A Lifetime of Support for Education

Education is, and always has been, part of Mary Alice (Lehman) Bertram’s life. Growing up on a farm just east of Princeton, Indiana, she attended Indiana State Teachers College (now Indiana State University), where she earned a bachelor’s degree in social studies and biology. She then attended Indiana University for her master’s degree in secondary education with a cognate in library science, and an education specialist degree in secondary administration, supervision, and curriculum. “In those days, there wasn’t much else for a girl to do,” Mrs. Bertram said. “You became a teacher or a nurse. But I’ve enjoyed working in education. I know how important it is.”

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Mrs. Bertram began teaching at Central High School and retired as media specialist from EVSC’s Cynthia Heights Elementary School in 2001. She also taught and worked at the University of Southern Indiana where she supervised student teachers for more than four years. She consistently helped former first lady Betty Rice build community ties for the University—bringing new families into the USI circle and reaching out to the community.

Mrs. Bertram’s late husband Dr. Charles J. Bertram, was among one of the first members of the USI family. He began teaching in the Mathematics Department in 1969, attaining the second most seniority of any full professor at the time of his death in 1999.

“I remember when Charles first brought me to campus to see his office,” Bertram said. “There were no doorways yet, as campus was still under construction. We had to climb in through a window in the Education Center.”

Drawing on his mathematics background, Dr. Bertram created the popular Eagle Math program at USI. Emulated nationally, it brought second-and third-grade students to USI to learn math concepts and interact with student athletes. Mrs. Bertram remembers “the kids loved going to campus because for them, it was going to college.”

During his tenure, Dr. Bertram was chair of the Division of Education; co-founded the Great Lakes Valley Conference (GLVC) of the NCAA Division II, serving two terms as its president; and was USI’s first NCAA Division II faculty...
athletics representative from 1975 until his death. He was named to the GLVC Hall of Fame in 2002. When USI began its own Athletic Hall of Fame in 2007, Dr. Bertram was among the inaugural class. He was widely regarded as the person who put USI intercollegiate sports on the map. He also co-founded the USI Varsity Club, which now supports more than 250 student athletes, and has raised $2.4 million since its inception.

Still heavily involved with the University, Mrs. Bertram continues her membership with the Varsity Club, and established the Charles J. Bertram Memorial Scholarship in memory of her late husband. The fully-endowed scholarship is awarded annually to student athletes who excel in academics and have a minimum GPA of 3.4. The scholarship has been awarded to several men’s and women’s basketball and soccer players, but is not restricted to any sport. “All of our scholarship recipients have been delightful students,” Mrs. Bertram said.

In 2003, in Dr. Bertram’s memory, she funded the Bertram Mathematics Education Laboratory, located on the third floor of the Torrington Science Wing. She is currently funding the Lehman-Bertram Memorial Scholarship in memory of her and Charles’ parents.

“Offering scholarships is one of the most valuable things a person can do. These students deserve to be rewarded for their hard work.”

Mrs. Bertram is the current recording secretary and a founding member of the USI Retirees, and, in 2005, pledged an unrestricted estate gift to USI. The Bertams passed along their devotion to education to their children, John and David. John taught English before becoming principal at Castle North Middle School. David is executive vice president of sales for Volar Video in Lexington, Kentucky, and is an adjunct faculty member at the University of Kentucky where he teaches sports marketing courses.