



Clemson Legacy Connection

PLANNED GIVING NEWSLETTER

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Greetings, Tigers!

Across campus this spring, there was a familiar electricity in the air — the joyful swell of applause inside Littlejohn Coliseum, proud families leaning forward with tear-filled eyes, friends embracing between photographs, orange and purple stoles fluttering in the Carolina breeze. Nearly 5,000 new graduates crossed the stage to shake President Jones' hand, then stepped boldly into the next chapter as Clemson alumni.

In that singular moment — somewhere between celebration and

goodbye — many discovered something profound: Clemson never truly lets go of us.

Long after the diplomas are framed and the tassels tucked away, the vivid memories remain. Our friendships endure, and our values deepen. The sense of belonging follows us into every season of life. Clemson gives us roots — grounding us in purpose, community and tradition — while also giving us wings to pursue lives of meaning and impact.

For Travis '00 and Minde '99 Wheeler, of Summerville, South Carolina, that truth shaped their lives, along with generations of family members intertwined with Clemson.

Roots That Run Deep

For Travis, Clemson was woven into his life before he ever stepped foot on campus.

As a child, he spent countless weekends and holidays in Tigertown, surrounded by generations of family members and friends whose lives were deeply connected through the University. His paternal grandfather, Dr. Richard Wheeler, served as Head of Clemson's Department of Animal Science and devoted much of his professional career to educating students and advancing the University he loved.

"My grandfather grew up on a farm in Saluda during the Great Depression," Travis shared. "Even through difficult times, his parents believed in the value of education, and they encouraged all of their children to pursue it. Clemson meant everything to him, and that love

became part of our family's foundation."

That foundation stretched across both sides of the family tree. After serving in the Army during World War II, Travis's maternal grandfather opened a grocery store in Clemson on the site that would later become Sardi's Den.

"My grandparents and great-grandparents built their lives here," Travis reflected. "Some of my family members are buried in cemeteries that sit in the shadow of campus landmarks. Clemson has always been more than a place to me — it's home."

Like deep roots beneath a strong oak, Clemson's influence quietly shaped generations of the Wheeler family long before Travis ever realized how far those roots would reach.

Finding Home — and Each Other

For Minde, Clemson represented something entirely different.

As the daughter of an Air Force officer, she moved frequently throughout her childhood, never staying in one place long enough for it to feel like home. That changed when her family relocated to Shaw Air Force Base near Sumter, South Carolina, before her senior year of high school.

"I started looking at Clemson because I wanted to stay close to my family," Minde recalled. What she discovered would ultimately change the trajectory of her life.

During their sophomore year, Travis and Minde met on a Fellowship of Christian Athletes service trip in rural Kentucky. Amid cold rain, muddy boots and a church roof in desperate need of repair, their story began.

“It was freezing and raining, and somehow I ended up the only girl on the roof helping to repair the church,” Minde laughed.

“We spent the day hammering roof tiles together,” Travis added, smiling. “And I remember thinking, ‘This girl is pretty cool.’”

What started on that rooftop grew into a lifelong partnership rooted in shared faith, values and family — all strengthened by the Clemson Experience surrounding them.

“I hit the in-law jackpot,” Minde shared. “Their love for Clemson and for one another is so deeply interwoven and connected. My family moved so often growing up that I never really had a hometown. Clemson became that home for me.”

And in many ways, Clemson gave Minde something every person longs for: roots of her own.

Giving the Next Generation Wings

After graduation, Travis joined the Air Force and was stationed in Texas while Minde pursued her master’s degree in teaching. In 2002, the couple married at the Owen Pavilion, located on the shores of Lake Hartwell at Clemson’s Clyde V. Madren Conference Center and Inn complex — a magical beginning for the next chapter of a story already

intertwined with deep roots and a connection to the University.

Eventually, the Wheelers settled in Charleston, where Travis built a career as a pilot for Delta Airlines while continuing to serve in the Air Force Reserve for 23 years. Minde became a high school science teacher, helping guide and encourage students during some of the most formative years of their lives.



Today, their Clemson journey continues through a fourth generation. This fall, their oldest daughter, Caroline, will begin her Clemson Experience as a first-year student, majoring in communications.

“Our girls grew up coming to Clemson the same way I did,” Travis said. “We gather in my grandparents’ home to share those traditions, which remain incredibly meaningful to all of us.”

Travis laughs, remembering how differently his daughters have embraced certain traditions. “They know Esso as a restaurant,” he joked, “but I’ve told them stories about my father stopping there for gas while jars of pickled eggs sat on the counter.”

For Minde, watching another generation step onto campus feels deeply emotional.



"It's amazing to see the fourth generation beginning their Clemson Experience," she said. "Our nephew will also be a first-year student alongside our daughter. They have strong Clemson roots, and now it's our responsibility as parents to give them wings."

That balance — grounding future generations while empowering them to soar — beautifully captures what Clemson has meant to the Wheeler family for decades.

A Legacy That Lifts Others

The Wheelers' connection to Clemson extends beyond memories and traditions. Inspired by the profound impact Clemson has had on their family, they chose to support the University through a planned gift — ensuring future students can discover the same sense of purpose, belonging and opportunity that transformed their lives.

"Clemson offers something truly special," Minde shared. "Students receive an outstanding education, and they become part of a vast community that genuinely cares about them."

As a teacher, Minde witnesses every day how meaningful connections can shape a student's future. "When students feel invested in their school community, they thrive," she explained. "That sense of belonging can shape the entire trajectory of their future."

For Travis, giving back feels deeply personal. "We know firsthand the power of the Clemson Family," he added. "We want to help ensure that legacy continues long after we're gone."

And perhaps that is the true definition of legacy.

It is never measured in buildings, scholarships or gifts. It is a strong bond that connects people to a shared experience and purpose — traditions lovingly passed down to the next generation, making provisions to provide opportunities for others to enjoy. It is the quiet, powerful decision to plant seeds today, whose fruits we may never enjoy.

The Wheelers understand that a true legacy is providing roots that become wings.

Your Clemson Legacy Begins Today

Like the Wheelers, we have the unique opportunity to shape Clemson for future generations.

Long after we are gone, what will remain are the lives we have touched, the opportunities we have created, and the futures we helped set in motion.

Somewhere in the years ahead, a student will arrive on Clemson's campus uncertain of where they belong. They will walk beneath the oaks, sit in classrooms that challenge them, form friendships that sustain them and discover gifts within themselves they never knew existed. They will become part of something larger than themselves — the Clemson Family.

And perhaps they will never know your name. However, thanks to your thoughtful generosity, they will have their chance to learn, lead, and dream bigger than they thought possible. That is the extraordinary gift of leaving a legacy.

Like roots planted deeply in Clemson soil, your impact can continue growing for generations — steady, unseen and life-giving. And like wings lifted by purpose and possibility, your gift can help new students rise toward futures they once only imagined.

The Wheelers understand this truth well: Clemson is not simply a place we pass through. It is a place we establish roots and then carry forward.

And we each have the unique and personal opportunity to do the same.

We invite you to explore how a current or planned gift can become part of your own Clemson story — one that will endure far beyond a lifetime and continue shaping students, families and futures for generations.

To learn more about creating your Clemson legacy, please visit our

[website](#). I also encourage you to download our complimentary [Estate Planning Guide](#). Please reach out to me directly at jovanna@clemson.edu or call 864-656-0663. I always enjoy hearing from you! And our Gift Planning team would be honored to help you explore opportunities that reflect your values, your passions and the impact you wish to leave behind – and push *Fiercely Forward*.

In August and December, more graduates will cross the stage. More families will erupt in applause. And more lives will be forever changed by Clemson and our generous supporters.

Thank YOU for the visible and unseen ways that you continue to support and enhance the Clemson Experience.

We are Ever Loyal and Forever Grateful,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "JoVanna". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'J' being particularly large and stylized.

JoVanna J. King
Senior Associate Vice President for Development
110 Daniel Drive

Clemson, SC 29631
864.656.0663 telephone
864.940.7983 mobile
jovanna@clemson.edu

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