

Alumni of the Year – Tom and Phyllis Farver

Tom and Phyllis Farver—members of Houghton’s Class of ’64 and Class of ’65, respectively—found each other a decade later in an uncanny stroke of providence. They met at a church coffee hour following a worship service at Marble Collegiate Church in New Jersey, during Tom’s tenure as a senior researcher at a multinational pharmaceutical company. “Don’t I know you from Houghton College?” Phyllis (then Fleming) asked, and the rest, according to Tom, is history.

Together, Tom and Phyllis Farver illustrate the hopes that we have for our alumni as lifelong learners, shapers of their churches and communities, and contributors to God’s redemptive purposes around the world through their faithful and creative stewardship of their gifts over the course of a career.

Phyllis is a board member for the Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts at the University of California, Davis. Phyllis volunteers there regularly, serving as an usher for matinee performances that the Mondavi Center puts on for local K-12 schools. To help students get the most out of these live performances, Phyllis has also written curriculum guides for teachers, as well as materials for docents who visit the schools before performances.

According to Joyce Donaldson, former director of arts education at the Mondavi Center, Phyllis and Tom are strong supporters of the Center's mission. Phyllis served many terms on the Friends Executive Board in a range of roles, including K-12 outreach and adult education, and Tom currently serves as the chair of Mondavi Center tours.

"Their commitment, generosity, and good spirit have helped [the Mondavi Center] become an invaluable resource in providing access to the arts in the Sacramento region," Joyce says, adding that Phyllis has played an especially key role in forging lasting relationships with schools in high-risk districts, as well as raising thousands of dollars to provide free matinee tickets to students who would otherwise not be able to participate.

Her husband, Tom, is a Professor Emeritus for the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of California at Davis, where he taught biostatistics for 38 years. He saw early on in his career the importance of applying statistics to the study of biology in general and the study of veterinary medicine in particular. His students were largely participants in UC Davis's Master's program in Preventive Veterinary Medicine.

Over the course of his career, Professor Farver taught statistics to approximately 875 veterinary students from 75 countries around the world. In 1997, his 20th anniversary of teaching at UC Davis, Tom received their annual Faculty Teaching

Award, “in recognition of distinguished contributions to veterinary education and outstanding teaching in biomedical statistics.”

One of Tom’s former students, Phil Kass, spoke of the impact Tom has had as a professor, both to his own students as well as to the field of animal population health as a whole. “During his years at Davis,” says Kass, “[Tom] has trained hundreds of students from dozens of countries from virtually every continent save Antarctica.” A plaque hanging in the Farver home listing the names of many of these students testifies to the global impact of Professor Farver. His students have gone on to prominent positions at numerous universities and in federal, state, and local governments, including organizations like the Centers for Disease Control, the Department of Public Health, and the Pan-American Health Organization.

Tom and Phyllis have also maintained strong ties to Houghton. In 2014, the Fleming-Farver Vocational Opportunities and Career Advising Center, or VOCA—now part of the larger Center for Student Success-- was made possible thanks to their generous donation. The Farvers wanted to ensure that Houghton students of today’s generation received the personal and technical support they needed to translate their Houghton education into a larger lifelong calling—to places of satisfying employment, service and impact in our world.

Tom and Phyllis, over the course of your lives you have influenced students across academic disciplines, national borders, and economic class lines. Your impact in promoting education and student success is far-reaching, extending from veterinarians with doctoral degrees, to at-risk grade school students, to our own undergraduates right here at Houghton College. You have contributed to the flourishing of your community and your workplace, all in the name of Christ.

For your vision, your dedication, and your faithful investment of the resources and gifts that God has given to you, we are proud to present you both with the 2019 Alumni of the Year award.