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Office of University Communications

December 14, 2019



John J. Godbold Jr. Receives Doctor of Humane Letters Degree During Fall Commencement



BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Gardner-Webb University bestowed its highest recognition of merit, the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree, to John J. Godbold Jr. during Fall Commencement Exercises on Saturday, Dec. 14.

The GWU Godbold School of Business is named after Godbold and his wife Linda. A distinguished business entrepreneur from Rock Hill, S.C., Godbold and his wife gave a multi-million dollar gift to Gardner-Webb in 2008 to establish the school and a pledge of annual support. In addition to funding enhancements for the school and development opportunities for the faculty, the donation provided four student scholarships presented annually to business majors.

“John and his wife, Linda, have been tremendously generous to our University,” GWU President Dr. William M. Downs stated before bestowing the honor. “They have provided leadership and counsel, which have contributed greatly to the success of our business programs. We are grateful for his vision and for his commitment to future generations of business leaders and management professionals.”

No stranger to the world of business, Godbold graduated from the University of South Carolina (Columbia) with a degree in marketing and spent more than five decades of his life in the banking industry, including 17 years in Cleveland County, N.C. He founded Carolina State Bank in 1989 and at that time began his relationship with Gardner-Webb.

“I’ve always been impressed with Gardner-Webb and its leadership and the position it has taken in the community and the region,” Godbold has said about his support of the University. “We know investing our money in a Christ-centered school like Gardner-Webb makes a difference and will multiply and help a lot of people. This gives us an opportunity to invest in education and it also gives us an opportunity to give back to the community that was so good to us.”

Godbold also played an important role in creating the Merry-Go-Round Festival in Shelby, N.C., an annual event that began in 1998 at the City Park to celebrate the restoration of Shelby's antique Carousel. Godbold was co-founder with the late Jim Allen and served as co-chairman of the festival and its honor awards program. He was also the founder of "Come See Me" in his hometown of Rock Hill. The festival showcases the city and since 1962 has grown from a weekend event to 10 days of food, music, sports and fun.

Since 1971, GWU has presented honorary doctorates in various disciplines to more than 60 deserving individuals, including O. Max Gardner, Fay Webb Gardner, Johnny Cash, Earl Scruggs, and more. The practice of awarding honorary doctorate degrees dates back to the 15th century. In the latter part of the 16th century, the practice became common at Oxford and Cambridge universities in England.

Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university. Gardner-Webb emphasizes a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics to prepare students to become effective leaders within the global community. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.