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Philanthropic couple passes along the fortune of a good life

Jon and Gwyn Hartman have shown that one doesn't need a lot of money to make a big difference. When Jon retired from Oakland University at the end of December's term, he left behind an endowed Accounting and Finance Department Enrichment Fund.

The couple shies away from the word philanthropy, preferring to describe what they do as just giving back. "Life has been pretty good for me and my wife, and we just want to pay it back," said the retired Kmart finance executive and consultant.

It is clear how important making a difference is to Jon's life. When he started teaching the Introduction to Managerial Finance course in the fall of 1999, he wanted to be the sort of teacher who was always there to help, one who knew student's names and gave timely feedback.

When he saw an article that stated for every \$1 spent on education, \$1.25 was spent on corrections, he told his wife, "This is wrong, and we have to do something about it."

They decided to create a three-year, \$5,000 scholarship for the School of Business Administration that has the power to significantly help an accounting or finance student. Rather than focus on economic need, the scholarship is awarded based on scholarship, service to the university and service to the community.

The first scholarship was given last year to Ashley Eichoff, a young woman who had lost her mother to cancer. It allowed her to take more classes and graduate earlier. Recalling that first award, Jon's face brightens and his voice gets quieter. "Ashley was so thankful. That's what makes it all worthwhile. It's just the right thing to do."

As he prepared to segue fully into retirement, Jon began to look for ways to make a lasting difference to the accounting and finance department. He saw decreasing state support and an increased difficulty in finding qualified finance teachers. Jon and his wife decided to create an endowed fund that would support research, encourage creativity in recruiting faculty and provide enrichment for the department. "My hope was to create a fund that would help things grow and provide some guidance, without too many strings attached."

Jon and Gwyn have a long history of making a difference by giving to their alma maters (Albion and MSU), Leader Dogs School and the local library. Oakland is special, though, for Jon. "I always knew I was going to like teaching at OU, I just didn't know how much."

The difference for Jon was the ability to make a larger impact with their gift to a smaller school like Oakland.

In his quiet way, Jon concluded, "I'd like to challenge everyone to look at their good fortune, to pick an organization, and to give back."

SUMMARY

Former Oakland professor Jon Hartman and wife Gwyn chose to give back and make a big difference by creating an endowed Accounting and Finance Department Enrichment Fund.

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