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West Coast meets East Coast: California couple connects with Liberty

December 01, 2009 ¦ Mitzi Bible

Roy and Vela Gwin love Central California, their home for more than 30 years.

“We love the sunshine,” Vela says.

But even out on the West Coast, they keep strong ties with Liberty University.

Roy, a retired civil engineer with the Civil Service, and Vela, a former high school guidance counselor, said their relationship with Liberty and its founder, Dr. Jerry Falwell, goes back to the beginning.

“When we first knew him, he was travelling around the country and preaching sermons, and that’s when we fell in love with Jerry Falwell,” Vela says. “His sincerity and Christianity” attracted them, and they were excited to hear about the forming of a college.

“I’ve been in education all my life, so definitely I was interested in that, and especially when he [Falwell] said he was training pastors, because we certainly need them,” Vela says. “That is when we really started donating [to Liberty], when we heard he was training Champions for Christ.”

Through LU’s Planned Giving Department, the Gwins have purchased 10 charitable gift annuities and have decided to leave their entire estate to the school after their homegoing.

As a guidance counselor, “I learned to size up colleges very well, that’s how Liberty gets at the top of the list,” Vela says. “That’s exactly where I’d send any of my kids if I had any.”

Earlier this year, the Gwins met Liberty graduate Neil Grobler, who is now working toward his M.B.A. at LU. Grobler traveled to their home with Planned Giving officer Rusty Smallwood.

“The Gwins were very sincere, humble people,” Grobler says. “Both were very excited about what was going on at Liberty and concerned of what is going on with the world. They bought into the vision of training young champions for Christ and ultimately that is what they want to see.”

The Gwins were happy to meet a product of the school they had only supported from a distance.

“We really were impressed with him,” Vela says. “It makes us feel even better about giving to Liberty.”