

Basics of Business: Alfred University trustee commits to supporting marketing and branding initiative

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Alfred University Trustee Eric Bershad '69 and Susan Bershad

Alfred University trustee Eric Bershad & '69 and his wife, Susan, have committed to investing \$500,000 toward branding and marketing, a critical initiative identified by the University&s strategic plan.

Eric and Susan together started Phillip Jeffries, a wallcovering company that grew from 10 items in a small, unheated warehouse to become the world&s largest manufacturer of natural, textured, and specialty wallcoverings with a selection of more than 2,000 items and almost two million yards in stock in their Fairfield, NJ, headquarters. Their wallcoverings, sold through “to the trade” showrooms located throughout the United States, Canada, and in London, grace the homes of Bill Gates and Elton John as well as the walls of the White House, Wynn hotels, and Four Seasons hotels throughout the world.

“Eric has shown real leadership as we have worked on our branding and marketing initiative,” said Zupan. “He has been involved since day one on the trustees& marketing and branding advisory committee, helping us choose consultants to redesign our website and improve our marketing activities, and providing counsel on building a centralized marketing function at our University.”

“My role as chairman of Phillip Jeffries fostered my interest in branding and marketing,” said Eric Bershad. “Even before I became a trustee, I was encouraging the University to do more with marketing itself. Alfred University is an amazing place, and I knew we needed to do more to reach the students who would benefit the most from an Alfred University education.”

“When President Zupan approached me about working with the trustees& advisory committee on marketing and branding, and then to support the initiative, Susan and I were happy to step forward,” Bershad said.

Zupan pointed out that the Bershads are generous in other ways as well. Each year for the past five years, they have hosted one of Alfred University&s largest alumni events at the Broken Sound Country Club in Boca Raton, FL. Eric is

the president of the Broken Sound Club, a five-star residential country club that is ranked 62nd among more than 1,000 clubs in North America.

Additionally, the Bershads have helped to beautify the appearance of several high-visibility locations on the Alfred University campus. They have underwritten the resurfacing of the University&s tennis courts (in purple, of course!...Eric was on Alfred University&s tennis team during his student days). They have donated the wallcoverings for the University&s Carnegie Hall, , Alumni Hall, and Saxon Inn, and have just committed to help refurbish the Knight Club, one of the most popular gathering spaces on campus.

Susan and Eric are strong supporters of Alfred University&s new applied and experiential learning program, APEX, which will give students an opportunity to study abroad, complete an internship, undertake a research project, or engage in service learning, and provide them funds in support of the activity. Susan recently created a travel fund to provide Alfred University students the opportunity to study abroad.

The Bershads are most proud of their two sons, Philip and Jeffrey, the president and chief executive officer, respectively, who have grown the company “beyond our wildest imagination while creating a culture of giving back to the community.” Under Philip and Jeffrey&s leadership, the company sponsors a food kitchen, supports many charities, plants trees for every order received, and is helping to support Alfred University&s APEX program with paid internships for design students.

Last fall, Reka Varga-Vienne, vice president of product development, and Tara Van Lunen, creative director at Phillip Jeffries, came to Alfred and spoke to a standing-room-only crowd of more than 300 students at the School of Art and Design about the business of design and the many design opportunities for Alfred students. Both Reka and Tara, who are mothers as well as senior managers of the company, returned to the office, exclaiming that “Alfred University is a fantastic school. Our kids are definitely going to Alfred!”

They also announced the creation of the Phillip Jeffries Design Award for Alfred University design students. The inaugural recipients of the award are Sophia Weiss ‘19 and Natalie Lambert &18. In addition to a stipend, both students will have a chance to visit Phillip Jeffries and to meet and work with the wallcovering design team.

Eric and Susan Bershad expressed their gratitude to Gerar Edizel, the dean of the School of Art and Design at Alfred University, for his assistance in creating the award. US News & World Report consistently ranks Alfred University&s School of Art and Design in the top 10 in the country overall and as a leader in ceramics and glass art.