

## The

## BEST of TIMES

The Alumni Association bids a fond farewell to its longtime leader.

by Lauren Cabral



**C**limbing ladders, beating the odds and overcoming adversity are all facets of the American dream that make a story worth telling and a life worth living. And if those elements add to the appeal of a tale, then Pat Whetstone's life is an attractive one.

Today, Whetstone is the director of The University of Alabama's Office of Alumni Affairs, and executive secretary of the National Alumni Association, comprised of approximately 30,000 members across the United States. For the past 20 years he's been a commanding officer of sorts, guiding the NAA and those who lead it toward development and growth.

His current position is not one many saw coming when he was a boy growing up in Greenville, Ala., population 7,228, according to a recent count. He came from a modest background; his parents were both public school teachers, and he was the oldest of seven children.

But humble beginnings never fazed any of them, especially Whetstone. "I just sort of knew when I graduated high school that I'd be coming here," he said of his alma mater. In fact, he received the W.O. Parmer Scholarship, given annually to a Butler County student. It wasn't until years later when he became involved with the scholarship's advisory committee that he learned why he had been so lucky. "You had to be a young man from a relatively poor family who showed promise," he said. "And I laughed when I heard that criteria,

because I didn't know I fell in either category."

Whetstone said he and his siblings never considered themselves poor. "We didn't have much, but we didn't know it," he said. "Nine of us lived in a three-bedroom house with one bathroom. So when I came off to Alabama and got one of those little-bitty dorm rooms, I thought I'd hit the jackpot."

His colleagues and friends insist the reverse is true. It was the University that was the winner when he became director, which is why many will be so sad to see him go when he retires this spring.

"Pat Whetstone has led the National Alumni Association with vision, effective leadership and dedication," said UA President Robert E. Witt. "But above all, he has led the NAA with heart: a heart filled with love for The University of Alabama and all of the people, programs, values and traditions that make our University truly special." In February, Whetstone was awarded the Algeron Sydney Sullivan Award, one of UA's highest honors, given to individuals who have demonstrated the highest standards of scholarship, leadership and service.

Whetstone said he has enjoyed his job as director immensely, but the time is right to go. "I would have

been stunned years ago that I would have lasted 20 years," he said. "The enemy is not at the gate, so maybe that's a good time to retire, when things are right."

To an alumni office that has come to rely on him, however, there never will be a good time. "He's my boss, but he's also one of my best friends," said Dianne Golson, who has been Whetstone's assistant since he took his post as director. "I've been very sad since we've returned from the Christmas holiday, because I know time is going to fly until he leaves us. And the whole staff feels that way. We've been a good team."

### ON THE ROAD

Whetstone hit the ground running when he came to the Capstone as an economics major. He pledged Sigma Nu Fraternity, played intramural sports and swam on the freshman swimming team. He also found time to meet Joyce, his future wife, on his way to swim practice one day.

"I ran into a girl I had been dating so we stopped to chat," he said. "This girl had another girl with her, who I noticed. It took the right combination of questions over about a two-week period to ascertain the name and telephone number of this



Inset, Pat Whetstone became the director of the UA alumni office in 1991; right, Joyce (Stephenson) Whetstone in her newspaper engagement photo



other girl, but my efforts were successful.” The two married in June 1962.

The pair’s studies were interrupted when, after three years at UA, Whetstone was called into service as an Army paratrooper with the 101st Airborne Division. The couple later returned to campus to finish their studies, and Whetstone buckled down in the classroom. “I found out when I came back, that college is not that hard,” he said. “I was stunned. It was so much harder the way I was trying to do it before.”

After he and Joyce graduated in 1966, Whetstone went to work for Johnson & Johnson. They moved frequently, living in Georgia, Tennessee, Texas and the Carolinas over the years, but they always took care to keep their ties to UA. “We were transferred all over the country, but in every single place we joined the Alumni Association, even when we didn’t have any money,” Joyce said.

“We did it because we thought we were supposed to,” said Whetstone, who served as the Knoxville, Tenn., chapter’s president at one point. “I remember that feeling—it was like an obligation.”

When his company decided to send him to New Jersey, though, he decided it was time to go a different direction, literally. He took a job at First Tennessee Bank, and he was elected a regional vice president of the NAA.

Yet again, he learned he’d be moving. When he called Alumni Hall to inform the staff he’d need to be replaced, someone suggested he interview for an

opening in the UA Planned Giving division. “In the middle of the interview, I realized that was not the job for me,” he said. “So I just thanked them for inviting me, and told them they really needed somebody else.”

His interviewers weren’t ready to give up on him yet. They informed him of an opening for an Alumni Fund position, and interviewed him on the spot. He went on to do a final interview with Dr. John L. Blackburn, who’d been dean of men during Whetstone’s time as a student.

Unfortunately, the gentlemen had history.

In college, Whetstone had been required to work off demerits he’d gotten for misbehaving, and he’d had to report to Blackburn every week for a month about his progress. “Meanwhile, here I am as a grown up, and he’s trying to remember me,” Whetstone said. “He came up with wrong things that I’d done, so I denied it fervently. He knew I had been in his office, but he just couldn’t place it.”

A few weeks later, Whetstone found himself coming back to where he began, not as a mischievous freshman, but as an adult with big responsibilities.

## DOWN TO BUSINESS

He took his post in the Alumni Fund Department in 1988, and three years later he was chosen as director of Alumni Affairs. He is the longest-serving director since Jeff Coleman, who was at the helm from 1954 to 1974.

During Whetstone’s reign, the Alumni Association has grown and evolved for the better. After his first year as director, its total assets reached not quite \$1 million. “Today we have assets of approximately \$34 million, and most of that is scholarship endowment,” he said, noting the association has aimed to respond to the need to expand UA’s scholarship program.

*Sporting a pair of hand-me-down jeans from cousin Jimmy Andrew in 1950; below, with daughter Paige in 1969*

Among his biggest achievements, he said, was helping to keep the alumni staff and executive committee focused on the needs of alumni, prospective students and the University, and UA Provost Judy Bonner agreed. “Whenever we discuss a new initiative that is important to the University, Pat is the first to volunteer meaningful ways that alumni can be involved and assist or facilitate with priorities,” she said.

For example, when Witt set a goal for enrollment growth, Bonner said Whetstone looked for ways the NAA could help. “The alumni chapters around the nation work with our regional recruiters to identify and educate prospective students,” she explained. “Our current students and the University are the beneficiaries of this strong working relationship.”

Now the association, Alumni Hall staff and other campus leaders will need to adjust to Whetstone’s departure, which he revealed in September. “I tell everyone that when I told the staff about my retirement, that they all stood and applauded and jumped up and started bumping hips. I like that story better than the real story.”

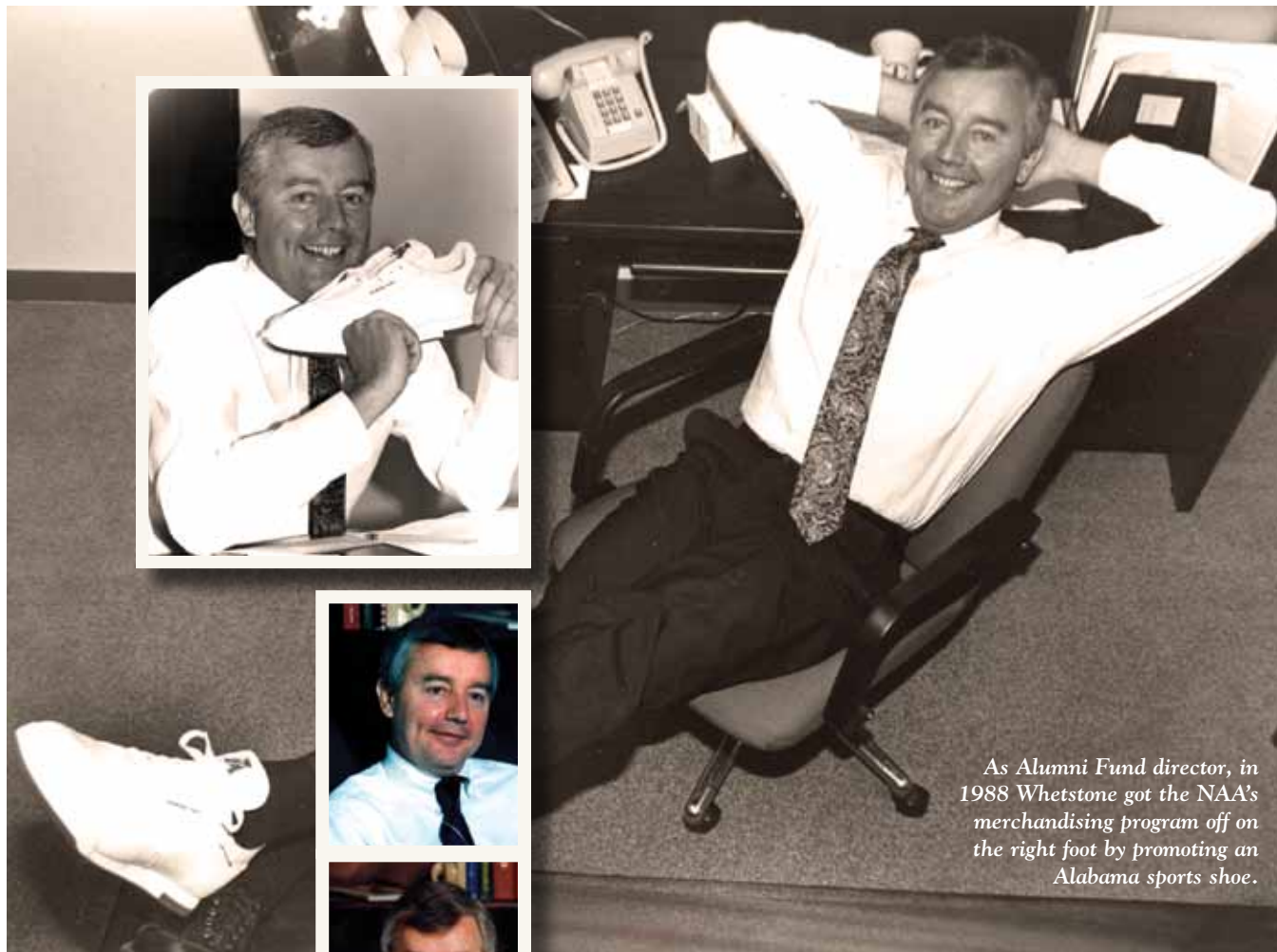
He’d informed Witt months earlier, and he’d given Golson an idea of the



*Insets, clockwise from top: with mother Marie in 1942; his first-grade school photo; second from left, with his family, featured in the Greenville Advocate because they were all involved in the school’s football program (father Luke coached the local team); on left, attending Boys State during high school; and background, in his 1957 Easter suit*







As Alumni Fund director, in 1988 Whetstone got the NAA's merchandising program off on the right foot by promoting an Alabama sports shoe.

news before his announcement. "I was thinking that I was slowing down just a touch," he said, noting he'd be tired after staying out three consecutive nights, something that never used to happen. "I had thought about what I was going to do with my time, and by the time I spoke with President Witt and met with the executive committee and staff, I was very comfortable with my decision, and still am."

His plans for retirement include traveling with Joyce, taking continuing education classes, studying history and getting outdoors more. "I want to play a little more golf and see if I can get any better," he said. "I want to wear Bermuda shorts

and watch hummingbirds on my hummingbird feeder . . . and I hope to exercise more."

A search committee recently chose Calvin Brown as the new alumni director, to begin his duties April 1. After a month's transition period, Whetstone will begin his full retirement on April 30, saying he will be on hand to help Brown get off to a smooth start, but not for too long. "I'm certainly going to be available, but I don't think it'd be good for my successor if I hang around. I would like to think I have built a campfire that he can warm himself by."

## WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

Though many factors contributed to his successful career, Whetstone considers his background the most critical ingredient. His small high school allowed him to play football, baseball, basketball, run track and serve as president of the student government, all while taking care of his siblings. "Being the oldest child, I was responsible for my brothers and sisters, the one that handed out nickels and dimes and was in charge of money," he said. "And I think that influenced me quite a bit. I had to do it the right way; otherwise, my parents would be bitterly disappointed."

The people he met along the way also influenced him. "When I was in school, a lot of my teachers had fought in World War II," he said. "They were good role models for guys in class to look up to."

And then, there was Joyce. "He has



With alumni directors from across the country, part of the Council of Alumni Association Executives

a wonderful support group in his family, especially Joyce," Golson said. "She's been one of the best first ladies we've had."

Ben Shurett, immediate past president of the NAA, added that she'd gone above and beyond her duties. "I can't think of one without thinking of the other, and what a terrific team they've been."

Joyce said what helped her husband most along the way was his concern for others. "Honest to goodness, I think he sees all sides," she said. "He has a lot of empathy for people."

Of course, Whetstone said fathering his three children, two of them Alabama grads (the third went to Tennessee, which Whetstone said "was like a death in the family") also changed him for the better. Now that he's retiring, he'll have more time with his grandchildren, which he looks forward to.

But understandably, there will be plenty to miss at Alumni Hall. "I'm going to miss the interaction with alumni," he said. "I've met some of the finest people on the face of this earth through going to chapter meetings or meetings with the alumni board."

He'll also miss working with students, which he said keeps him young. "You know the older you get the easier

it is to become cynical about youth," he said. "But if you work on a campus like this, it's impossible to become cynical. You meet the finest young people."

## FULL CIRCLE

Golson said it would be hard to stay without Whetstone, but she understands why it's time for him to go. "He is very dedicated, and he has a hard job," she said. "A lot of people don't realize how difficult this job can be sometimes; but he always knows how to balance it."

That balance is due in no small part to Whetstone's humor, which all who've met him can attest to. "I have tried to not take myself too seriously,

but I have tried to take this job very seriously," he said.

That attitude has proven to be the perfect ingredient to garnering not only members, but respect for the NAA. "Pat has been a wonderful ambassador for The University of Alabama for his entire 20-plus-year career. His charm, wit and wisdom have served the University well," Shurett said, adding that his unique blend of humor and tact has been indispensable.

Just as Whetstone has made new connections, he has also reconnected to not only his alma mater, but his hometown as well. "I had a chance to go back to Greenville recently and speak to the Rotary Club," he said. "I rode by the little house we grew up in, and I was stunned at how small it was. But it was really neat."

Something he considers even neater is what happened to his brothers and sisters. "I look at my siblings that followed me out of that house, and all of them are better-educated than I am, and that makes me proud," he said. "Proud of my parents for encouraging that and proud of them."

And that's the same way his UA family feels about him. "He's one of a kind," Golson said.

"His many friends wish him the best on retiring," Shurett said. "He will enjoy his time and his family, and because of his great love for the University, he'll continue to be active however he chooses."

Whetstone is certain he'll stay involved in at least one way. "I'll still be at football games, but in the upper deck in the end zone now," he said. "But I've got plenty of sunscreen, so I'll be okay." ■

**Lauren Cabral, '10, is a reporter for the Killeen (Texas) Daily Herald.**

**Pat and Joyce Whetstone received the Amanda Grace Taylor Watson Distinctive Image Award from the Capstone Men and Women for exemplifying the essence of the University in all aspects of life.**

