UC Alum Inspires Deeper Understanding of True Giving

By: Desiré Bennett

Aerospace Graduate Tom Byar lives a simple lifestyle so he can give back to his alma-mater through a scholarship fund for undergraduate students.

Tom Byar’s dedication to the college is exhibited through an extraordinary pattern of philanthropy.

In 2007, he established the Knowlson and Irene Byar Endowed Scholarship Fund for undergraduate aerospace students in recognition of his deceased parents.

Knowlson, Tom’s father, was a design engineer at the American Tool Works Company. Byar says that it is his mother Irene, a graduate of Bethesda Nursing School, who instilled his spirit of giving.

“I think it maybe originated a little bit with my mother. We weren’t rich people – just your normal everyday folks,” he said. “But I remember every year she would support charitable organizations. It was one thing that she liked and thought that it should be done.”

Byar started the scholarship fund, he says, because “I had some assets that were appreciating and I wanted them to be meaningful. A need-based scholarship fund for undergraduates seemed like a good way for that money to be used,” he said. “I want to be able to help out a lot of students because the financial burden is quite high on the students these days.”

Byar, who is a University of Cincinnati aerospace graduate, retired nearly 20 years ago from working on aircraft external structural loads during a 36 year
career at the North American Aircraft Division of Rockwell International (now Boeing) in California, where Byar still happily lives.

“It doesn’t take much to make me happy. I don’t need a large house or anything, but of course it’s easy to be happy here in Los Angeles,” he laughs. “I have an apartment to live in and hot and cold running water, refrigeration, and food – yes, I could have a big house and all of the lavish money-wasting [things], but that would just be a waste of money.”

University of Cincinnati President Santa J. Ono praised Byar’s gift of giving saying, “[Byar’s] gifts toward the Knowlson and Irene Byar Endowed Scholarship Fund will ensure that talented aerospace engineering students in their last three years of college with financial need thrive in their education to become the leaders of tomorrow, and help pave the way for their successful entry into the profession.”

Byar, who exemplifies altruism, believes that it is important to give back and is steadfast in his spirit of giving. “Once you decide that giving is something you want to do, it is only a short step to the realization that anything worth giving to is worth giving to repeatedly.”

Tom Byar with mechanical engineering student Rebecca Matthews.