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Giving Back: A Legacy of Gratitude

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Jim Ryan (MBA '87)

“DEPAUL TRANSFORMS PEOPLE’S LIVES, NOT ONLY BY PROVIDING A HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION, BUT ALSO BY PROVIDING ACCESS TO THAT EDUCATION TO PEOPLE WHO MIGHT OTHERWISE NOT HAVE IT.”

A Legacy of Gratitude

JIM RYAN (MBA '87), chair of DePaul's Board of Trustees, is full of gratitude to the university. “Both of my parents attended DePaul. That’s where they met. I like to tell people I’m eternally grateful for DePaul, because if it were not for (the university), I probably wouldn’t be around,” Ryan says.

Ryan credits his parents’ strong work ethic and values as driving forces in his life and his successful 37-year career at W.W. Grainger, an industrial supply company based in Lake Forest, Ill., where he served as president, CEO and board chairman. “Both of my parents grew up in Chicago. They were both first-generation college students, which is very much a big part of the profile of students at DePaul,” says Ryan. “My parents, like a lot of students at DePaul, worked to put themselves through school.”

His father, the late **James Ryan Jr. (BUS '53)**, had a long career in labor relations and human resources, working for companies such as General Dynamics and Freeman United. His mother, **Patricia Ryan (BUS '53)**, served as an assistant for many years to a number of different executives at Chicago-based companies.

Ryan took many of his DePaul MBA classes while he was working at Grainger in the 1980s. Ryan says that he was attracted to the program’s practical approach. “There were theories, concepts and ideas that I got to explore during my MBA that were directly applicable to the things I was doing during the day at work,” he says.

In May, Ryan was elected chair of the DePaul Board of Trustees, which he has served on since 2007. Playing an active part in the DePaul community is important to both him and his wife, Michelle. “My wife and I have been blessed in a lot of ways, and I feel like it’s a responsibility for us to give back to organizations like DePaul that have such a worthwhile and honorable mission. DePaul transforms people’s lives, not only by providing a high-quality education, but also by providing access to that education to people who might otherwise not have access to it,” says Ryan.

The Ryans established the James T. and Michelle A. Ryan Family Scholarship earlier this year to fund tuition and expenses for graduates of the Chicago Jesuit Academy, a middle school in Chicago’s Austin neighborhood where Michelle is a volunteer teacher and board member. “Education will help the trajectory of these kids’ lives,” says Ryan. “This is great opportunity to (make) a very positive impact.”