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Eric F. Spina
University of Dayton, efspina@udayton.edu

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It's About People : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Tuesday May 2, 2023

It's About People

By Eric F. Spina

It's about people.

When trustees, alumni and friends ask me to describe the vision behind our ambitious and historic We Soar campaign, it comes down to those three words: It's about people.

Nothing illustrates this campaign more, though, than the stories about people that inspire donors to invest. The stories that give wings to our students' dreams. The stories that are propelling our beloved UD to greater heights. Consider:

SCHOLARSHIPS. We want to create access for promising students no matter their background or family circumstances. The Flyer Promise Scholarship program is close to my heart — and an exemplar on our campus and in higher education nationally. Largely first-generation students from humble means (think \$32,000 annual family income) who were at risk of not attending college are graduating from UD at an eye-popping 95% rate in four

years, an achievement that only elite universities attain. Our Flyer Promise graduates, after making their mark on campus, have embarked on rewarding careers or graduate study, including law school and medical school.

When donors help us remove the financial barriers for talented students from every ZIP code to receive a Catholic, Marianist education, *they enable our students to soar.*

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING. What do you do if you're the mother of a profoundly disabled child who loves going on bike rides with his family but can no longer enjoy this simple family activity now that he's an adult in a wheelchair? There's no off-the-shelf solution, so engineering professor Kim Bigelow led diverse teams of students over three semesters during the pandemic to find one. When they delivered an adaptive bike with a trailer attachment to the family, the mother cried. This is engineering that matters.

As UD moves into the future, we want to guarantee that every student, no matter their major, will experience a deeply meaningful experiential learning opportunity before they graduate. When donors fund hands-on projects that go beyond the textbook, *they enable our students to soar.*

FACULTY AND STAFF EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION. Students who learn from world-class mentors are prepared to make an immediate difference in the world. In the fall, Tom Albrecht '76 and Ellen Albrecht committed to creating a new endowed chair, the Albrecht Chair in Capitalism and the Common Good, in the School of Business Administration. Tom, a trustee who chairs the academic affairs committee of the board of trustees, understands the value of a business curriculum rooted both in free market capitalism and Catholic social teaching.

When donors fund faculty and staff initiatives that inspire critical thinking and creativity in service to humanity, *they enable our students to soar.*

As we enter the public phase of the We Soar campaign, I'm confident that our alumni and friends will rise to the challenge and help us soar past our \$400 million goal. This is a university with a higher purpose and a strong identity and mission. This campaign is about becoming the best UD we can be for the students we educate.

It's about people.

(This piece originally appeared in the spring 2023 issue of the University of Dayton Magazine.)