

NEWS & NOTES

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help. She's always supported me. During my years with the TeleCable division of Landmark Communications, which later became an independent company, she was always by my side. Together we raised three daughters. Now we have five grandchildren, and Shirley is still by my side.

I hear people at JMU talking about student success, and I think that takes the same kind of commitment Shirley has always made to me. That's what I see in the faculty at JMU.

I have always told my people never to say "never." But I'm breaking my own rule here because I have never — never — heard any student say anything other than "I love it here at JMU." I especially listened to the boys — 18- and 19-year-olds can be cynical. And even they love it here. That's what I've heard since Shirley and I have engaged with JMU after coming to her 50th reunion in 2006.

Those words "I really love it here" struck me. Then I read in *Madison* magazine a



"Student success takes the same kind of commitment Shirley has always made to me," says Roberts, here with Shirley ('56) outside their Virginia Beach home.

student saying, "I can call my professor at 8 o'clock at night, and he will talk with me." There has to be a reason.

It has a lot to do with the commitment of the faculty at JMU. It's a unique difference

from what I have seen at other large universities. I bet there isn't another one on the scope of JMU in this country where professors make themselves so available.

JMU has not deviated from the teaching experience that it valued when Shirley graduated with her teaching degree. That teaching experience — that closeness of the faculty and staff with students — is so unique that it deserves to be fertilized.

That's what Shirley and I hope our gift will do — fertilize the rich relationships that develop here. It takes a special kind of person to be so committed. I learned that from Shirley.

I recognize something else, too, that's special about JMU, and that's something I learned in business.

I had a life-changing experience in my business when I was 50 years old. During a deep depression, I had to change my *modus operandi*. Instead of giving orders, as I had

Madison had it right all along

Ever since President Alger started asking students, professors, alumni and parents what makes JMU unique and superior, the response has been resounding: students' close relationships with professors.

Group after group turned out to talk to the president on his Why Madison? Listening Tour, exhorting him to preserve and cultivate that distinctive element of the Madison Experience. Then, last summer, a national Gallup/Purdue poll reported that student engagement with superior faculty is the No. 1 factor leading to alumni success and sense of well-being later in life. As Alger quipped, "Madison had it right all along."

Today, that faculty-student dynamic is at the heart of the Madison Plan (www.jmu.edu/jmuplans), the document that charts JMU's strategic vision for the future.

More alumni are recognizing the profound role Madison professors have played in their lives by making private gifts to JMU for faculty support.

One of them is Sarah Miller Luck ('14, '15M), who celebrated her graduation last spring by surprising her professor, John Almarode, with the establishment of an endowed professorship in his honor, the Sarah Miller Luck ('14, '15) Endowed Professorship for Excellence in Education. "He has seen me throughout the program, as adviser, teacher and supervisor," Luck said. "I hope to impact my students in these same ways. Teachers are what make the College of Education exceptional." Another is the Brown family, including parents Mike and Susan ('84) and daughter Katherine, valedictorian of



Sarah Miller Luck with College of Education faculty member John Almarode.

the Class of 2013. They have established the Dave Pruett Faculty Support Endowment in Teaching Excellence to recognize Katherine's "inspirational" math and honors professor at JMU.

The generosity of Luck, the Browns and other donors provides resources to help recruit and retain top-caliber professors who care about their students.

'He has seen me throughout the program, as adviser, teacher and supervisor. I hope to impact my students in these same ways. Teachers are what make the College of Education exceptional.' — SARAH MILLER LUCK ('14, '15M)