



ANNUAL LETTER

FEBRUARY 2022

If we were forced to pick annual themes, I'd proclaim 'perseverance and focus' for 2021. There are more than one-thousand ways to say, "stay focused and be agile" in the face of uncertainty and challenge. A roller-coaster year like 2021 calls for one of the best from Jim Valvano, North Carolina State Head Basketball coach, "Don't give up. Don't ever give up." Jimmy V. declared this in the midst of a crushing cancer diagnosis. His determination to inspire hope and greatness in others even as his own battle was drawing to its sad conclusion is legendary. In the same speech, he also reminded us that "In every single day, in every walk of life, ordinary people do extraordinary things. Ordinary people accomplish extraordinary things."

The students we help once again gob smacked us with their determination to overcome circumstances largely out of their control. In 2021, our GMFF scholars achieved a collective 3.62 GPA at 33 different universities. A majority are studying in STEM fields, business and political science. All of them will graduate, 98% will graduate on time. These statistics illustrate tenacity using numbers. With permission, I've included stories from two of our 2021 scholarship recipients below for illustration in prose:

2021 by the Numbers	
72	Total number of students helped in 2021
75%	% of cost students raise through savings, merit scholarships, grants and work
\$3,208	Average 2021 scholarship amount
\$256K	Total value of GMFF giving in 2021
0.98%	Annual operating expenses as a percent of assets
100%	% of donations that go directly to students
\$1.29M	Total giving since 2015
143	Total students helped since 2015
65	GMFF Scholar college graduates

"... I aspire to break against the obstacles set before me. Living in a part of Charlotte, NC that many people would consider "the ghetto," opportunities are hard to come by. Because of where I live, people assume that I'm not academically inclined, that I lack work ethic, and that I don't have big dreams. The stereotypes of this community have been etched into children like me. Many of us see the paycheck from an inadequate job to be a better alternative than putting our meager funds towards

higher education which could burden our families. Many even drop out to work in low-end jobs to support their families. Many children are unable to spread their wings due to circumstances where success feels impossibly out of reach. But I want to not give up, to never give up. I am willing to jump at every chance to better my education, to push towards graduation, to college, and eventually, to a better life. In this sense, I am a hyena. Willfully, with hopeful dreams, I chase after opportunity because this is my chance and it might be my only chance.”

— **Marlette Jessa Dawkins, Garinger High School Class of 2021**
Currently at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

“Muggy, humid air clung to my skin. Sounds of wet leaves and branches crunched under my cold, quick feet. Muffled whimpers from my eight month old sister filled the dark air, echoing the fear we were all feeling. We were somewhere between Myanmar and Thailand and one week into what would be a four month journey running from a crushing military dictatorship in my home country of Myanmar. My heart raced as I remembered the words of my mother before we started the journey: “Do not make a sound or the guards will kill all of us.” We were running towards a chance at a better future through education, opportunity and freedom. We were leaving everything we knew, certain to face ungodly conditions, all to chase the dream of a better life in America. We were to hunker down for the night, I sat in a pitch black crowded one room house on the border of Thailand, shoulder to shoulder with upwards of seventy other refugees fleeing Burma. I could smell the sweat of the stranger in front of me and fell asleep with my heartbeat in my hands. SLAP! I awoke from my thoughts to find a very foreign looking man had slapped my mother, who was comforting my crying sister. “Why did he do that to my mother?” I thought quietly. “Wasn’t he supposed to be helping us?” My mother hardly reacted. I looked into my mother's eyes and saw strength, determination, composure, fear and love all mixing in her deep brown eyes. Although I didn’t know it at the time, this look, this moment, would fuel a passion inside of me for the rest of my life. Every struggle I encountered, I remember how blessed I am to be here and what my purpose in life is. Not only will I be the first college graduate in my family, I will become a doctor so that I can go back to my impoverished country and provide free or low cost medical services for the vulnerable members of Burmese community.”

— **Ciliza Thang, Independence High School, Class of 2020**
Currently at Appalachian State University, Public Health

As these impressive students demonstrate, the challenge of staying focused is making sure we clarify succinctly what truly matters. In the case of our mission at GMFF, it's enabling students to achieve their educational and career potential despite their circumstances. We have traditionally executed against this mission by removing the barrier of cost through scholarships to individual students. In 2022, we will expand our strategy to our partners. After two years of missed classroom time, isolation and uncertainty — now more than ever, students need the support of nurturing, capable mentors and advisors. Our partners fulfill this need for thousands of students in North Carolina. They mentor and support students in navigating the process of preparing, getting into, and graduating from college with academic tutoring, mentoring, access to technology and encouragement. They are:

- TRIO programs at NC State University
- TRIO Upward Bound at Appalachian State University
- NC State Student Services, including Pack Promise
- Appalachian ACCESS
- Carolina Youth Coalition in Charlotte, NC
- GenOne in Charlotte, NC

On January 15th, 2022 we launched, by invitation only to our partners, our new grant making program. Let's declare 2022 the year of RESILIENCE.

Again this year, I am appreciative of your support and hope that you are all aware of the important role you've played in the lives of Goodwin Meissner Scholars. Whether through your cheerleading, donations, or both, you helped them obtain their degrees and ultimately launch their careers.

Best Regards,



Laura Dean Meissner
President, Goodwin Meissner Family Foundation