gratitude.