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An Outpouring of Love

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The University of Dayton set what some thought to be a crazy goal — 2,800 gifts in 28 days.

In the final days of February, alumni, students, faculty and staff stepped up with nearly 1,000 gifts to put the monthlong "I Love UD" engagement campaign over the top by 216. Donors supported their passions — from scholarships and study-abroad opportunities to new books in the library.

In all, the University received more than $1.7 million in February. The 3,016 gifts marked a record for the month. Last year, the University received 1,679 gifts in February, but the five-year average is 1,320.

This outpouring of last-minute support for the "I Love UD" campaign didn't surprise Chad Warren '05, executive director of University outreach and engagement, and a team of advancement and University marketing and communication professionals who conceived and carried out the strategy, primarily through social media.

Warren is used to thinking big. In his first semester as a caller in UD's Telefund in 2001, he secured more than $50,000 in commitment from alumni. And last year, as director of annual giving for the Florida State University Foundation, he spearheaded "The Great Give," a 36-hour online campaign that exceeded the University's $161,000 goal by 17 percent. He knew the 2,800-gift goal — though more than twice the number of gifts the University typically receives in February — was a stretch but doable.

"Everyone thought we were nuts, but we knew we could do it," he said. "More than anything else, 'I Love UD' month was about engagement and service. We reached 1.1 million people alone through Facebook and nearly 37,000 on YouTube. These results could not have been achieved without a strong and passionate staff."

Each week in February, the University used Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to ask alumni and the campus community to show their love for UD in various ways. The campaign kicked off with an interactive "Porch Sheet Challenge" contest — a nod to the creative porch sheets students hang at their houses in the student neighborhoods to welcome their parents or make such pronouncements as, "Holy Sheet! Where Did the Last Four Years Go?"

During "I Love UD Athletics Week," hundreds of students tested their knowledge of Flyer lore in a Facebook contest and "broke up" with their T-shirts from other schools. On Valentine's Day, students traded in approximately 200 shirts from places like Xavier and St. Louis for free "I Love UD" shirts. A student group called Students Today, Alumni Tomorrow donated these shirts from other schools to the St. Vincent de Paul homeless shelter. A 1995 alumnus who wished to remain anonymous offered to match $10 text-to-give gifts for scholarships, up to $5,000. That effort brought in 138 gifts.

During week three, the University encouraged random acts of kindness, asking participants to download a "Be UD Kind" card or sign a Martin Luther King Jr. Community Service Pledge that was part of Black History Month activities on campus.

Credit Frank Geraci '73 '77, a federal judge in Rochester, N.Y., and former president of the National Alumni Association, for the popular random acts of kindness portion of "I Love UD" month.

"Imagine 100,000 acts of kindness passed on to 100,000 others and continuing forward," said Geraci, who did his part in February by sweeping the snow off co-workers' cars and pushing other drivers out of snowdrifts during a stretch of bad winter weather. He left behind a "Be UD Kind" calling card.

During the final week, those whose lives have been touched and changed by the University shared their stories via email or video. Scores of alumni reached out through Facebook to thank professors who made a difference in their lives. Alumni chapters throughout the nation used social media to share a heart gauge monitoring progress toward the 2,800 gifts.

"2,446. 354 to go. Time to show your love," UD officials asked more than 24,000 followers on Facebook at 5 p.m. on Feb. 28.

With eight minutes left in the month, the team declared victory.
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