

# WHAT IS BECA?

## *Alumni Giving Program Benefits Adventist Schools*

BY RICK MOYERS

**Y**ou're enjoying a quiet evening at home for a change when your phone rings. It's a representative of your college, or maybe your academy, or even some other Seventh-day Adventist school with which you have a connection. They're asking you to give money.

If you're like many Seventh-day Adventists, especially those who've spent years working at educational institutions, you've probably noticed a dramatic increase in the number and frequency of phone calls and letters from schools seeking your financial support.

How do you respond to each phone call or letter? In North America, nearly a quarter of all Adventist college and university alumni and a steadily increasing number of academy alumni reach for their checkbooks.

This past year, alumni gave more than \$2.6 million in unrestricted gifts (not designated for a specific project or purpose) and worthy-student funds in North American Adventist colleges. Total voluntary support, which includes capital gifts, bequests, and gifts from corporations, philanthropic foundations, alumni, and other individuals exceeded \$23 million in the 1989-1990 school year—more than \$1,300 for every student enrolled in an Adventist college or university.

The \$2.6 million in unrestricted gifts helps Adventist colleges maintain the high quality of their academic programs. Students and teachers benefit most from the gifts, which are generally used for operating expenses, including equipment purchases, student scholarships, campus renovations, and faculty development.

Adventist colleges and universities typically depend on tuition revenue and church subsidies for a larger percentage of their income than similar private institutions. Alumni support, along with gifts from corporations and foundations, helps ensure that schools don't have to pass along the entire cost of education to students. Support from outside sources also makes schools more stable in times of fluctuating enrollment, and less dependent on church subsidies.

\$2.6 million in unrestricted alumni gifts is a far cry from the \$413,000 the schools had raised 10 years ago. This participation far outstrips the average rate of giving to education in the United States. In 1989-1990, six of the NAD colleges could boast of alumni participation rates exceeding 25 percent, and some as high as 42 percent. The national average for private liberal-arts colleges is

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about 35 percent.<sup>1</sup>

The percentage of alumni giving to Adventist colleges is even more impressive when one considers that a decade ago, according to statistics compiled by Philanthropic Service for Institutions (PSI) at the General Conference, fewer than six percent of Adventist college alumni supported their alma maters, compared to a national average of 22 percent.

### **BECA Challenge Grants Inspire Giving**

This dramatic growth in the number of alumni supporting Adventist educational institutions was inspired in part by the BECA (Business Executives Challenge to Alumni) program, a cycle of challenge grants initiated by private Adventist donors and supported by the church.<sup>2</sup>

Conceived in 1979 and implemented in the 1980-1981 school year, BECA was modeled after a challenge grant extended to Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama, by the Bush Foundation of St. Paul, Minnesota. Oakwood's grant was part of a \$3.9 million challenge-grant program to increase regular alumni giving to 28 historically black colleges in the United States. The Bush Foundation had tried and refined similar programs for private colleges in Minnesota and the Dakotas before extending the challenge to members of the United Negro College fund in the late 1970s.

Milton Murray, director of Philanthropic Service for Institutions at the General Conference, was a consultant for Oakwood at the time it was invited to participate in the Bush challenge. He was intrigued by the challenge concept. After taking the idea to key donors and church leaders, Murray received enthusiastic support, and was commissioned to launch BECA.

### **Building Alumni Support**

Beginning in the 1980-1981 school year, BECA encouraged Adventist colleges and universities in North America to seek steadily increasing levels of alumni support. The program set out to increase unrestricted giving to the annual fund—not one-time gifts to building campaigns or multimillion dollar endowments. Instead, it focused on the year-by-year solicitation of general funds that help fill the gap between a school's income and its expenses.

“Once alumni begin supporting a

school systematically," says Murray, "their vision can be expanded to help meet specific capital needs as they come up. Any approach that works from the opposite direction is short-sighted. The BECA program was designed to build loyalty and commitment for the long haul."

Committed volunteers are crucial to the success of the annual fund raising at all 13 colleges in North America. John McKellip, a businessman from Minneapolis and one of the original donors to the BECA program, encouraged the schools to focus on developing a network of "class agents." These volunteer representatives for each graduating class or group of classes communicate regularly with their classmates.

"During World War II I attended the Navy flight training school in Corpus Christi, Texas," says McKellip.

"My roommate in the officers' quarters was a young man right out of Yale. It seemed that for weeks at a time he would be in our room at night writing a lot of letters, all by hand. I asked him what it was all about.

"He said he was a representative for his Yale graduating class, attempting to stay in touch with a portion of his classmates, maintain a sense of community among them, and encourage them to contribute to the annual fund . . . This impressed me enough that 35 years later, when Milton told me about BECA, I recounted this experience."<sup>3</sup>

The class agent system has been emphasized by the BECA program since 1985. Colleges report that more than 70 percent of the estimated 70,000 graduates of Adventist colleges in North America are represented by a class agent. McKellip's gift to BECA provided grant money to help colleges buy the computer equipment and software to keep track of alumni and provide support for class agents.

#### **BECA Overseas**

Since the early 1980s, colleges and universities outside the North American Division have participated in BECA International, a challenge grant program supported by Tom and Violet Zapara. Logistics and world economic conditions present significant challenges for a worldwide program. However, between 1982 and 1990 BECA International awarded a total of \$85,874 to 11 colleges

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for raising \$183,970 from alumni and friends.

Among the schools that have participated in BECA International are Bogenhofen Seminary, Colombia Adventist University, Southeast Asia Union College, Antillian Adventist College, River Plate College, Newbold College, and Helderberg College.

#### **Long-term Benefits**

The benefits of increased alumni support

extend beyond the dollars contributed. In a 1981 *Journal of Adventist Education* article, Milton Murray outlined one of the most important contributions that donors and church leaders hoped BECA would make to the Adventist college system. Strong alumni giving impresses corporate and foundation donors. In fact, many foundations ask for alumni-giving statistics as part of the grant application process.

Corporate gifts to Adventist colleges have increased from \$857,000 in 1981-1982 to more than \$4 million in 1989-1990. Gifts from foundations have remained relatively static over the past decade. However, according to the Council for Aid to Education, this is consistent with national trends.<sup>4</sup>

BECA has helped to convince alumni of Adventist colleges that they have a stake in their alma maters. In 1981, Murray wrote,

*Although tuition may have paid up to 60 to 70 percent of the alumnus' costs of getting a college education, the balance had to come from founders, friends, foundations, corporations, or from the church. Although few alumni may realize it, their professional future is in great measure linked with the future growth, stability, and standing of their alma mater . . . A*

person who identifies with a college that no longer exists is forced to admit that the school failed in some way to keep up with the times. An involved alumnus helps build the college.<sup>5</sup>

Over the past decade, alumni directors at Adventist colleges have learned that many alumni who are no longer church members appreciate receiving information and attending alumni activities. Thanks to BECA, colleges have had an incentive to build relationships with all their alumni, not just those who remain active in the church.

"Alumni who are no longer Seventh-day Adventists still have a connection to the college, and we want to keep that connection open," says Esther Burrow, alumni director at Columbia Union College, in Takoma Park, Maryland, for the past 13 years. "One of my most faithful volunteers is no longer a church member, but he's still making an important contribution to the college."

The education and involvement of alumni in tapping philanthropic resources for Adventist colleges and universities is an ongoing process. Thousands of teachers and students in the Adventist educational system stand to benefit, and the future of Adventist education may depend on it. That's something to think about next time you get a phone call or letter from campus. ☺

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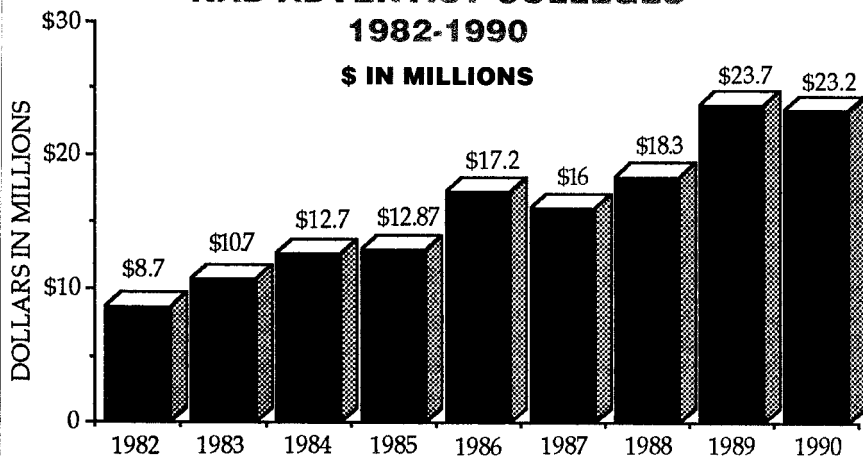
#### REFERENCES

1. Giving statistics for more than 1,000 colleges and universities and 500 independent schools are outlined in *Voluntary Support of Education 1989-90*, a publication of the Council for Aid to Education, New York.
2. For the purposes of BECA, alumni are defined as graduates, attendees, and honorary alumni.
3. This excerpt from an interview with John McKellip is from the manuscript of a forthcoming biography of Milton Murray, written by Ronald Knott and to be published by Jossey-Bass Publishing in San Francisco, California.
4. National trends in philanthropic giving are summarized in *Giving USA*, an annual report on philanthropy published by the AAFRC Trust for Philanthropy, New York.
5. Quotes from Milton Murray are from "Fund Established to Improve Alumni Support of Adventist Higher Education," by Milton Murray, *Journal of Adventist Education*, 43:4 (April-May, 1981), p. 12.

## TOTAL VOLUNTARY SUPPORT FOR NAD ADVENTIST COLLEGES

1982-1990

\$ IN MILLIONS



### Philanthropy and Your School

If you work at a large institution that already has a development program in place, why not volunteer your services as a phonathon caller, envelope stuffer, researcher, or writer? If your school is just getting started, several national organizations can provide invaluable information on developing your school's philanthropic resources.

#### Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE)

11 Dupont Circle, Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 328-5924

CASE is a professional educational association for college, university, and secondary school development, alumni, public relations, and publications officers. It publishes a monthly magazine, *Currents*, for member institutions, and sponsors workshops throughout the country.

#### The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS)

1133 15th St. NW, Suite 1200  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 265-3500

An association of nearly 1,000 independent schools, NAIS can provide research reports, periodicals, and manuals; and leadership and professional development for teachers, administrators, and school trustees.

#### Philanthropic Service for Institutions (PSI)

General Conference of Seventh-day  
Adventists

12501 Old Columbia Pike  
Silver Spring, MD 20904  
(301) 680-6131

Since 1973, PSI has helped hospitals and educational institutions attract philanthropic support. Through direct consulting, a resource center, an information service, and incentive programs, PSI helps Adventist schools and hospitals develop philanthropic resources.

#### The Foundation Center

79 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10003  
(800) 424-9836

A national service organization founded and supported by foundations, the Foundation Center helps grant-seekers select foundations that are likely to be interested in their projects. All of the more than 30,000 active U.S. foundations are included in one or more of the Foundation Center's publications, which include directories that describe foundations, and grant indexes that list and classify recent foundation awards.

START-UP, a training manual and seminar, has been developed through Project Affirmation. The seminar is designed to help academies and elementary schools build solid development programs. If you'd like to schedule a START-UP seminar in your area, contact your union education director.

# Academy Alumni Meet the Challenge

In 1986, the AAA Challenge, a system of challenge grants similar to BECA, was implemented for Adventist academies in the North American Division. Eighteen academies began a four-year cycle of challenge grants in 1986-1987. New schools have been added to the program each year since then.

During the 1989-1990 school year, 43 academies participated in the program and the 18 original schools completed their four-year cycle. By the end of their fourth year, collective alumni giving to the 18 original schools had risen from \$238,566 to \$452,631, and the percentage of alumni participation had risen from 14 percent to 25 percent.

Each academy participating in the AAA Challenge is given a dollar goal that must be raised from a minimum number of donors. The goals are based on the school's total number of alumni, the amount of money raised the previous year, and the percentage of alumni participating. Only gifts ranging from \$10 to \$1,000 may be counted toward the challenge goal, although larger gifts certainly help the schools.

"The idea behind the AAA Challenge," says LuAnn Wolfe, associate director of Philanthropic Service for Institutions, "is to encourage academies to build a broad base of support from a large number of donors. Because the gifts must be given as unrestricted funds, each academy is able to use the money in the areas of greatest need."

This annual campaign for unspecified gifts from alumni is known at most schools as the "annual fund." According to Wolfe, the annual fund concept has been used at colleges and schools in the United States for more than 50 years, and is the financial mainstay of many private secondary schools. "The donors who set up AAA want to help Adventist academies broaden and diversify their base of financial support," says Wolfe. "Once these schools have strong annual funds, they'll be much more likely to attract other types of philanthropic support. Also, larger gifts eventually result from this annual pattern of giving."

If the goals of the AAA are realized, academies will become less dependent on tuition and church subsidies. The structured system of goals and grants also provides an incentive schools to develop accurate mailing lists. Right now, the money helps stretch tight academy budgets and meet students' needs.

Blue Mountain Academy in Hamburg, Pennsylvania, has learned that regular communication with alumni can pay off in many ways. This past February, BMA planned a career day when more than 30 alumni shared their career expertise with students. "If it hadn't been for our accurate alumni records, we would never have had the information we needed for the career day," says Marion Streidl, BMA's annual fund coordinator. Streidl says that some BMA alumni are interested in starting chapters in other parts of the country.

BMA raised about \$23,700 in unrestricted annual gifts last year and is now entering its fifth year of the AAA Challenge. Over the past four years, more than \$70,000 in alumni gifts and \$27,000 in AAA Challenge grants to BMA have helped repair the roofs on academy buildings, provide scholarships for worthy students, renovate the lobby of the administration building, and buy computers and a new telephone answering system for academy offices. Last year, constituents and alumni gave more than \$40,000 for a new computer lab in addition to unrestricted gifts for the AAA Challenge.

Dakota Adventist Academy in Bismarck, North Dakota, leads the schools participating in the AAA Challenge in average gift size and amount of money raised. Last year, DAA alumni gave more than \$131,665 in unrestricted gifts, with an average gift of \$165. Dakota also has an outstanding network of volunteer class agents. Twenty-six of DAA's graduating classes have passed the 50 percent participation mark. Forty-two percent of DAA alumni support the annual fund.

Last year, more than 18,000 alumni donors gave more than \$2.5 million to academies in North America. Those donors share the vision of the donors who established the AAA Challenge—that Adventist academies must not only survive but also thrive in the 21st century. ☛

**ALUMNI GIVING TO  
NAD ACADEMIES PARTICIPATING IN  
AAA CHALLENGE**

