



## Making Dreams a Reality

Greetings from Tigertown!

The “dog days of summer” are always filled with rich rewards, and if you have been near Clemson this week, you have witnessed our students returning with U-hauls, cars packed tightly with treasured belongings, enthusiastic reunions of old friends and eager introductions to new friends.

The Welcome Back Festival, hosted by the Clemson Alumni Association and the Student Alumni Council to support the SAC Scholarship Endowment Fund, is scheduled for Monday on College Avenue, and classes begin on Wednesday; this marks the time that 4,658 new freshmen will begin earning their stripes as they navigate through campus and the surrounding communities. It is electrifying to observe the energy and excitement as they prepare to launch one of the most important and defining chapters of their lives. They were selected from 60,182 applications, with the top five intended majors being general engineering, pre-business, biological sciences, computer science and nursing. There are 295 South Carolina high schools represented; 117 have enrolled as first-year student-athletes; 371 are enrolled in Honors College programs; 683 have self-identified as first-generation students, and 613 report having one or both parents who are Clemson graduates! Out-of-state enrollment leaders are North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, New York and New Jersey.



There is a freshness in the air every Fall. The energy engulfs you as you feel Clemson come alive, rejuvenating from a quiet summer siesta. After 35 seasons, it continues to wave over me like a majestic new sunrise! Seeing these new students reminds me of a beautiful story about of our most treasured

supporters. William M. Ballenger graduated from Clemson in 1923, and I am confident he never imagined the indelible impact he would have on Clemson University and so many generations of students who have followed in his footsteps. He and his wife, Florence, rarely returned to Clemson after he graduated; however, they made it their quest to name Clemson as a final beneficiary of a marital trust, an irrevocable trust that lets you transfer a deceased spouse's assets to the surviving spouse without incurring any taxes. Bill allowed Florence to alter the charitable designation, if desired. When Bill passed away and the value of the trust was \$300,000, Florence parlayed the amount into more than \$3.4



million. His desire to give back to the institution that meant so much to him led them to establish a bequest, which came to fruition in 1999, providing seed funding for the Clemson National Scholars Program in 2000. Little did they know that their act of unrestricted generosity would make it possible for Grant Wilkins '23 to graduate from his beloved alma mater exactly 100 years later. The establishment of the National Scholars Program has allowed Clemson to attract and retain some of the brightest minds in the country, including Wilkins, who became a distinguished Goldwater Scholar and the University's first Churchill Scholar.

The remarkable gift from the Ballengers was instrumental in the establishment of Clemson's National Scholars Program, which was a driving force for Wilkins to attend Clemson. Grant is a native of Kingsport, Tennessee; however, his connection with Clemson started at a Clemson Football game when he was six weeks old. His grandfather is Dr. Jerry Reel, previous University historian who served with distinction as the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies for decades. During Wilkins' senior

in high school, his heart was set on Clemson; however, the expense as an out-of-state student was something that may have kept him from attending his dream school. His life was forever changed when he received news that he was selected as a Clemson National Scholar.

A recent graduate, Wilkins was a double major in computer engineering and mathematical sciences. His outstanding academic achievements were recognized when he was selected as one of only 16 Churchill Scholars in 2023 from across the nation in the fields of science, math and engineering. The Churchill Scholarship funds one year of graduate study at the University of Cambridge.

Clemson's abundant opportunity for research played a pivotal role in Wilkins' journey to Cambridge. Wilkins highlighted Clemson's commitment to research through programs like Creative Inquiry, research grants and financial support. "The ability to attend



Cambridge with four years of research experience is pretty rare when you talk to people from other schools like Berkeley or John Hopkins," says Wilkins.

In addition, Wilkins praises the culture at Clemson. He enjoyed the easy accessibility of professors, whether it was dropping by during office hours or being invited to a dinner at a professor's home. It made it easy for him to seek guidance and mentorship. "Things like this are what makes Clemson special," said Wilkins. He also participated in faculty-directed study abroad trips to Paris and South Africa, where his relationships with cross-disciplinary members enhanced his college experience.

As a result of the Ballengers' vision more than 100 years ago and their commitment to actually move forward and make a provision for Clemson in their estate plan, Clemson continues to attract exceptional students like Wilkins, who left an impactful legacy at Clemson through his service and accomplishments. He was an active member of the Honors Student Advisory Board, vice president of Blue Key Honor Society and played a key role in Clemson Legacy Celebration programs and the Student Alumni Council, where he directed the Ring Ceremony. Most importantly, he formed lifelong friendships and created memories that he will always cherish.

Thanks to visionary investors like the Ballengers, students like Grant Wilkins are encouraged to reach for the stars, and Clemson served as a catalyst to make his dreams come true. It is one of the greatest gifts you can ever give — supporting future generations of students whom you will never meet. We encourage you to reflect on your life, how others have played an important role in shaping your success. I challenge you to think about the future and what role you will play 100 years from today — how many lives will you have touched? How many people will achieve their dreams because you made it possible for them to accomplish more than they ever imagined?

We would be honored to help you explore ways in which you can utilize your resources to maximize the impact for future generations of students. Please visit our [website](#), featuring useful online resources. We have detailed information regarding IRA Charitable Qualified Distribution (QCD) benefits and how the new tax laws allow you to transfer up to \$50,000 from these assets to create a charitable remainder trust or charitable gift annuity, to provide you with annual income and the residual go to Clemson, please look [here](#). For information about general estate planning, you can download our [free Wills Guide](#), designed

to help you navigate your thoughts and plans before you visit with your attorney and financial advisors. As always, I thoroughly enjoy hearing from you via email at [jovanna@clemson.edu](mailto:jovanna@clemson.edu)



Please make your plans to join us on campus this Fall and let the path of freshly painted orange Tiger Paws lead you home. Take a stroll through campus and see our newly completed Daniel Hall Renovation and Expansion. Continue your walk by the Watt Family Innovation Center and see the beautiful new landscape and enhanced green space around the building. There have been so much construction and campus

improvements added this year. We are on the move — elevating our great University to new heights and enhancing the Clemson Experience for everyone. It is our goal to help each student reach their full potential and ultimately leave prepared to add significant value to the marketplace and the communities in which they will live and serve. Cheers to all new and returning students. We are looking forward to a great new year!

Ever Loyal, and GO Tigers!

Gratefully Yours,

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