

# Editor's Note

## 'Southern Cares

BY BILL WAGNON

I am quite certain that if I asked 100 people I would get two dozen different opinions on what sets Birmingham-Southern apart from other colleges and universities. To some it would be the distinguished faculty. To others, the Hilltop campus. Still to others it would be the history of service or the academic excellence. There is no right or wrong answer. Birmingham-Southern does so many things so very well. What truly sets us apart from all the others? It's a question that several at the college have pondered of late. Below is a brief excerpt from President David Pollick's annual State of the College address to faculty and staff on Aug. 22.

"Several months ago, I raised the topic of institutional distinctiveness with the college's General Officers [vice president team]. I said I had finally firmly come to the conclusion, after so many conversations with alumni, students, and friends, that the care that the faculty, staff, and alumni of this college have shown for its students over many generations is extraordinary and powerful. It does set this community apart from 99 percent of college campuses in America, in my opinion. ... We live in an era when personal care is at a premium because it is increasingly so absent. Getting problems solved by persons who genuinely care has become rarer and rarer. In our world, it means safe and secure environments with people you can truly trust to turn to. It means talking with a person versus talking with an answering machine. It means living in a neighborhood with real neighbors who care about your problems and want to help you solve them. We use all kinds of words to describe this, for example, 'home,' and 'family,' but whatever the words, they mean something powerful and fill deep human needs and desires. You, and those who came before you, have provided a place where such words have real meaning and value. You care for students in both the great and the small. And you are loved and revered for it. This is Birmingham-Southern—yesterday and today. ... There is a thing here called '*Southern Care*, and I want every student who considers coming here to know about it, and I want every student who does come here to experience it."

Prior to Pollick's address, the college did something it had never done before. It put down on paper, all in one place, those things that Birmingham-Southern offers to its students as a service. Not for a cost, but simply because it has been our nature to do so. A '*Southern Care* guide for students. Pollick continued.

"... as students are returning this year—all students—they will find a personal gift in their rooms ... welcoming them 'home.' There will be a booklet listing the many college services that are available to each of them, much as when you check into a hotel room. We are working on setting up a morning Kiosk in the Bell Tower that provides free coffee and juice before the first class periods on Monday and Friday mornings. The expense is minimal; the gesture is large. We are looking at placing a person in Norton who can answer almost anything, or help a student get to the right people, whether it's where to go to solve a problem on campus or where to take that special friend for that special dinner when you only have three dollars in your pocket. Over the years, the kind of warm care that has been shown students through the hands of Miss Martha [maker of the cafeteria's famous yeast rolls], perhaps symbolically captures the essence of our message. There are times when we would all love to be able to turn to a 'Miss Martha' for some personal care as comforting as a warm roll—both symbolically and actually."

As we move forward, Birmingham-Southern will continue to seek out and recognize the strengths of the 'Southern culture of care and to intentionally tell that story far and wide.

Pollick concluded: "This is all about putting a spotlight on the kind of care that is so deeply rooted in this community. The investment is small, the care is authentic, and the retention of each of our good students is valuable to the entire community."

As you peruse this issue of '*Southern* magazine, you will find many examples of 'Southern people who care—those devoting their lives in public service to their country, those making life-changing gifts because they want to give back to their alma mater, those making the traditional Move-In Day for new students an unforgettable experience.

You will hear more about the '*Southern Care* program in issues to come, but for now enjoy reading about the care of 'Southern people on the pages that follow.

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USPS 087-600

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'*Southern* magazine is published three times a year in spring, summer, and fall by the Office of Alumni Affairs and the Office of Communications at Birmingham-Southern College, Birmingham, Alabama 35254. Non-profit postage paid at Birmingham, AL Permit No. 2575. Postmaster: Send address changes to: Alumni Affairs, Birmingham-Southern College, 900 Arkadelphia Road, Box 549003, Birmingham, AL 35254; telephone 205/226-4909; or access at [www.bsc.edu/alumni](http://www.bsc.edu/alumni).

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