
February/March 2009

2009

2-2009

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Recommended Citation

Liberty University, "Generous gift: Donors sign over 112-acre lake, land to Liberty" (2009). *February/March 2009*. 4.

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Generous gift: Donors sign over 112-acre lake, land to Liberty

February 01, 2009 | Teresa Dunham

Liberty University once hoped to build a 100 to 125 acre lake on Liberty Mountain for student recreation, but the dream seemed impossible when LU officials learned that Virginia would require them to spend millions in wetland credits to offset the environmental impact.

Now three generous donors are giving Liberty a lake for free.

Ivy Lake, located about 15 minutes from LU in Forest, Va., is a beautiful man-made lake with a mountain vista reflected in its waters — and it's 112 acres with a dam.

“That’s what’s so providential about this,” said Chancellor Jerry Falwell, Jr.

The donation, including a small park-like area with a concrete boat ramp, gazebo, large dock and plenty of green space for student recreation, is a focal point in several recent land and monetary gifts to LU totaling more than \$5 million.

The lake gift comes from Lynchburg-area residents Tom DeWitt, Terry Dobyons and Richard Chaffin. DeWitt, the only Liberty alumnus among the group, transferred to LU in 1977 and earned a degree in Christian Ministries in 1979 before deciding to enter the real estate and development world.


“[I] love Liberty and everything they’re doing. We just want to be a part of what they’re doing,” said DeWitt, who fondly recalls his time spent on the LU baseball team. “Liberty’s influence has been tremendous on me, and I think tremendous on the community as well.”

DeWitt first contacted LU to ask if the school could use a lake. He figured it would be a winwin because LU could maintain the donated lake, allowing the surrounding homeowners to continue enjoying it. When LU responded positively, he made plans to sign the lake over by the end of 2008. The lake is valued at around \$2.5 million.

Meet the Donors



Richard Chaffin (not pictured), Terry Dobyns and Tom DeWitt recently donated Ivy Lake, a 112-acre lake in Forest, Va., to Liberty University. The donation also includes land with space for university activities.

 [View more photos of the lake.](#)

“I think it’s a very healthy sign that alumni like Tom DeWitt ... are starting to give to Liberty,” said Falwell. “Liberty doesn’t have that many alumni who have lived long enough to accumulate significant assets, but the few who have are giving in a big way, and I think that’s very encouraging. That’s where our future endowments will originate.”

DeWitt said LU’s early alumni are finally getting to a position in life which enables them to give back.

“We’ve been in our business long enough. We’ve got our kids out of the house and those kinds of things,” he said.

Now that the lake is more than a dream for LU, officials are brainstorming all the possible ways students could use it. Rowing, sailing, kayaking, scuba diving training, canoeing and fishing are just a few of the suggestions.

Liberty University student Kevin Gahagan from Orange County, Calif., said there is interest among students to form a club crew team, and the university recently acquired an eight-man skiff, oars and trailer.

Officials also envision recreational use of the shoreline and possibly a clubhouse for university use.

“We think this lake will be a real asset in recruiting students. It’ll be a real benefit to our existing students, and it will enhance student life and activities,” Falwell said.

ADDITIONAL DONATIONS

Ivy Lake is only one highlight in Liberty University’s recent wave of land and monetary donations totaling more than \$5 million.

Bob Hughes, the original developer of Candler’s Station shopping center across from the LU campus, gave the university a commercial lot adjacent to Applebee’s. Chancellor Jerry Falwell, Jr. conservatively estimates that this land donation is worth \$750,000.

“It’s a wonderful contribution, and it is very generous of Mr. Hughes. We deeply appreciate the gift,” said Falwell, who will consider whether to sell it to build the school’s endowment or use it for other practical purposes, such as a bus parking lot.

In addition, **Glen Thomas** recently donated nearly 6 ½ acres on Mayflower Drive in Lynchburg. Falwell estimates the land is worth more than \$700,000.

“It may be a good spot for us to locate our central receiving functions,” Falwell said.

Thomas, who briefly attended LU, also donated \$700,000 for the university’s new indoor soccer field, which is now under construction near the LaHaye Student Union at Campus North.

In addition, **Thomas and Iris Tilley** recently fulfilled their pledge to donate \$250,000 for the construction of the Tilley Student Center. The student center, which opened in September of 2008, is a popular coffeehouse-style lounge where Liberty students can relax between classes, surf the Web and play a friendly game of pool.

The Tilleys live in Durham, North Carolina and have supported Liberty University since the early 1970s. They are the parents of Becki Falwell, the chancellor’s wife.