Selfless Example
Danny Srisawasdi’s mother inspires him by her selfless example.

Before immigrating to America, she picked rice in Thailand’s paddy fields. Today, she works 12-hour days as a seamstress in Chicago. Her education didn’t go beyond eighth grade, yet she raised two children on her own.

"I come from a broken home, but that home is filled with love. My mother provided a healthy environment for her kids to be successful and happy," he said during a break from his chemical engineering classes. "My mom came from nothing and created so much success. I don't want to disappoint her."

Thanks to the selflessness of another Chicago family — Cathy and Tim Babington — that's not going to happen. Srisawasdi is on track to graduate this spring, due, in part, to their financial help. They've endowed a scholarship fund in honor of Cathy's parents, George and Kathleen Valenta, who made sure all eight of their children received what they valued the most — a Catholic education.

"My education was phenomenal," she said. "I had such a fine education at the University of Dayton, and not just from the standpoint of academics. I grew as an individual and made lifelong friends. We're giving back because we want to share that experience with other people. This is a great institution and getting better everyday."

Babington '74, who serves on the board of trustees, earned a degree in dietetics and worked as a dietician before parlaying her knowledge and community-building skills into a career at Abbott Laboratories, a global healthcare company. She retired last year as vice president of public affairs for Abbott and president of the Abbott Fund, which invests millions of dollars to fight HIV/AIDS and expand health care in the developing world.

In separate conversations with Srisawasdi and Babington, they repeat strikingly similar stories about what motivates them — and why they love the University of Dayton.

Srisawasdi says he switched his degree from business to engineering because of "a passion for the sciences and to simply help people and humanity." The Babington family's scholarship benefits underrepresented students majoring in STEM or engineering fields.

"I would like to eventually start an engineering company that makes a difference," said Srisawasdi, who's part of a service fraternity, Alpha Phi Omega, volunteers as a tutor at the Dakota Club and serves in the Ohio National Guard.

Babington traveled to Africa, India and China in Abbott's effort to expand business in international markets while improving the health of people in impoverished villages. "It's disturbing when you see people who need health care and clean water and can't get it. There was a commitment at Abbott to making a difference. Our engineers often built wells and clinics. That became part of a broader health care initiative in these countries," she said.

Both say the University of Dayton will always be a part of their lives. "I didn't know anyone when I came to UD," Babington said, "but many I met here have remained good friends. Two of my lifelong friends, John '74 and Cindy Klee '74 Sullivan introduced me to my husband, Tim, a Marquette graduate. By association, he's developed a strong commitment and support for the University."

Srisawasdi concurred: "You essentially create a family here. I made a select group of friends who will be my best friends forever."

One day, Srisawasdi hopes to be in a financial position to help others, too — as gratitude for the scholarship he received and in honor of his mother. "Until I've paid off all my college loans and donate 75 percent of what I earn to charity, I'll never feel I've done as much as my mother," he said quietly.

"I've always been about giving back more."
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