

MarketPlace



Ruth McKee, '26
McKee Foods Corporation
Co-Founder

NATURAL LEADER

RUTH MCKEE'S LEGACY
OF FIRM KINDNESS
CONTINUES TO INSPIRE.

Students Serve Locally, Globally | Christian Investing | The Business of Belonging

MarketPlace



Dean's Note

Stephanie Sheehan, '05, PhD
Ruth McKee School of Business

This summer the view from Brock Hall has changed beautifully. Where construction cranes and steel beams once rose against the Tennessee sky now stands our completed School of Business—a bright, welcoming 53,000-square-foot academic home positioned prominently at the entrance to campus. What a visible and timely answer to prayer.

The success of the School of Business Leadership and Innovation capital campaign made this moment possible. Every gift, large and small—from alumni, trustees, denominational partners, churches, campus family, and friends near and far—turned a shared vision into reality. We are deeply grateful for your partnership and continued investment in Southern's mission.

Beyond its additional square footage, this new facility provides thoughtfully designed classrooms, state-of-the-art collaboration spaces, innovation labs, and inviting gathering areas. These spaces are intentionally created to support the important work of shaping competent, Christ-centered young professionals. Here our students will master the technical skills the marketplace demands while cultivating the character God's kingdom requires. They will learn to integrate faith and business seamlessly—practicing competent, ethical, missional business that honors God and serves others in meaningful ways.

We remain committed to what Southern has always done best: educating young men and women for now and for eternity. In these new halls, students will study economics alongside ethics, finance alongside faithfulness, marketing alongside ministry, and strategy alongside service. They will engage in real-world projects, simulations, and mentorship opportunities that prepare them not only to succeed in their careers but to view the marketplace itself as a powerful mission field. Every lecture, group discussion, late-night study session, and chapel reflection becomes another brick in the "construction" of their hearts and minds—building lives of integrity, innovation, and eternal impact.

As we begin this new chapter, we are reminded that buildings, however beautiful, are only tools. The true construction happening here is in the lives of our students. We are forming the next generation of business leaders who will carry Southern's distinctive blend of academic excellence and spiritual commitment into boardrooms, startups, nonprofits, and communities around the world. These young professionals will integrate their faith into every decision, lead with Christlike integrity, and approach business as a calling to serve others.

Thank you for helping make this new chapter possible. Your generosity ensures that Southern continues to prepare students who are not only professionally equipped but spiritually grounded—ready to make a lasting difference for God's kingdom.

Stephanie Sheehan



18 TO INVEST, OR NOT TO INVEST

Wrestling with the tension between earthly realities and our abiding hope in Christ's soon return

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Professor Joelle Akiki, center, is the faculty adviser for SMARRT. Last year's student leaders included (from left) Jonathan Amarandei, Eric Barnuevo, Kylie Mastrapa, Adrian Helm, Alicia Garver, and Glenn Grakov.

Student-Led Investment Fund Surpasses \$1 Million

This past fall, Southern's Student Managed Asset Risk and Return Training (SMARRT) Fund surpassed a major milestone of \$1 million in stocks. The initial \$500,000 investment, entrusted to a group of School of Business students in 2019, is part of the university's endowment. Earnings are used to continually support scholarships and student programs across the campus. Last school year, the student team switched from investing in exchange-traded funds to single-equity stocks; this led to an immediate increase in returns, accumulating a \$272,000 profit in just one year. With a return rate nearly twice that of the S&P 500, the SMARRT Fund also outperformed several major hedge funds. In addition, students learn invaluable lessons in managing assets. They receive Bloomberg Terminal certification in the Finance Lab and develop responsible trading practices alongside leadership skills. "The financial world can be very aggressive," said faculty adviser Joelle Akiki, "but I've witnessed these students always keeping their focus on God while managing the fund as part of the class requirements."

Enactus Team Earns a Top Spot in National Competition

Three teams from Southern's School of Business traveled to Denver for the 2026 Enactus USA National Exposition, a competition where students pitch ventures addressing real-world challenges. Two Southern projects advanced to the finals. The Bayiri Project, which combats child malnutrition through an affordable multigrain blend, earned a spot among the top four in the nation. "We are developing students who combine excellence, service, and entrepreneurship," said professor Sergio Bellino, Enactus adviser. "It's an honor for me to mentor teams who stand tall, both professionally and spiritually."

Students Showcase Financial Skills, Place Second in Southeast

Four business students showcased their equity expertise, securing second place among schools participating in the CFA Institute Research Challenge's Southeastern sub-region, which included teams from Belmont University, Covenant College, Lipscomb University, University of Tennessee-Knoxville, Vanderbilt University, and others. This competition in Nashville tested students' analytical, valuation, report writing, and presentation skills. The Research Challenge, which involves work from September through February, requires a significant commitment of time and effort by students but provides hands-on mentoring and real-world experience.

CALLED

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

INTERDISCIPLINARY GROUP OF STUDENTS EXPLORES CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES IN RURAL KENYA.



Senior business major Ava Niemeyer, left, evaluates samples before beginning work on product prototypes.

In a rural community in Kenya, far removed from the structure and predictability of a traditional classroom, a group of Southern Adventist University students found themselves wrestling with a question no textbook could fully answer: What does it actually take to build something that works? Not just an idea that sounds good on paper, or a project that

looks promising in a presentation, but something real—something sustainable, something capable of transforming lives?

This past semester, six students studying business administration, finance, psychology, and pre-med embraced these questions through a hands-on missional entrepreneurship experience in partnership with ElevateHER, an initiative supporting women in vulnerable situations.

ElevateHER is part of Enactus, which this year engaged more than 50 students from 19 majors across campus and launched eight community-owned projects, each focused on creating sustainable change around the world.

What these students encountered was not a neatly defined problem waiting for a solution, but a deeply human reality: complex, layered, and filled with both challenges and possibility.



Students working on Enactus' ElevateHER project quickly learned that listening was critical to success. Here, part of the group engages in an assessment with the ground manager.

At the center of the project was a group of women—many of them single mothers, widows, or individuals carrying the weight of trauma—who had been receiving sewing training for several months. They had the machines. They had a safe place to gather. They had community and support. What they did not yet have was income. Despite months of training and care, none of their sewing products had been sold, no revenue had been generated, and no clear path forward had been defined. The work had been relationally meaningful, but economically, it remained stalled.

For the students, this realization became a turning point. It challenged their assumptions about what it means to help and forced them to confront a difficult truth: good intentions, no matter how sincere, are not enough to create sustainable change. And yet, the answer was not to walk away, but to lean in more thoughtfully.

Learning to See Reality

Rather than rushing toward solutions, the students began with something deceptively simple—learning to

see. They listened. They observed. They asked questions. They spent time in the community, trying to understand not only what people said they needed but also how they actually lived, purchased, and made decisions. It quickly became clear that understanding this context required more than casual conversations with people they barely knew. The students needed structure.

So, they began building tools on the fly. Each day, they refined their approach, adjusting to cultural nuances, reworking their questions, and improving how they gathered information. They developed a simple survey and, over the course of their time in the community, collected responses from 150 women from different backgrounds. They asked about preferences, concerns, daily realities, and purchasing behavior.

What they discovered was striking. The research told a different story.

Before arriving, the students assumed the main barriers to Kenyan consumers adopting reusable, fabric feminine pads—one of the products those receiving sewing training were producing—would be stigma or cost. But the community women who were surveyed expressed something else entirely. Their primary concerns were

hygiene and comfort. These insights reframed the entire problem. What the students thought would be the challenge was not the challenge at all.

At the same time, research revealed something unexpected. Women consistently expressed a strong preference for dresses and bags, items they valued, desired, and were already accustomed to purchasing. What seemed a simple observation became a critical insight. For the first time, the students began to see clearly the difference between assumptions and reality. They were not just learning about a market; they were learning how to listen to it.

From Insight to Action

With this deeper understanding, the students began to move from observation to action. The original focus of the project had been on producing reusable feminine pads and school uniforms; both are meaningful and practical ideas. But now, armed with real data, the students realized that introducing a product based only on perceived need would not be enough.

Instead, they asked a more strategic question: how can we connect what women want with what they need? The answer led to one of the most creative breakthroughs of the project. The students developed a prototype for a branded bag—an item women already desired and valued—but designed it with discreet, specialized compartments intended to hold reusable feminine pads. In this way, the bag became more than a product. It became a bridge.

By offering women something they were already excited to own, the project created a natural pathway to introduce something they truly needed. The Kenyan women involved in ElevateHER would be trained to produce both the bags and the reusable pads, creating a dual-product model that aligned demand with impact. This approach transformed the strategy entirely. It was no longer about convincing women to adopt a product they were unsure about. It was about meeting them where they were and building from there.

Overcoming Barriers to Acceptance

Even with a strong product idea, the students recognized customers would not adopt it automatically. Their research revealed that hygiene concerns remained a significant barrier. Addressing this would require more than product design. It would take trust. In response, the students began developing an educational campaign aimed at addressing these concerns directly. Rather than relying on traditional messaging, they identified the importance of working through trusted community voices: local influencers who could speak credibly and authentically about hygiene, comfort, and product use.

This approach reflects a deeper understanding of how change happens. People do not simply adopt new products because they exist. They adopt them when they feel confident, informed, and supported in doing so. By combining product innovation with community-based education and communication, the students are working to ensure that the product is available and accepted.

When Business Becomes Dignity

Throughout the experience, students also grappled with a deeper question: why not simply help these women find jobs in existing tailoring businesses? It was a reasonable question—one that led to further discovery. The barriers were not only economic, but also social and personal. Limited access to employment, gaps in skill, family responsibilities, and the lingering effects of trauma all made traditional employment difficult to attain or sustain. This was not simply a matter of job placement. It was a matter of restoring capacity.

At the same time, students recognized another critical truth: without income, support can unintentionally create dependency. This is where the concept of missional business came into focus. They began to see that business, when done thoughtfully and responsibly, is not separate from ministry. Instead, it can be one of its most powerful expressions. Providing an opportunity for women to earn income, even on a small scale, is an invitation to dignity, ownership, and hope.

Broken Paradigms

Perhaps the most profound transformation was not in the product, but in the students themselves. Many arrived with assumptions that felt logical and well-intentioned, but reality challenged those assumptions at every step. They learned much along the way, including: need and demand are not always the same; a good product can still fail without trust and acceptance; training without a market leads nowhere; and compassion without structure can unintentionally sustain dependency. These realizations broke long-held paradigms. In their place, a deeper understanding emerged—one that integrates business discipline with human-centered insight. The students learned to listen before acting, to test before scaling, and to adapt based on what is real rather than what is assumed.

The work in Kenya is far from finished. In many ways, it is just beginning. But something important has already taken place. Students moved beyond assumptions. They uncovered real needs. They designed solutions that connect desire with necessity. They identified barriers—and began building strategies to overcome them.

Along the way they became something more than students; they became leaders. ■

by Sergio Bellino, Enactus advisor and associate professor for the Ruth McKee School of Business

Hands-On, Heartfelt

Southern Adventist University is dedicated to transforming lives for eternity by nurturing academic and personal excellence, and two marketing professors from the School of Business are providing opportunities for students to live out this mission statement in their coursework.

In one class, students are helping local nonprofits to identify gaps in organizational communication processes; in another, students are creating fundraising platforms to encourage donations to nonprofits. These hands-on opportunities create a win-win situation, leading to meaningful growth for both the students and the local ministries.

Sharing Their Skills

Students who enroll in Professor Lisa Kuhlman's Principles of Integrated Marketing Communications course have a special opportunity to partner with a local nonprofit and incorporate what they learned in her class with concepts from previous courses such as Consumer Behavior, Digital Marketing,

BUSINESS STUDENTS' ANNUAL FUNDRAISING AND COMMUNICATION CONSULTING PROJECTS FOR LOCAL NONPROFITS PROVIDE REAL-TIME EXPERIENCE, REAL-WORLD SOLUTIONS.

and Principles of Marketing. In order to succeed, student teams must have excellent communication skills, create trust and build relationships with clients, manage scheduling, and learn about work outside "the office" that needs to take place in a consultant role.

"I want them to see how what they are learning can actually be applied in the real world," Kuhlman said. "However, the most important piece of this project is providing a service to others. I often tell my students: everything about business is about serving others."

The students are given a list of nonprofits that have expressed interest in participating. They must then select an organization, review its current marketing communications process, and provide recommendations for

improvement or extension. Senior Sharna Ebanks' team selected A Paw and a Prayer (APAAP), a volunteer-run dog rescue located in Chattanooga, Tennessee. This organization works to reduce the number of pets sent to shelters by rescuing adoptable dogs and preparing them for adoption with vaccinations, microchipping, heartworm testing, spaying or neutering, and medical treatments.

"The Southern students have been very polite and kind," said Judy Butterfield, APAAP founder. "I appreciate that they are willing to come out and work with us on marketing, because that is not in my skillset."

Ebanks' team began their integrated marketing audit using four different types of analysis: internal and external situational analysis, SWOT analysis,

target audience analysis, and a message-consistency analysis. Next, they established objectives, created a budget, and developed a strategic plan to achieve and implement those objectives using the best forms of media available to APAAP. To conclude, they created a summary including their recommendations and suggestions for how to execute them.

"This experience has refreshed and strengthened my classroom knowledge by allowing me to work with a real client and gain hands-on experience," Ebanks said. "APAAP has a real passion for helping dogs find their forever homes. I'm glad I've been able to play a small part in helping them with their marketing, and I'm excited to see them grow!"

Marketing for Good

Since 2024, Professor Ben Schnell has divided his Principles of Marketing class into teams and given them a special challenge: conduct an on-campus fundraising event for an off-campus organization.

The groups of participating students must host their events at the same time on the same night and compete to see who can raise the most money for Child Impact International (CII), a global nonprofit dedicated to helping vulnerable children through education and rescue initiatives in more than 20 countries.

"Organizing these events serves as a type of capstone project for the course," Schnell said. "Students have to be diligent with time management and incorporate what they have learned about social media marketing, guerrilla marketing, segmentation, targeting, positioning, hype cycles and virality, and consumer behavior."

In the spring of 2025, junior Atlanta McKee's team brainstormed together about what sort of event they should host. First, they considered their target market: their fellow students. They decided sports would be the biggest draw and decided to hold a basketball



Business Professsor Ben Schnell, right, talks with Tony Dennis, sponsorship operations manager for Child Impact International, at the nonprofit's headquarters.

tournament where people could make their own teams and compete for a prize. They strategized about price points, location, and event details. In the end, McKee's team raised approximately \$500 and won the competition. She was proud of how her team pulled the event together and really enjoyed being part of a fundraiser contributing to something bigger than herself.

"As a student, it is easy to feel as if your impact is minimal or non-existent," McKee said, "but getting involved in a fundraiser that can help support a worthy nonprofit can make a huge difference. We are called to serve others, and that is exactly what Child Impact International does."

Last year, CII leader Tom Evans

visited all of the student groups and was impressed by their drive, creativity, and friendly spirit of competition. It was clear to him that they understood this was much more than just another school assignment; it was about making a tangible difference in the lives of children around the world. In three years of holding these events, Schnell's students have raised more than \$13,000.

"It's a valuable experience for business students to support a humanitarian project," Evans said. "This helps nurture a worldview that highlights how we are disciples of Jesus who should make efforts to relieve suffering, wherever it is taking place." ■

by Angela (Ford) Baerg, '06

Work by senior business major Seth Mace, left, will help Jennifer McCallie, middle, and Judy Butterfield, right, improve communications for their nonprofit, A Paw and a Prayer.



celebrating selfless LEADERSHIP

**FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATORS FOR THE CHURCH
OFTEN WORK QUIETLY BEHIND THE SCENES,
BUT THEIR SKILLSET IS CRITICAL. WITHOUT MARGIN,
THERE IS NO MISSION.**

Study room 1206 in the Ruth McKee School of Business is named in honor of the men and women who have faithfully served the Seventh-day Adventist church as financial administrators. The naming is inspired by the life of the late Errol Eder, a financial administrator and ordained Adventist pastor for 37 years. Eder was passionate about growing future financial professionals for service to the denomination. In honor of these often-unrecognized servants, MarketPlace asked pastor Eder's wife, Bonnie—a retired professor for Southern's School of Education, Psychology, and Counseling—to answer a few questions about financial careers within the church.



MarketPlace: We often overlook the financial leadership necessary to run a faith-based organization. But without margin, there is no mission. How have you seen finance careers developed in the church?

Bonnie Eder: Finance begins in the local church, where members volunteer for positions as school treasurers, school and church board members, and fundraising leaders. But there are career positions as well, such as treasurers, auditors, financial officers, and vice presidents of finance. Nonprofit organizations are not synonymous with “no money to manage,” but rather, a loftier goal of funding ministry. Professionals can apply both faith and professional skills by serving as a financial officer within an Adventist organization.

Our church started humbly in the mid-1800s. How did that growth mature into needing professional financial leaders?

Historically, a pastor with some training—and known to be particularly frugal—was asked to carry financial responsibilities. However, as the church has grown and financial decisions have become more complex, professionalism among church financial workers has increased and has come to be appreciated and respected by the entire church. Combining one's professional skills with God's calling on your life can be extremely fulfilling, as it was for my husband.

You mentioned several positions where finance professionals serve within the church. We often think of this as limited to the local conference, but it is broader than that.

Yes, and businessmen and businesswomen are well-equipped to help nonprofits succeed by using their ability in accounting, finance, organization

QA

planning, and management to help organizations work efficiently. Consider the variety of organizations that are a part of the Adventist church: conferences, unions, camps, schools, colleges, hospitals, media ministries, humanitarian organizations, and other ministries.

For example, I was an educator working for the church. Repeatedly, I benefited from the expertise of business-trained individuals on school boards. Their management of administrative budgets and oversight helped ensure that we were protecting and using funds donated by individuals to further Adventist education.

We are a global church with an array of needs. That variety must make for some interesting roles within financial management that might be more diverse and exciting than a job at a traditional financial firm.

Absolutely. Because of the church's dedication to hiring members of our own faith, employers will actively promote professional development opportunities and help employees to become a CPA, complete their MBA, or become certified in trust services. There are other perks, as well. Many financial roles offer travel opportunities, and because of our evangelistic focus, a financial professional can often preach on Sabbath or hold an evangelistic series.

How does the Ruth McKee School of Business help prepare students for a career in finance for our church?

A mission-oriented organization such as the Adventist church continues to seek individuals to join its team who have unquestionable integrity combined with business expertise that is provided through Southern's business training. This isn't just routine finance or business education. Because of Southern's business-as-ministry focus, alumni are prepared to use their talents to help an organization feed the hungry, provide education, or support communities in need. These graduates understand that every spreadsheet, campaign, and budget decision can fuel hope and transform individuals and their communities.

How can working for the church support someone's personal spiritual journey?

Working for a Christian nonprofit means collaborating with people who share your values and vision. The work environment often fosters one's own spiritual growth, compassion, and teamwork. It is fulfilling to see firsthand how your efforts translate into changed lives. Instead of only pursuing profit, you are being driven by a higher purpose—to serve God and others.

What is your hope for the study space in the Ruth McKee School of Business that is dedicated to honoring our church's financial leaders?

I hope students who use this space will be inspired to consider God's call to financial leadership within His church. I want it to remind them of the variety of options available within Adventist organizations for business professionals. Ultimately, choosing a career is about living out your faith in action. It is about redefining success, finding joy in service, and leaving a legacy that matters for eternity.



These current McKee family members—ranging in graduation years from Ellsworth, '54 (middle) to Nathan, '14 (right)—all earned their business degrees from Southern Adventist University.

an INSPIRATION *for* GENERATIONS

RUTH MCKEE'S PEOPLE-FIRST, CHRISTLIKE DECISIONS
IMPACTED BOTH HER BUSINESS AND COUNTLESS SOUTHERN ALUMNI—
INCLUDING 41 MCKEE FAMILY MEMBERS.

Grandma fired him. He was five years old when, on the second day of the yard job, Grandma Ruth again carefully pointed out the poor quality of her grandson's work, gave him a couple of coins for each day, and then said, "There is no need to come to work tomorrow." The kind tone of her voice conveyed that she deeply cared for the young boy she had just fired. Ruth McKee believed in hard work; there were no excuses. But she also believed in taking special care of those in her charge—and that included all of her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and employees.

This fall, Southern Adventist University is honored to put the name of Ruth McKee on its first named academic school: the Ruth McKee School of Business. A pioneering Christian businesswoman who put people before politics and prayer over profit, Ruth set a standard and culture that still guides the McKee Foods Corporation nearly 40 years after her death.

Business Beginnings

When Ruth and her husband, O.D., started what would become the McKee Foods Corporation in 1934, they were just a couple trying to support their young family and make ends meet. Ruth was an educator by training, passionate about education; she had started teaching elementary school before she was even out of high school.

While attending Southern in the 1920s, Ruth never imagined she would become a businesswoman. But even in her first job of picking apples on her parents' farm as young girl, Ruth outpaced the adult pickers. Her energy and natural business sense meant that she fell right into an operational role beside her husband's sales skills as they

Ruth McKee inherently knew the right decisions, even in difficult situations. Once, she paid a higher-than-contracted rate to a vendor, saving their business.

started baking and selling snack cakes, cookies, layer cakes, and pies.

The young company's ties with Southern started in 1957, when a McKee Foods factory opened on the campus and students were invited to work manufacturing lines to help pay off their school bill. Ruth might have been running a company, but she still believed strongly in Christian education, often encouraging and helping her employees to finish their degrees. She also supported that vision for her own family, with 41 McKee family members attending Southern to date.

Natural Leader

Business leadership seemed to come naturally to Ruth. She inherently knew the right decisions, even in difficult situations. Once a supplier called to let the company know that they were struggling to honor their contracted rate. The growing environment that year had meant higher costs. Ruth agreed to pay a higher-than-contracted rate, saving her vendor's business. Years later, when crops were back to regular levels, the vendor returned the favor and gave McKee Foods Corporation a lower-than-market rate. These people-first, Christlike



(Left) Chris McKee, '88, looks across the street toward McKee Foods Corporation headquarters from the fourth-floor boardroom in Southern's new Ruth McKee School of Business.

(Below) O.D. and Ruth McKee purchased King's Bakery on Dodds Avenue in Chattanooga in 1953.

decisions set the standard for the company's operational culture.

Ruth also was not afraid to make unpopular public decisions. In 1953, when she and her husband bought bakery facilities on Dodds Avenue in Chattanooga, she immediately took down the "white" and "colored" water fountain and bathroom signs. There was no segregation for her employees. She stood up for employees in other ways also, personally calling to address a supplier who had been

rude to one of her truck drivers. The vendors knew they would lose contracts if they weren't professional to McKee employees. One vendor said that he had never known anyone who could tell him off so thoroughly in such a kind way. That tough kindness meant that vendors behaved, and employees appreciated being protected.

Financial savvy and confident direction were Ruth's strengths. Once, when an employee was fearful to call and collect on unpaid bills, Ruth reminded her, "When you call somebody about money, always be kind but don't be afraid to ask. They know our terms." This direct approach inspired McKee Foods employees with confidence and elicited respect from those the company called.

Power of Prayer

The power behind Ruth's wisdom, strength, and energy lay in her personal prayer life. She believed that God had His hand over her company, and she consulted Him in decisions often. It wasn't about her way or another employee's way,

but God's way. Ruth prayed for her family (biological and employees), and she asked others to join with her in uplifting each of them to God.

The Ruth McKee School of Business opens its doors to approximately 450 students this fall, making it the second-largest academic area on campus, after nursing. Southern business students repeatedly prove their quality by testing in the 80th and 90th percentile in national business aptitude tests every year. This is the kind of excellence Ruth expected. It's the kind of quality she knew best represented Christ in the marketplace. Through her exceptional quality and leadership, Ruth consistently represented the mission of Christ in the approach to business, a characteristic that lives on in her family members, who have continued her legacy support of Seventh-day Adventist education. Ruth's legacy continues to inspire the next generations of students learning to be missional business leaders.

Ruth's longtime vice president and corporate secretary, Glenn Fuller, said it best: "Ruth was the

engine; God was the power source." It is the McKee family's desire, and Southern's commitment, to ensure that God is the power source behind each of our students as they learn to lead and innovate. ■

by Ellen Hostetler, vice president for Advancement

Ruth McKee's biographical information and anecdotes were taken from McKee Archives—HeritageWerks (2023), *The McKee Conveyor* (1989)—as well as interviews with McKee family members and former employees.



"RUTH WAS THE ENGINE;
GOD WAS THE POWER SOURCE"



EXPLORING VOCATION

**BUSINESS GRADUATE'S FONDNESS FOR TRAVEL SPURS THE
TRANSITION FROM WORK IN LONG-TERM CARE TO THE LAUNCH,
GROWTH OF CAMPSITE RESERVATION COMPANY.**

When Jackie Duffy, '01, studied long-term healthcare as a business student at Southern Adventist University, she had no idea that this career path would lead to the great outdoors. She grew up in a family that spent many weekends camping and backpacking. One family road trip that included her great-grandmother particularly sparked her love for RV travel.

"I saw all of the colors that bloomed in the Alaskan summer, set against the majestic mountains," Duffy said. "I remember lying in bed, watching my dad and brother go fishing at one in the morning because the sun didn't fully set, and recognizing that the world is a beautiful, diverse place that I wanted to explore."

Laying the Foundation

Duffy cherished these experiences but did not see them as relevant to her future career. Back at Southern, she especially appreciated her summer long-term healthcare classes. These courses covered all aspects of managing a large business and then required students to work in a nursing home for several months in each area of operations. Her teachers were executives who were active in their industry and gave students real-life examples of how to translate their book knowledge into real life.

These experiences led to interviews with those executives' companies, which helped her land a position at Adventist Care Centers in 2001. She worked there, and later at Signature Healthcare, for 10 years in human resources. Her varied responsibilities included collaborating with the IT team to build an information system that managed employee data, benefits, payroll, and time-keeping across multiple states.

"It's interesting to see how God works and builds the foundation for things you will need later in life," Duffy said. "I had no idea that helping to brainstorm, test, and work out bugs related to developing software for different time zones and diverse circumstances in the long-term care industry was building a foundational knowledge that would help me later in conversations for my family's own business."

CampLife is Born

At various points throughout Duffy's career, she and her husband, Tyler, assisted family members who were running a small business. These efforts involved frequent travel to remote places across the country for weeks or months at a time, so the Duffys bought a travel trailer to reduce the hassle and expense of living in hotels.

Once they stayed for three months at an unattended campground in West Virginia. There was no staff on site and no place to make payments. They frequently saw people come and stay for the weekend, but there was no way to tell if those campers had reservations or were just squatting.

"My business-minded husband recognized that if these people were not paying for their campsites, then the owners could be operating at a loss," Duffy said.

At that time, airports had recently introduced the concept of the self-service check-in kiosk. Duffy's husband, with a background in mechanical engineering, was inspired to apply the concept of a self-service check-in kiosk to unattended campgrounds. The kiosk was durable enough to withstand the elements and, when paired with control units at each site, would turn on the water and electricity when a camper paid for and checked in at their campsite and then turn them back off at the end of the reservation.

In 2006, the Duffys launched CampLife, under the name Campground Automation Systems, Inc. A year later, they traveled to the national campground owners' annual convention as exhibitors and presented their product. They were received positively by the industry, but campground owners stressed the need for the kiosk to integrate with their current reservation systems to ensure there were no double-bookings.

For the next year and a half, they met with existing reservation software companies in an attempt to integrate (or partner with them toward that goal). None of those endeavors worked out, so in the summer of 2009, they decided to develop their own reservation system instead, building one with the features they wished were available in the market.

"Early on, we were blessed to partner with a few customers who were known to be innovators in the

industry," Duffy said. "They talked to us about their dreams of what an all-in-one management system can do, and then we incorporated that wish list in our strategic planning sessions to see how we could make it a reality."

Demand and Growth

Gradually these strategies have helped CampLife grow from a basic online reservation system to a robust property management system that parks can use to manage all areas of their business, including security gates, maintenance requests, advanced guest communication, sales and inventory of their store, AirBnB reservations, utility management, remote check-in, electronic document storage, and much more. In 2025, they coordinated with 1,000-plus campgrounds and outdoor destinations in North America to book approximately two million reservations.

Today, as the company's vice president, Jackie Duffy's role within the company includes managing human resources, finance, and collaborating on strategic planning. Tyler is the president and visionary, also managing contract negotiation, sales, feature development, and software development. As their business has grown, they have expanded their team, which includes multiple Southern alumni such as sales team member Brandon Reese, '24, and accounts receivable clerk Caroline Dewind, '24.

The Duffys and their teenage children enjoy camping together whenever possible and typically do at least one long RV trip each year to visit their customers, for the purpose of exploring what makes each location unique. They are uncertain what CampLife will look like in 20 years, especially as advancements in artificial intelligence transform the software industry, but their goal is to maintain a close-knit team that provides user-friendly products.

"Starting a business is hard; it's even harder to keep it going when you encounter competition and unexpected changes in the marketplace," Duffy said. "Passion might start a business, but what keeps it going is grit and the motivation of knowing that you are offering a product that is serving others with the skills that God has given you." ■

by Angela (Ford) Baerg, '06

(Facing Page) The Duffys and their three teenage children enjoy weekend camping trips together whenever possible.

TO INVEST OR NOT TO INVEST

**THE QUESTION ATTACHES ITSELF TO MANY LIFE-CHANGING DECISIONS—
EDUCATION, MARRIAGE, BUSINESS VENTURES—AS WE WRESTLE
WITH A TENSION BETWEEN EARTHLY REALITIES AND OUR ABIDING HOPE
IN CHRIST’S SOON RETURN.**

As an 18-year-old considering college, I faced an enormous question: invest in a college education, or enter mission work immediately, given (so I thought) Christ’s imminent second coming.

It was the mid-1970s, and to my 18-year-old mind, the world’s problems seemed overwhelming. Clearly, Christ would come within the next few years—or at most a decade. The United States was at war in Vietnam, the nuclear arms race was at its height, major conflicts taking place in the Middle East suggested Armageddon was at hand, unprecedented economic shocks driven by the oil crisis created instability and stagflation, and the growing world population had us concerned that we, as a planet, may not be able to feed ourselves within the next decade.

Thankfully, I went to college.

As I discovered later, it is biblical to invest in one’s growth and the future.

God created the Earth as a perfect yet incomplete world. He provided all of the resources needed to develop this planet, so that humans could fully live and experience an abundant life. Given the raw materials, God desired for people to design, engineer, build, and implement systems that would provide a fulfilling relational life, which honored and glorified the Creator. Thus, the first God-given assignment to mankind: Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, govern it, work it and watch over it (Genesis 1:28, 2:15).

The stewardship of Earth and its resources—referred to as the cultural mandate, or cultural commission, to complement the gospel commission of Matthew 28:20—has not been withdrawn; it is still an active assignment today. Jesus condemned the steward who attempted to preserve or hide the resources entrusted to him rather than invest and grow them (Matthew 25:14-30). Our stewardship responsibility is to develop and grow the resources under our individual and collective care to bless others and honor God.

This principle applies to relationships, economic and financial resources, skills and abilities, the Earth, and to everything else under our care.

Abundance and Scarcity

The introduction of sin brought restrictions and uncertainty. In a sin-scarred world, we experience times of plenty and times of famine. Countries and businesses cycle through periods of economic recession and growth. The land experiences droughts and floods. Over a lifetime, individuals experience seasons of surplus as well as deprivation. A most notable time of scarcity for us as individuals is the latter years of life, when physical strength and endurance wane, mental capacity dwindles, and income from work declines.

How does the Christian prepare for lean times? Scripture directs us to look at the ant, which harvests food during the abundance of summer to provide for the



“LORD, THY POUND HATH GAINED TEN POUNDS.”

bleak days of winter (Proverbs 6:6-8), just as the virtuous women does (Proverbs 31:21). Joseph, guided by God, recommended the same (Genesis 41) approach to pharaoh to save the people of Egypt and, unexpectedly, his own family from famine. Solomon considers those who retain resources for the future to be wise (Proverbs 21:20). Paul considers someone who does not provide for themselves and their household to be an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8).

Our stewardship responsibility within the context of the cultural mandate after the entry of sin includes that we plan and invest to provide for ourselves and others during times of scarcity and uncertainty.

Faithfulness to God

A third scriptural principle is faithfulness to God, the Owner, as we, as stewards, execute the cultural mandate. Who is blessed in our stewardship of resources is an important matter. Jesus warned against a selfish focus in the parable of the rich man with surplus, who enlarged his barns (Luke 12:14-21) to store up things for himself without being “rich toward God.”

The third angel’s message (Revelation 14:9-13) is a call for faithfulness to God and keeping His commands, including the cultural mandate, amid challenges and chaos. In the parable of separating the goats and sheep (Matthew 25:31-46), Jesus illustrates that faithfulness to God includes showing care to the marginalized and needy of our community and society. Faithfulness to God means recognizing our continued dependence on God’s grace and provision as we care for ourselves, our family, and others in need.

These God-given mandates call us to faithfully develop and grow our God-endowed resources—in all of their forms—to meet our present and future needs while blessing others and honoring God. This is the basis for how we can live as if Christ’s return will be tomorrow, while we plan to fill, work, and care for Earth in the coming years. ■

by Braam Oberholster, DBA, retired Southern business professor

Numbers & Notes



Bill Richards (seated) frequently opens his home for others to join him in musical worship.

When registering at Southern Missionary College as a freshman in 1967, I chose accounting as a major because it was what my father studied when he attended. Although career choices frequently benefit from more robust reasoning, the outcome has served me well.

All of my Southern business courses were taught by Professors Wayne VandeVere and Cecil Rolfe; it was a two-person department in those days. Thanks to persistent, nudging from the late Larry Hanson, I also declared a math minor—advice I recommend to all. The years went by quickly and, with VandeVere’s help, I was accepted into graduate school at Michigan State University.

FORMER PROFESSOR BILL RICHARDS EMBRACES INTERSECTIONS OF ACCOUNTING, MATH, AND MUSIC THAT KEEP HIS MIND ACTIVE LONG AFTER RETIREMENT.

Pursuing a doctorate in accounting expanded my horizons in several ways. I learned COBOL, FORTRAN, and BASIC, three of the earliest programming languages, while growing in the understanding that accounting is far more than balancing debits and credits. Academic accountants debated various theories behind financial reporting with great vigor, courses were highly challenging, and I enjoyed every class. One reason I enjoyed pursuing my degree was because I felt prepared; my math minor from Southern was greatly beneficial as I took highly quantitative doctoral preliminary exams in economics and statistics.

But studying accounting and math were not the only ways I invested my time as a student. While at Southern, I accompanied the choir and senior vocal recitals on the piano, played the saxophone in the band, and took a few organ lessons. I continued to enjoy music during graduate school and played both organ and piano for the University Seventh-day Adventist Church in East Lansing, Michigan.

New Beginnings

After briefly teaching elsewhere, I soon returned to Southern as a professor and attempted to hold myself to the same high standards I required of students. Evonne, my wife of more than 50 years, can testify to countless Saturday nights and Sundays spent preparing or grading exams.

After a decade of teaching, McKee Foods Corporation gave me an opportunity to try something different: developing software to solve a variety of business needs. I thoroughly enjoyed this related work (and not being hampered by arbitrary GAAP pronouncements or tax code regulations).

30 years later, I did what most people call ‘retire’—and my musical

life accelerated. I began collecting hymn-based arrangements for organ and piano, but I could not stop there. Leaning into both my academic and professional habits, I began designing a database schema to capture the complex relationships of texts, tunes, composers, authors, meters, hymnals, and instruments. Currently there are nearly 70,000 hymn arrangements in this library and more than 250 hymnals. Things we love are best shared, so once a month Evonne and I open our home to a group of Christians who gather around the piano and sing while I play.

Shared Processes

My interest and skills associated with music are not a product of coincidence. Studies consistently show a strong correlation between musical training and success in science, technology, engineering, and math fields (STEM). This connection is likely the result of shared cognitive processes, as both music and science involve pattern recognition, systematic thinking, logical frameworks, analytical creativity, and mathematical

structures. This was anecdotally on display at a recent President’s Concert hosted by Southern where more than half of the excellent student musicians were STEM majors, mostly pre-med. The Ruth McKee School of Business was represented by a finance major.

For example, the science behind these instruments fascinates me and helps my mind stay sharp. Sometimes referred to as a “visual calculator,” the piano is often considered the gold standard for developing math-related skills because of its linear and spatial layout. It develops three specific skills that translate to other areas of science:

- **Spatial Reasoning:** Players must translate vertical notes on a staff to horizontal positions on the keyboard, strengthening the spatial-temporal skills required for geometry and calculus.

- **Visualizing Fractions:** Because the keyboard shows the physical distance between notes, concepts such as intervals and chords help students visualize ratios.

- **Dual-Processing:** Playing with both hands simultaneously and reading two different clefs (treble and bass) enhances cognitive flexibility more effectively than single-line instruments.

Music has augmented every aspect of my life, making me a better programmer, a better thinker, and even a better accountant. Some of the students I taught are approaching retirement age and I challenge them, just as I did in the classroom, to pursue their passions, do their best, never stop exploring, and maybe even pick up an instrument or sit down at a keyboard!

Playing the organ and piano not only provides our brains with continual challenges, but also—given appropriate application—allows us to serve God and others by turning hearts toward Heaven. ■

by Bill Richards, PhD, former Southern professor

the business of belonging

According to our family story, one of Dad’s mentors, Southern professor Ralph Davidson, helped initiate an invitation to the young Wayne VandeVere in 1956 to help build the school’s Business Department. His wife, Evelyn, agreed to move south for a few years, assuming that they would then head back to Michigan, home to them both. Neither dreamed that they, their four children, the Business Department, and the school would grow together for the next five decades.

As the third child born to Wayne and Evie, I missed his first few busy years of teaching too many classes and juggling the many other activities of developing the Business Department. My first memories of Dad at work centered around the various spaces from which he worked. Each office held a certain intrigue, probably because we children did not often get to visit or hang out. As a naturally neat accountant, Dad’s offices were inevitably well-lit and well-organized. I loved visiting him at work.

Several dark green metal, three-drawer file cabinets especially caught my eye. A swish of the side glides when a drawer opened revealed seemingly hundreds of manila folders that held what I assumed must be incredibly important information. Even standing on my tiptoes, however, I could not read the neatly written labels of the packed files kept in the top drawers. In one early office at the top of Lynn Wood Hall’s mountain of steps, a large, frosted glass window and heavy doorknobs made me feel a little uncertain whether I had chosen the right place to enter. Relief felt sweet when I heard his hearty, “Hello there! Come in. You can sit in my chair.”

WAYNE VANDEVERE HELPED DEVELOP SOUTHERN’S BUSINESS PROGRAM, AND MEMORIES OF HIS CAMPUS “HOME” STILL SHAPE HOW FAMILY REMEMBER THESE EARLY, PIVOTAL YEARS.

Growing Together

As Southern’s Business Department grew, the addition of more majors and more professors led to a need for important renovations. Afterward, the department looked quite modern to me, lined with light-filled offices featuring sleek credenzas and large bookcases for my dad and the other professors. Corrugated wall dividers marked office cubicles and classrooms.

In Dad’s office, I loved seeing a framed black-and-white picture of my mom, looking young and demure in her floral dress with a gracefully draped neckline. The photo received its own shelf. Another shelf held a small, clear acrylic cube with a suspended silver medal that honored my dad for receiving the state’s highest score on the CPA exam. Sometimes, the click-click-clicks of the adding machine’s keys made background noise as Dad’s fingers flew, and I watched the narrow roll of paper filled with numbers grow longer. Sometimes, I got to tear off the paper when he finished a calculation!

Young Jodi VandeVere visits her father, Wayne, at the Business Department table during Registration Day in Southern’s gymnasium.

Many years later, Dad moved into his final office on the third floor in the new Brock Hall, with its red brick exterior. The spacious lobby for office managers and students and tall, built-in shelves became a place for hundreds of business students, staff, and professors to participate in the business of Adventist education.

Part of the Team

Before individual advising and online registration, the official Registration Day seemed the most exciting time of the school year. Hundreds of students streamed into the gym, looking for their department’s sign in the line of tables where professors waited to help them fill in their green and white registration forms. Knotty problems required negotiations with professors at other tables or even a consultation with Mary Elam, the registrar.

Walking down the sidewalk after school from A.W. Spalding to Southern’s gym, I enjoyed threading my way through the many groups of people and maze of tables until I found Dad at the Business Department’s location. I felt special when he stopped to introduce me to his colleagues there. The weight of the tasks that occurred in his office multiplied exponentially during registration, as the entire faculty, staff, and student body figured out schedules and routines at one place and in such a condensed amount of time.

I never traveled on Business Department field trips to the Corvette factory or conventions—including one extra-exciting meeting in New Orleans during Mardi Gras—but Dad did take me to a day of meetings closer to home. I do

not remember anything about the conference except how important I felt going with him on official business.

The Business Department enjoyed many faculty and student gatherings at the Student Park or, more frequently, in our family’s backyard on Green Meadow Lane in the Pierson Drive neighborhood, near where the Southern Village apartments are now located. Mom cooked pans of spaghetti in her largest pot, and we children helped by buttering garlic bread, making salad, or pouring Hawaiian Punch into waxy Dixie cups. On Saturday game nights, Dad held forth in the middle of a large circle of students, leading out in loud games of Prince of Paris. Faculty evenings often began with fruit salad and popcorn and ended with discussions before playing many lively rounds of Pit, Aw Shucks, or Rook.

Departmental Family

As faculty, staff, and students in the Ruth McKee School of Business adapt to their new home—including the dean’s conference room named in honor of Dad—I am confident that kindness and camaraderie will remain central to the work at hand.

Although not every business major has the privilege of interacting with their biological family on campus, I pray that the hospitality and patience I witnessed in my father’s work with students will continue to be modeled in decades to come as new employees take up the mantle of leadership. ■

by Jodi (VandeVere) Ruf, ’83, associate professor for the English Department

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