

James M. Theisen '40, '45, '52, '66 (Hon.) – Over 35 years that stretched across five different decades, you shepherded Phillips Exeter Academy to unprecedented levels of success in human-centered fundraising. Beginning in 1976, when you were hired by 11th Principal Instructor Stephen Kurtz to head Exeter's Annual Fund, you established yourself as someone who led and built connections with uncommon intelligence, humor, grace and, above all, heart. Almost immediately, the members of this community were drawn to your *joie de vivre*, and such vivacity – *your* vivacity – could not have come at a better or more critical time.

When you arrived at Exeter with your wife and children, the Academy's endowment was in jeopardy. A too-high annual spending rate of nearly 10 percent was imperiling our school's corpus and therefore its future. Eventually, a trustee-authored report illuminated the gravity of the situation, and together with the team you were now leading, having been promoted in 1981 to director of alumni affairs and development, you and the Trustees adopted appropriately austere budget and spending practices that reversed this trend. That alone would be reason to laud and celebrate you, but there are countless and important other reasons.

Foremost, perhaps, is your utter genius with people. Whether you were seeking just the right candidate for alumni affairs and development as you worked to expand and professionalize your team, or reaching out to a disaffected alumnus whom you wished to re-connect to Exeter, your insights into and empathy for the human condition garnered the trust and affection – and often the adoration – of all who were fortunate enough to cross your path.

Long before many at Exeter, and certainly before many in your profession, you understood that relationship-building was essential to the enterprise of fundraising. "He knew that to be successful, one had to ask prospective donors not for money, but for their love, attachment and commitment to a set of purposes," recalls a former trustee. Another former trustee adds: "Jim is the guy who drew me back in and unleashed in me the joy of philanthropy, which has become my life. He opened that door to me."

The same gifts for connection and authenticity that endeared you to generations of Exonians also made you a beloved manager to a staff of professionals that grew five-fold during your tenure. What's more, the individuals you hired stayed, and through your nurturing and role-modeling, flourished, creating over the years a cohesive, high-functioning team that was the envy of your peers. "Jim always paid attention to the individual person," recalls one former employee. "He built a family," states another.

If care and compassion were valued traits, so too were your painstaking attention to detail, your strategic mind, and your nearly superhuman work ethic. Through the years, as you partnered with four different principal instructors and no less than nine Trustee presidents, you maximized these qualities in service to Exeter's students, faculty and staff – insisting, always, that the focus of the Academy's endeavors should be on her people. It was your singular formula, and it succeeded in spades.

Notably, you and your team set new benchmarks for Exeter and for independent school fundraising in three consecutive decades – becoming in 1980 the first secondary school to raise \$1 million in annual giving; in 1996, the first independent school to surpass \$4 million in annual giving; and in 2009, at the close of *The Exeter Initiatives*, the Academy's first modern comprehensive fundraising campaign, exceeding your goal of \$305 million to become the most successful fundraising effort ever conducted at a secondary school.

These are astonishing accomplishments, to be sure, but even more awe-inspiring is how these record-setting resources transformed our school. The Ralph Lovshin Track, the Saltonstall Boathouse, the Phelps Science Center, the Phelps Academy Center, the Harris Family Children's Center, and myriad other facilities bear your imprint, just as surely as do hundreds of scholarships, fellowships, and professional development and travel funds. Even now, conversations you began years ago continue to bear fruit.

Over the years, another group benefited greatly from your love and respect – Exeter's staff. Quietly and without fanfare, you sought to establish or expand awards and funds that recognized staff contributions or that helped staff members and their families through difficult times. Many recall, and have even saved, notes of encouragement or thanks that you penned. Others remember how you joined them in celebrating achievements or in grieving losses.

In fact, the only other people to whom you may have directed more of your love and care during your 35-year-tenure at Exeter are your charming and equally ebullient wife Pat and your beloved children Jill and Craig '97. How lucky we are, and Exeter is, that they shared you so generously with us over so many years.

Jim, your legacy to Exeter is exceptional and profound, which is why we honor you today with the Founder's Day Award.