

Alfred University recognizes scholarship donors, recipients

10/30/19



Russ Cesari 67 displays the football jersey presented to him Friday by Julio Fuentes (left).

ALFRED, NY – At its Board of Trustees dinner Friday evening, Alfred University recognized donors and recipients of scholarships. Trustee Gene Bernstein, former chair of the Board, announced the creation of a new scholarship which honors former University President Charles Edmondson and his wife, Laura Greyson.

Members of the Board of Trustees endow 16 scholarships, which this year are benefitting 60 students. Three of those students spoke Friday about the importance of scholarships and the role they have played in allowing them to attend Alfred University.

“I wasn’t going to be able to come here” without a scholarship, said Nathaniel Atkinson, a senior fine arts major from Harrisville, NY. He thanked Trustee Marlin Miller ’54, ’89 HD, ’19 HD, for providing the scholarship funding he needed to attend Alfred.

“I’m from a modest situation. This means a lot to me. I’m the first in my family to pursue a four-year degree,” said Atkinson, one of 44 students who received funding from five Miller-endowed scholarships. “The gracious gifts from other people have given me great opportunities. I thank you all.”

Natalie Turco, a senior from Westerly, RI, pursuing dual degrees in mechanical engineering and chemistry, is a recipient of a Presidential Scholarship and James A. Comstock Memorial Scholarship. Like Atkinson, Turco expressed how scholarships have helped throughout her time at Alfred University.

Turco enrolled at Alfred as a nearly 21-year-old first-year student. “When I came here, I had a very narrow focus: I wanted to get in and get out. Then Alfred sunk in,” said Turco, who immersed herself in numerous activities including the Society of Women Engineers and Chemistry Club.

As a junior in 2018, she received the Robert R. McComsey Career Development Center Outstanding Mechanical Engineering/Renewable Energy Engineering Co-op Award. She was honored for her co-op at Electric Boat in New London, CT, in the fall of 2017.

“To be able to come here because of scholarships is an amazing thing,” Turco said. “There are no words to express my appreciation.”

Julio Fuentes, from Olean, NY, is the recipient of a unique scholarship, awarded more than a decade after he first enrolled at Alfred University.

Fuentes was a sophomore on the Saxon football team in the fall of 2006 when he suffered a devastating spinal injury during a game which left him paralyzed. At the football team’s 2016 home opener, Fuentes, who has undergone years of physical rehabilitation, served as an honorary captain. Following the pregame coin toss, he was able to get out of his wheelchair and walk the final steps from the field to the sideline.

Inspired by his courage and determination, the Board of Trustees approved providing a full scholarship to Fuentes so he could complete his studies at Alfred University. Originally a criminal justice studies major, Fuentes is now a counseling major, who aspires to someday help people going through difficult, life-altering situations.

Fuentes, accompanied to the dinner by his fiancé, Heather, stood at the podium and thanked the Board for the scholarship.

“It is extremely important and means a lot to me,” said Fuentes, an Olean, NY, resident. “My mom said, always finish what you started and get an education. She told me, ‘You’re a heckuva athlete, but you never know when that will be taken away.’ I know that.”

“What happened to me was a blessing in disguise,” he continued. “I can now counsel others. I found the place I belong and for that I’m grateful.”

Fuentes presented Russ Cesari ’67, a member of the Board of Trustees, a former Alfred University football player, and one of his strongest supporters with a special edition black football uniform jersey. Russ and his wife, Jo Ann, are members of “Team Julio,” a group of alumni, friends, faculty and staff from Alfred University helping Fuentes not only recover from his injuries, but to also realize his dream of completing his studies at Alfred University.

“For everything you’ve done for me and my family, I want to say thank you,” Fuentes said in presenting Cesari with the jersey.

Cesari responded, saying of Fuentes, “This guy has inspired me so much.

Added Mark Zupan, Alfred University president, “You continue to provide an inspiration to all of us. Thank you.”

Bernstein announced the Charley Edmondson and Laura Greyson Endowed Scholarship, named in honor of Edmondson, who served as the University’s 13th president, from 2000-16, and his wife, Laura Greyson, a professor of political science and former director of the Women’s Studies program at Alfred University.

Alfred University experienced “unprecedented growth,” Bernstein said, in expansion of physical facilities and academic programs, during Edmondson’s tenure as president.

Bernstein cited the creation of the AUNY program in which we offer master’s degrees in counseling and public administration to students who attend classes in the New York City Metro area; the establishment of a Phi Beta Kappa chapter in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; the of the Beth Robinson Judson Leadership Center, which houses the Women’s Leadership Academy; the Confucius Institute; and Gary Horowitz Service Learning Program.

Also under Edmondson's leadership, the University saw construction of Miller Theater, Joel's House and Ann's House residence facilities, the Bromeley-Daggett Equestrian Center at Maris Cuneo Equine Park, the Inamori Museum of Fine Ceramics, Connors Pavilion, Doris Harrington Softball Field, the Joyce-Walton Family Health and Wellness Center, and the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum.

"I had the distinct please of chairing the search committee that hired Charley Edmondson in 2000," Bernstein said in announcing the scholarship, which has surpassed its fundraising goal of \$200,000. "Now I have the distinct pleasure of announcing the establishment of the Charley Edmondson and Laura Greyson Scholarship fund that will help an undergraduate students earn a bachelor's degree."

Edmondson thanked Alfred University for the honor and recognized the Board of Trustees for their support of the University.

"Things were not always sunny and positive. That is when the trustees, most of whom are alumni, weathered the tough times and kept their eyes on what was best for the University," Edmondson said.

To the students in attendance, Edmondson advised they look to the trustees for inspiration.

"They once sat where you are; you can accomplish what they've accomplished," he said. "They have made a commitment to giving back to society. Do what they did and the world will be well served."

Edmondson spoke of the important role scholarships played in his life, as an undergraduate at the University of Mississippi, where he earned a B.A. in history; and later as a graduate students earning a master's degree in history from Mississippi and a Ph.D. in history from Florida State.

"I started college with limited means," he said. "It is deeply meaningful to me that you have established something so meaningful to students."