

Silver Spur 2013 Comments

What an amazing video! I can't think of a more perfect tribute to a very deserving couple.

Good evening, everyone. My name is Dianne Van Hook and I have the privilege of serving as chancellor of College of the Canyons. And tonight, it is my honor to bestow on Barry and Pati Gump the Silver Spur Award for Community Service.

I love watching the videos every year that our Public Information Office produces. The life stories of our honorees are always amazing. Plus it's fun to reminisce about the eras we've all lived through as represented by the styles and fashions that have come and gone. Times changes, of course, and whether we realize it or not, the times in which we live change us. Our lives reflect the eras in which we came of age.

The doo wop sounds of the 1950s not only set the teenage feet of Barry and Pati moving at school dances. But the vocal harmonies and upbeat lyrics of groups like The Coasters, The Drifters, The Del-Vikings, The Chiffons, and The Platters also provided the soundtrack for a postwar era that exuded American optimism, confidence, enthusiasm, and opportunity. Those same themes and character qualities are woven throughout the story of the Gumps, from serving in the military, to raising their family, to building a business.

Not every story makes the video, of course. And one from 2003 also offers a unique insight into our honorees. I was walking out of the office on my way across campus. I swung open the door and nearly ran into Barry. I certainly wasn't expecting to see him. But he was there to see me. He said he had something he wanted to drop off.

I had met with him some months before in his office and shared with him our college's plans to build the University Center – a first-of-its-kind facility that would make degrees from four-year colleges and universities available on our campus at College of the Canyons. Barry and I had talked more about the project as we saw each other around town. But I had no idea what was coming next.

He handed me an envelope and said, “Here’s the first half. We’ll get you the rest when we can.” The envelope contained a check from him and Pati. It was a substantial contribution that represented their commitment to naming a University Center computer classroom in honor of their company.

To me, that brief interaction says so much about Barry and Pati. It captures the essence of who they are and the manner in which they conduct themselves. Selfless. Committed. Humble. They see a need and they meet it, not to draw attention to themselves, but because they can make a difference. When I think of Barry and Pati – their family, their business, and their service to the community – this is what comes to mind: Doing the right thing. And doing it all the time.

And that’s why we’re here tonight. To pay tribute to Barry and Pati, a couple, who for almost five decades, has modeled for us what it means to do the right thing for the right reasons. We are here to honor what they do for our college and our community. Because acknowledging their service, their commitment, and their selflessness is the right thing to do.

As I was watching the Super Bowl this year, I instantly thought of Barry and Pati when I saw the truck commercial based on Paul Harvey's "So God Made a Farmer" speech. If you haven't seen it, go home tonight, find it on You Tube, and watch it.

Farmers represent our American ideals of hard work, commitment, sacrifice, and ultimately, success. In the same way, Barry and Pati represent the best of Santa Clarita. And, they evidence the same noble spirit so eloquently captured in that commercial. The steadfast commitment to doing whatever needs to be done, because it needs to be done, regardless of the effort involved to see it through.

The two-minute monologue at the heart of that commercial opens with "God looked down on the his planned paradise and said, 'I need a caretaker.' So God made a farmer."

It continues with, "God said, 'I need somebody willing to get up before dawn, milk cows, work all day in the field, milk cows again, eat supper, then go to town and stay past midnight at a meeting of the school board.'"

If you didn't grow up in a small town, you might wonder what school boards have to do with farming. But consider for a moment what life is like in a small town. There is just as much to do there as any place else. But not as many people to do it. So everyone wears multiple hats. They make a living during the day, then make a life for themselves and their neighbors at night and on the weekends through their selfless service to the community. They do what needs to be done, especially if it's something that benefits the whole community and creates opportunity for those who need it.

That spirit of service is alive and well in Santa Clarita. We're not a small town, but people here are willing to lend a hand. They come through, even when the request is so inconvenient that you feel bad asking for help. When you do ask, you find people will be there for you when you need them most – especially Barry and Pati Gump.

When we launched our first bond campaign at College of the Canyons in the Fall of 2001, we were presented with an opportunity that seemed impossible to capitalize on. We needed furniture for our campaign headquarters. We found some at the right price – free – but it was in a warehouse near East L.A. And if we wanted it, we had to pick it up by Friday night – no exceptions. It was then or never.

You can probably guess how this story ends.

- With Barry driving the truck himself down to L.A. after a full day of work.
- Filling it with our furniture.
- Then driving back to the Commerce Center in Castaic where he helped to unload it.

He did so without hesitation, willingly investing in our potential.

Without a functioning office, we would not have had a place to conduct our campaign, pass our bond, build new facilities, and create the Canyon Country Campus. A simple, selfless act, yet one that yielded immeasurable impact.

Leadership, responsibility, selflessness and consistency of purpose are defining characteristics of Barry and Pati. They are characteristics honed by life experience. Helen Keller said that, “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.” As a result, Barry and Pati have generously supported numerous community organizations in Santa Clarita, and dedicated themselves to raising millions of dollars to fight cystic fibrosis and finally find a cure for something that caused them such heartache. They take it upon themselves to help because it’s the right thing to do.

At College of the Canyons, we are particularly grateful for Barry and Pati’s support of the University Center. Like the farmer serving on the school board, there might not be an obvious connection between their company and that project. But their support is rooted in the recognition that what’s good for the community is the right thing to do.

The University Center benefits Santa Clarita as a whole. It opens the door to higher education, providing access to an advanced degree beyond the community college level to those who otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity. That's what led Barry to pay me a visit that afternoon 10 years ago. And, of course, I saw him again a few months later when he stopped by to drop off another check just as he said he would.

Further along in the commercial, the farmer is described as "somebody who'd plow deep and straight and not cut corners." What an apt description of the Gumps. Some might say Barry and Pati's ideal that a handshake is worth more than a contract is a throwback to a different time. Old-fashioned perhaps. Even antiquated. I would argue to the contrary. They stick to their principles and know what they stand for – and have the courage to do so. What Barry and Pati stand for is timeless. They have shown us that values and character never go out of style - that you can never go wrong by doing the right thing.

The commercial ends with the farmer being known as "Somebody who'd bale a family together with the soft, strong bonds of sharing, who would laugh, and then sigh and then reply with smiling eyes when his son says that he wants to spend his life doing what Dad does."

As we know, Barry is that son who did in fact go on to spend his life doing what his dad did. Soon, it will be his turn to pass the baton. His daughter Nancy, who has worked with her parents for more than 20 years, is preparing to assume leadership of the company her grandfather started.

Barry and Pati have something else in common with the farmer. They provide a valuable service through their business, but don't get the credit they deserve. We all appreciate food, but how often do we stop and thank, much less think of, the person responsible for growing it? The same goes for a clean portable restroom when indoor plumbing isn't an option. We all enjoy the special events that are unique to Santa Clarita, but how many of them would be possible with the efforts of the Gumps and their employees? Whether it's a backyard, the Mann Biomedical Park, or McBean Parkway at the starting line of the Santa Clarita Marathon, Andy Gump Inc. enables us to gather in places that aren't normally equipped to handle large crowds and raise money to support organizations that help so many others in the Santa Clarita Valley.

Like the farmer, who does what needs to be done, and does it because it's the right thing to do, Barry and Pati are not looking for acknowledgement or recognition. Someone once said, "Every job is a self-portrait of the person who does it. Autograph your work with excellence." For the Gumps, their satisfaction comes in the form of a job well done. They are so humble, and so low key. Fanfare and photo ops are not something they enjoy. They don't want to be in the spotlight, they just want to help. In fact, we had to twist their arms a little bit to get them sit down on camera for the video. And I'm glad they did, as what they have to share is instructive and inspiring.

Albert Einstein said, "Try not to become a man of success but rather try to become a man of value." Barry and Pati have not only tried, they have indeed succeeded in becoming people of value. They are true originals who have left a lasting mark on their family, their friends, their customers, and their community. I can't imagine Santa Clarita being what it is today without this remarkable couple and their influence and leadership.

Tonight, we as a community have an opportunity to do the right thing. To thank Barry and Pati for their leadership, their commitment to improving the lives of those around them, their selfless service. To stand in awe of their integrity, dedication, and service. And to be inspired by their example and work to match the standards they set for the rest of us to achieve. Please join me in honoring our 2013 Silver Spur Awardees for Community Service – Barry and Pati Gump.