

Tom Hartness made enduring contributions to Furman, Greenville

Entrepreneur. Inventor. Philanthropist.
Civic leader. Friend to Furman.

Tom Hartness was all of these, and more.

When he died December 3 at the age of 90, he left a legacy of accomplishment and dedication that touched many in the Greenville community and beyond.

As Max Heller, former mayor of Greenville and an emeritus trustee at Furman, told *The Greenville News*, "He was a brilliant man with a heart of gold and the mind of a giant. He was wonderful to be around and a wonderful person for Greenville."

A native of Shelby, N.C., Hartness moved to Greenville in 1940, graduated from the Aviation Ground School at Furman in 1941, and worked with the Red Cross during World War II. He went on to own the Pepsi-Cola bottling plant in Greenville for 43 years, during which time he made Pepsi a sales leader in the region.

As founder and chair of the board of Hartness International, a company that manufactures packaging equipment, he used his intelligence and perseverance to propel the business to a position of global leadership in the packaging industry. He held many patents on packaging machinery and other inventions, and today Hartness International does business in more than 100 countries.

Bern McPheely, the company's chief executive officer, told the *News* that Hartness "was an innovator beyond imagination. He could fix anything, and he knew how to make an operation run better."

Hartness served for many years on the Furman board of trustees, including several terms as chair. In the early 1980s he headed

the Campaign for Furman's Future, and he and his late wife, Edna Gladden Hartness, were generous supporters of the university's cultural, academic and athletic programs. Furman awarded him an honorary Doctor of Laws degree in 1972.

Both the pavilion at Daniel Dining Hall and the Welcome Center beside the Furman administration building are named in honor of Tom and Edna Hartness. They also donated funds to support several student musical groups, and their gift provided for the construction of the

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2,930-pipe organ in Daniel Chapel, which they gave in honor of their son and daughter-in-law, Bobby and Becky Hartness.

In addition to his extensive work for Furman, Hartness served on the Advisory Council at Converse College in Spartanburg and was a former trustee of the South Carolina Foundation of Independent Colleges and of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He was a past president and director of the Greenville Lions Club, a former director of the Greenville Chamber of Commerce, a member of the Entrepreneurs Forum at Greenville Tech, and a former director of American Federal bank. He was active in First Baptist Church of Greenville, where he chaired the diaconate.

At Hartness' funeral, Baxter Wynn, associate minister at First Baptist and a Furman trustee, captured the businessman's kind nature and generous spirit through a story about taking a Furman student to meet Hartness.

The young woman wanted to thank Hartness for supporting the musical quartet in which she had played during her Furman years, but she was a bit intimidated by the prospect of meeting her benefactor. Wynn described how Hartness quickly put her at ease — and wound up taking her on a tour of the company plant, complete with protective glasses.

"Tom blessed her with his wise and understanding heart," Wynn said. "He blessed her with his time and attention, and with words of encouragement and affirmation. He blessed her simply by being himself, and by showing her that her life mattered to him. That's pretty much the way he treated just about everybody fortunate enough to meet him."

Furman president David Shi echoed Wynn's comments, describing Hartness as "a man of grace and charm. He was remarkably sensitive and attentive to others. He loved to laugh, his smile was infectious, and he won the love and respect of all who knew him."

Wynn also quoted Gordon Herring '65, a Greenville businessman who served with Hartness on the Furman board. "Even though he was soft-spoken, you always listened when he spoke because you knew that you would hear the truth," Herring said. "Tom's love for Furman played a large part in my wanting to reconnect with the university. When I saw how dedicated Tom was to an institution which he did not attend, I knew that Furman was worth preserving. His love for Furman was unwavering."