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A gift to give back and encourage others

Jarl and Beth McConnell Bliss ('84) say they have always heard such good things about JMU. A good friend of Jarl's once told him, "I have never run into anyone associated with that school who didn't have something good to say about it." But it was something they considered not so good that prompted them to give \$105,000 to their alma mater.

Attending an alumni event near their home in Oakton, Va., Jarl and Beth say they were "shocked" to find out that only a small percent of JMU alumni give back financially to their school.

When they heard President Linwood H. Rose speak about the vision for JMU's next century and the financial commitment required, they felt personally inspired to start rectifying that.

Up until that moment, the Bliss family says they had only heard about the accomplishments of JMU. When they realized JMU needs support to develop and to remain competitive, they were prompted to take action and asked where they could contribute.

Their gift to JMU establishes the R. Jarl Bliss Endowment for Faculty Fellowships in the College of Business and the Elizabeth McConnell Bliss Endowment for Undergraduate Research in the College of Science and Mathematics.

"For me, [my JMU degree] was absolutely a springboard for my career," says Jarl, an accounting major who is vice president and partner at Lincoln Property Co. Says Beth, a biology major who worked for Upjohn for 12 years before working full-time at home with the couple's three daughters, "The biology program was a strong foundation for the medical knowledge I needed to be successful."

With a junior in high school, the Bliss family has begun to visit colleges and feels strongly that they want to help JMU to be a first choice for prospective students. In looking at schools, Beth has already been impressed by the high rate of freshmen who return to JMU for their sophomore year. Beth feels that bolstering JMU's undergraduate research helps to make the school more competitive in the sciences.

"We felt that being able to contribute as alumni helps to improve Madison's reputation," Beth says.

"If anything more comes out of this [gift], we'd like it to encourage others to do a similar thing," Jarl says.

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