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BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—For decades, a volunteer group has helped ease the transition for new Gardner-Webb students who move onto the University’s main campus. The Bulldog Movers are among the first to greet students and their families during orientation weekend each August.

Dozens of faculty, staff and student volunteers carry boxes, suitcases and bags from cars to campus residences, providing helping hands and a friendly welcome to the newest members of the Gardner-Webb community.

“The emphasis for Bulldog Movers is on reducing the stress of what is ultimately a very stressful day for students and their families,” shares John Johnson, GWU Director of Housing and Residence Education. “The Bulldog Movers help students complete the unloading of their belongings quickly, giving them time to set up their residence space, spend time with their families and meet people on campus, instead of worrying about getting luggage into the rooms.”

Dr. Tracy Jessup, GWU Vice President for Christian Life and Service and Senior Minister to the University, has experienced the positive impact of the Bulldog Movers program as both the parent of a Gardner-Webb student and as a staff member and a longtime volunteer. “It is our hope that the presence of Bulldog Movers reflects the presence of Christ,” Jessup offers. “While it is an exciting time for new students and their parents, it can also be a stressful and emotional time. Through our service, we hope to reduce that stress.”

Volunteers gather early on freshmen move-in day to organize, share a Christian devotional, and discuss the services they will provide. The Bulldog Movers serve each year as an active example of Gardner-Webb’s continuous commitment to community and service, said Neal Payne, GWU Associate Minister to the University for Student Ministries. “As a Christian university, we remind our volunteers they are one of the first contacts with these people moving in,” Payne reflects. “Some students fit right in, while some are nervous. Movers are a witness to those students and their parents, encouraging them, and serving them.”

Volunteers are an integral part of the culture at Gardner-Webb, and the Bulldog Movers offer comfort and peace to new members of the GWU family, relates Jessica Herndon, director of First-Year Programs. “Many first-year students struggle with loneliness and feeling accepted, so making connections with faculty, staff and students during the first moments of their arrival is so important,” Herndon assesses. “It shows new students and families that we care and are truly excited for their arrival.”

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University provides exceptional educational opportunities within a Christian environment, preparing students to think critically, to succeed professionally, and to serve faithfully as members of their local and global communities.