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All in for Wesleyan!

Tim Obermiller

Illinois Wesleyan University, iwumag@iwu.edu

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All in for Wesleyan!

Titan enthusiasm carries the day to meet historic challenge.

July 17, 2013, was the day Titan giving went viral.

“All in for Wesleyan” began with a challenge gift by John ’82 and Joann Horton in which the couple committed to provide a \$100,000 gift for student scholarships and financial aid if others contributed \$50,000 by day’s end.

As word spread about the Hortons’ challenge, other alumni offered their own challenges, including Howard ’60 and Sharon Fricke ’60, who pledged a \$10,000 gift if 600 gifts were made. That challenge was met before 1 p.m. Several more alumni challenges followed and were met by alumni and friends.

By day’s end, 2,475 donors had participated in the challenge (1,924 were alumni), with approximately \$480,000 raised. Among those giving were 302 people who made their first-ever gift to IWU. Seventy-four members of the Class of 2013 gave as brand-new graduates and 37 underclassmen also gave to the “All In” challenge.



Humorous memes like the one above, featuring Assistant Professor of Sociology Meghan Burke, were created by University staff and alumni to encourage the IWU community in meeting each of the day’s challenges.

Jeff Mavros ’98, who heads the University’s [Wesleyan Fund for Annual Giving](#), looks back on what happened that day with a sense of awe and gratitude. What impressed him most was the real love for the institution that was conveyed by participants, who took on the challenges and made them their own, spreading the word through Facebook and Twitter as well as via phone and text messages.

“We ended up calling it a kind of virtual Homecoming, in retrospect,” says Mavros. “We were really hoping to see a groundswell of support and watch it grow kind of organically, but it exceeded our expectations in just the positivity that was shared online. Never before has there been a forum for so many people to share in this way, and social media has changed the game in that regard.

“It allowed people a chance to share with other members of the extended community how they felt about Illinois Wesleyan and what it means in their life,” Mavros adds. “That’s what the day became about, and it was incredible to watch the dollar total rise and see as many people get involved as possible — but it was even more special to see everyone’s love of Illinois Wesleyan come out on one day and have everybody share in that.”

President Richard F. Wilson was vacationing in Barcelona with his wife, Pat, “so we were roughly seven hours ahead of central time, and we were watching the challenge begin in mid-afternoon,” he recalls. His excitement grew as he received encouraging text updates. By nightfall, Barcelona-time, Wilson says he gave up all hope for sleep as he couldn’t resist checking his phone every few minutes to see what progress had been made.

“One of the reasons we were as successful as we were,” Wilson notes, “is that we determined in advance that all of the money raised in this challenge would be used to support the students. And I think that idea resounded with alumni and friends, because they wanted to make a gift, and I think it made them feel really good that it was going to help students who either were at Wesleyan or would be coming to Wesleyan in the future.”

Wilson adds that more than 200 IWU faculty and staff also made gifts that day, “and that’s a significant amount of people on the campus who caught the spirit and joined in this challenge.”

Other alumni who joined in making challenge gifts were Ed ’62 and Lin Phelps, who offered \$25,000 if over 1,000 gifts were made (a mark that was reached before 3 p.m.). Korey ’00 and Heidi Coon offered the next challenge of \$15,000 if the number of donors reached 1,200. That threshold was reached, and yet another challenge came through after 5 p.m. when Mike Sombeck ’83 offered a gift of \$25,000 if the number of donors reached 1,500.

Two more families, energized by the overwhelming response they had witnessed during the day, made their own challenges that ended the one-day of giving on a high note. Randy ’73 and Jodie Reed offered \$25,000 and Ed ’62 and Lin Phelps added \$10,000 more to match every new gift, dollar for dollar, up to a total of \$35,000 for gifts received before midnight.

“It was amazing to be at the epicenter of this day,” says Mavros. “Watching it unfold was without a doubt the best day of my professional career.

“It was a day where there was no distinction between love for the institution and financial support of its mission. It was about everybody doing their part and that was enough. That helped move the meter forward. So the impact was far and wide, and will be felt for some time here on campus.

“You’d be surprised,” Mavros adds, “how many people are coming up to me to talk about the challenge and to ask, ‘When is the next one?’”

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