



Two Friends of the Foundation: Betty and Tom Graffis

Betty and Dr. Tom Graffis aren't Greencastle natives, but the roots they've laid down in Putnam County since arriving in 1961 are deep and enduring. Their impact goes beyond the lengthy careers they established here, or the fact that their dental practice provided outstanding care for thousands of families, or that they raised two daughters here. Their contributions to the quality of life in our community go far deeper than most people could ever hope to achieve. Betty and Tom wished their community and neighbors to prosper, so they got involved — with dedication and compassion.



“Betty and I were fortunate to be able to pick where we set up our dental practice,” says Tom Graffis. “After looking at three cities, we picked Greencastle because we liked the people and the town looked like a great place to raise a family. And our little daughters loved Robe-Ann Park and said they wanted to live here.”

Reflecting back, Betty fondly recalls that she and Tom met in high school in Cambridge, Indiana, when she was freshman, and Tom was a junior. They fell in love and married at the end of Betty's freshman year at IU and Tom's junior year at Purdue. Tom then served in the military for two years before spending another four years in dental school. During that time Betty studied for two years to become a dental hygienist and worked in Indianapolis. Then, daughters, Lynette and Debbie, came along, and the Graffis family became a constellation.

Dr. Graffis' dental practice was a “family affair.” While Tom was meeting the dental and orthodontia needs of his patients, Betty was right there as the dental hygienist and bookkeeper, and she filled in with other duties when office staff was gone. “I really enjoyed the people,” Betty says with a warm smile. “And being a detail-oriented person, I enjoyed the bookkeeping.” Tom actually retired from active practice twice: the first time in December 1993 when he sold the practice. However, he continued working for another two years so he could follow his orthodontia patients and work in the lab on crowns and other needs.

When asked why they got involved in the Greencastle community, Tom quickly said, “Our goal was to help preserve the good things about Greencastle and to try to improve things where possible.” Betty added, “I was raised to appreciate what our family had, and to not take it for granted. Maybe my religious training helped guide my thinking about sharing with others too.”

And share they have! Tom was a founder of Operation Life and is the longest serving member of Greencastle's Rotary chapter. But it doesn't end there. Tom is currently president of United Way, and he's been an active member of the Jaycees, First Christian Church, Friends of the Library, and of

course, the Putnam County Community Foundation, where as a past president and committee member, he has proudly served in various capacities for some 15 years. And Betty has been equally devoted to building the quality of life in Putnam County as treasurer of PEO, as a chair, elder, and treasurer at church, and involvement with Delta Theta Tau and Over the Tea-Cups. And as both Betty and Tom observed, “The support and friendship we’ve received in return has been very beneficial... a great two-way street.”



To know Tom Graffis is to realize that he is a philosopher — someone who has paid close attention to the lessons of life and who is eager to share helpful beliefs when asked. Here are a few of his recent philosophies:

“Most of life is learning to pay attention... first, to life in general and then to specifics. Then, to determine the true meaning.”

“Do things intentionally, not by accident.”

“A certain amount of trust is required. People are worth investing time and resources in.”

“Many times when you give money to a cause, you have to trust that the leadership of that organization will use your support wisely.”

When asked about the role of the Putnam County Community Foundation, Tom first reflects on how it wasn’t easy for their young family in the beginning. “We watched every penny, and our awareness of finances became very important. Over time as things improved, we squirreled a few dollars away. But we saw that a lot of other people were struggling around us, and when we saw how an organization like the Putnam County Community Foundation helped people in so many different ways, Betty and I were sold... and we have never stopped believing in the Foundation’s mission.”

“Perhaps the biggest change that I’ve witnessed at the Foundation over the years is the improved level of professionalism, including various business and reporting practices and a stronger committee structure.” Betty also cites a change in focus. “Initially, the focus of the Foundation’s leaders was to get people to put money into the Foundation. Now, the focus is on what we’re going to do with the money... how to make it help people and strengthen Putnam County through the grant-making process.”

When asked if he would encourage others to offer financial or volunteer support to the Foundation, Tom thought for a moment and offered an eloquent gem of “Graffis-esque” philosophy: “The Putnam County Community Foundation is the best long-term organization for this community to benefit the most people.”

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NOTE: *This is the first in a series of stories about Foundation “friends” who have had a positive impact on the quality of life in our community. The Putnam County Community Foundation welcomes suggestions of other people to recognize, and we remain deeply grateful for the friendship and support of so many people, near and far. Thank you!*