

Donors respond to budget crunch

By **BILL MANNY**
Of the Emerald

These may be tough times for tuition-paying students and tax-paying citizens. But bad times can be good times for fund raisers.

"People can see an obvious need," says Doug Wilson, whose job as executive director of the University Foundation includes telling potential donors just how bad times are for higher education.

Pleas that have gone unheeded in better times are being heard today, and donations have taken a remarkable upturn since Wilson became head of the foundation in June of 1979.

The number of donors has doubled in the past 18 months, and foundation assets have increased 50 percent in the same time.

Events and news stories, along with information from the University, have shown the public "that we really do need support," Wilson explains. "And our requests are being heard."

In times of hardship, fund-raising success becomes more important — and every dollar becomes more difficult.

"We'll have to work even harder," Wilson says. "The competition will be extra keen just in higher education."

The University's art museum was built with volunteer time and dollars during the Depression, Wilson notes. So universities don't have to stand still each time the nation's economy dips.

But bad times aren't the only reason for the foundation's success. The foundation's "systematic form of asking people for their support," has helped immensely.

"We've been more direct in getting out our needs and taking our case to our friends," Wilson says.

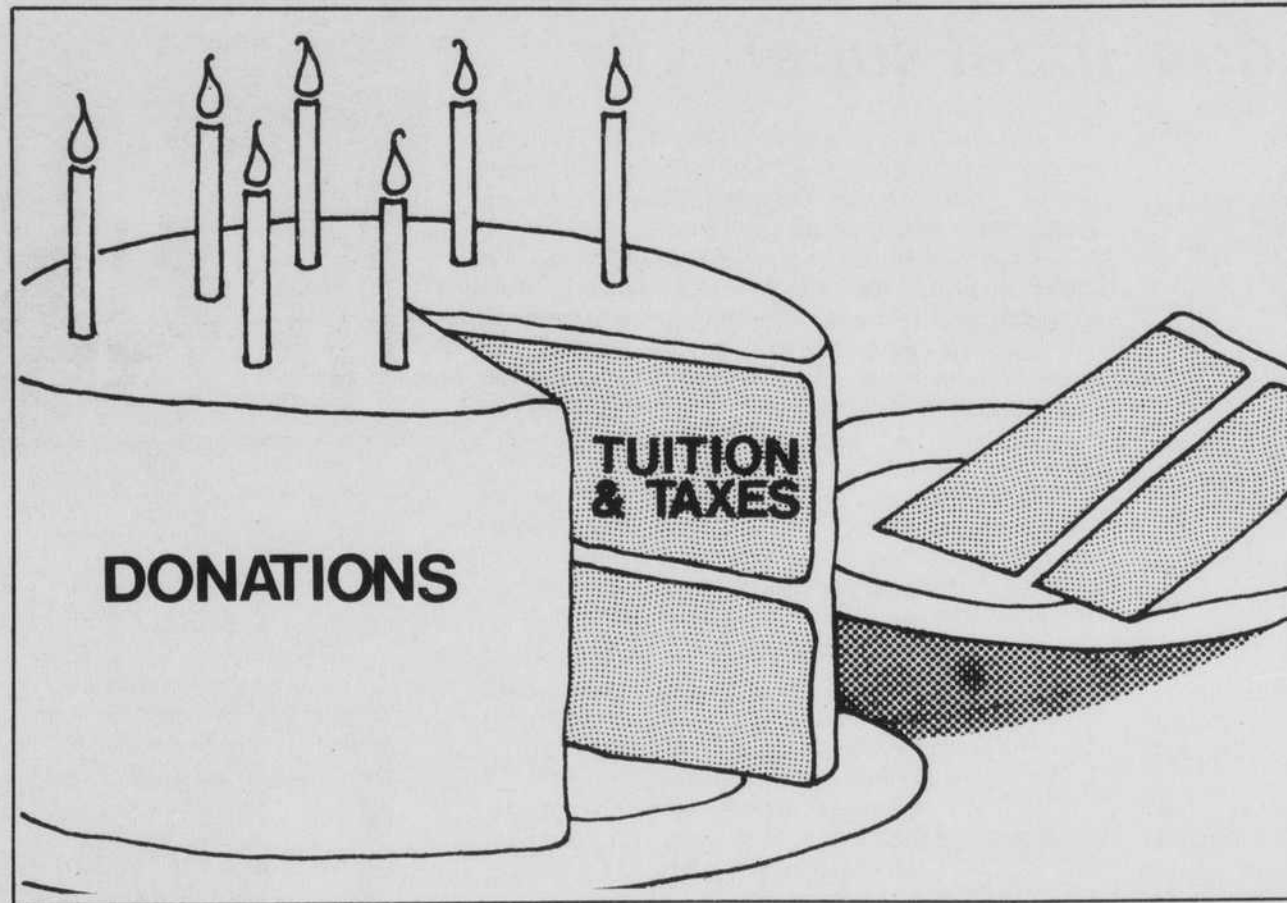
The foundation has centralized fund raising, coordinating the efforts of each department, school and facility into one cogent plan to avoid confusing, alienating or offending potential donors.

The funding of a university is much like a birthday cake, Wilson says. Tuition and tax dollars provide the majority of funding, the cake itself.

The donations a university collects constitute the icing. And that occasional special gift — money for a building addition, an academic chair, the donation of a large chunk of valuable property — becomes the candles burning on top.

Frosting that cake — and hopefully sticking in a candle once in a while — is Wilson's

Foundation funds increase 50%



Graphic by Sioux Anderson

job.

As executive director, Wilson oversees a staff of 13, a budget of several hundred thousand dollars and the 600 individual accounts maintained by the foundation.

To reach donors, the foundation mails out 300,000 pieces of mail each year.

Wilson has worked almost exclusively in alumni relations and fund-raising since he graduated from Miami University with a master's degree in 1965.

A 45-member trustee board along with ex-officio members has legal responsibility for the foundation's \$10 million in assets and some \$3 million more a year in "currently expendable" income.

Raising funds at the University is a three-pronged scheme, Wilson says, and money flows into the foundation through three primary routes.

Young alumni receive the magazine and are asked to start with a small contribution to "just be a part." They are asked to give whatever they can, and are thanked for what they can give.

Beginning early with personal appeals helps create a broad base of support and establishes what the foundation hopes will be a life-long friendship, Wilson says.

"The most important gift a person gives is the first. They cross the threshold — and it's one they cross mentally before crossing financially."

And those \$5 and \$10 donations add up. With 3,500 to 4,000 yearly graduates, small donations can amount to quite a lot. Still, Wilson notes, 10 percent of the donors contribute 80 to 90 percent of all donations.

Small donors are asked the next year to be bigger donors. In a few years they're encouraged to donate annually. Still later, donors contributing \$25 to \$99 are encouraged to join the \$100 Century Club.

Giving clubs are the second level for University donations. Donors to the yearly Century and Pioneer (\$500) Clubs can specify where half their donations go. The other half goes into the foundation and is "used wherever the need is greatest."

Presidents Associates — the elite of University donors — can specify the entire amount of donations. Donations upwards of \$5,000 qualify donors to become permanent associates. About 90 percent of all donations are specified, Wilson says.

Club giving is specifically designed to encourage donors to increase their donations, Wilson says.

The final of the three approaches is deferred giving — through wills, bequests or life insurance.

Getting involved in people's posthumous plans can be a sensitive part of the job, Wilson concedes.

"It's a terribly personal thing. Some people just don't want to think about it."

But a little information has convinced a lot of people that giving after they've died can pay off during their lifetime, Wilson says.

U.S. tax laws that allow tax deduction of deferred donations during the life of the donor over five years is a great way to beat inheritance tax, capital gains tax and inflation.

And when potential donors consider the legacy they leave the University, Wilson says, donations can be a consideration.

Donors come to the University in a number of ways, but nothing promotes contact with the University more than athletics.

Curt Simic, vice president for public affairs, says that more people look into the University through the athletic window than any other.

But Wilson doesn't see sports as the foundation's hope. Now he's concentrating on "computerizing" the foundation's mailing and appeal system to save materials and time. The first step will be completed in September, and the computers will allow the foundation to target potential donors even more personally.

Targeting donors, making pitches, asking for money. Does one in Wilson's position ever feel he's exploiting the "University's friends?"

"What I've tried to do is not raise money," Wilson explains, "but participate in building a better University."

"Raising money for the sake of raising money is pretty cold. But having a belief in the role and the importance of higher education — that's the reason."




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