Sesquicentennial celebration, online alumni community focus for new alumni board president

BY LINDA HALLMARK

For John Burton ‘85, his year as president of the Birmingham-Southern College alumni board will be noteworthy, thanks in large part to the 150th anniversary celebration of the college. Promotion and participation in the Sesquicentennial events will play a significant role in this year’s agenda.

“Southern alumni of all ages have a great feeling about their college days,” says Burton. “We hope the coming year will provide a great opportunity for them to reconnect to BSC and their classmates.”

Reflecting on his own time as a student at BSC, Burton recalls many opportunities made available to him, both academically and socially. It was not the big events, he says, but rather the small ones that are the source of his fondest memories.

“I remember hanging on for dear life playing alto sax in the jazz band,” says Burton, “with Dr. Hooten just grinning away up front. At ‘Southern, I was surrounded by extremely talented individuals.”

He also says he will never forget gathering with other freshmen outside Margaret Daniel and Cullen Daniel halls on the first few nights of the fall term, meeting new people, and making new friends with absolutely no idea of the impact those people would have on his life.

“That moment was so full of expectations,” says Burton. “It’s one of those moments that you remember not just as a collection of sights and sounds, but in temperature, in humidity. It’s absolutely vivid, years after the fact.”

One of the challenges for the association is continuing to foster alumni participation in giving to the college, says Burton, and maintaining those close ties and drawing on those friendships is a necessary element. He is looking forward to working with BSC’s new Vice President for Institutional Development Adelia Patrick Thompson ’86, who is a longtime friend of Burton’s.

Also, this year the board hopes to achieve another goal through the implementation of a new online community with a link to the college website. The new system will provide many opportunities for alumni to keep in touch and assist the college when possible.

“With this online community, we will soon have a faster, easier way to transmit information to alumni about college-related events,” says Burton. “It’s an exciting development, and alumni can expect to hear more about it in the coming year.”

Seizing opportunities is something Burton took away from his days at Birmingham-Southern and carried forward into his life and career.

“I can’t imagine a college experience without the breadth of the liberal arts curriculum that ‘Southern provided,” says Burton. The road from BSC led Burton directly to Yale Law School where he finished in 1988. Although he worked in Washington, D.C., and Atlanta during law school, he decided that Birmingham was the best place for him. He first clerked for U.S. District Judge William Acker ‘49, and then landed in private practice with Maynard, Cooper & Gale P.C. in 1989. Burton says choosing to join the firm was easy because it is full of Birmingham-Southern graduates, including the hiring partner Kirby Sevier ’68. Burton’s practice concentrates in public finance and general corporate work.

“The most satisfying part about my practice is that I work with people who are striving together to finance a public or nonprofit project,” says Burton. “At the end of the day, I know I got to play a small part in the accomplishment of the public objective.”

Burton and his wife, Lisa, have three daughters, Leah (11), Olivia (9), and Adelaide (5). He is an active member at Independent Presbyterian Church, and says his life is balanced between family, work, and church activities. However, this year he plans to exert extra effort to make time for BSC events related to the Sesquicentennial celebration. His message to fellow alumni is this:

“Interesting and varied programs follow throughout the year, culminating in Alumni Weekend May 5 and 6,” says Burton. “I would like to encourage alumni to take advantage of as many of the year’s special events as possible to celebrate this important milestone for the college.”