

# Host on the Coast: How the University of Georgia Libraries used a “friends” award to steward donors, build relationships, and connect with board members

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## Introduction

In the summer of 2023, Lee Snelling, the University of Georgia Libraries’ Senior Director of Development, approached the other three members of his team with an idea: He wanted to honor long-time Libraries’ donor and University of Georgia iconic football coach Vince Dooley and his wife Barbara by establishing a new “Friends of the Library” award in their name.

While Lee’s idea started as a way to steward the Dooleys, who had made one of the most significant gifts to the Georgia Libraries, the advancement team recognized that the “Friends of the Library” award would offer additional benefits, including improved board engagement, increased relationship-building, and a means to steward other donors. This model may serve other libraries that are considering establishing awards.

## Building on a Legacy

The Dooley Library Endowment was established by Vince and Barbara Dooley in 1988, and they led a fundraising effort to enhance their initial donation. The resulting endowment is unrestricted and therefore has a broad scope, providing significant financial support that spans the work of the Libraries, from materials investment to facility improvements to employee professional development. The Special Collections Library had developed a meaningful exhibit featuring Vince Dooley’s athleticism, coaching career, and extracurricular interests, but the idea for this award reflected the desire to highlight Vince and

Barbara Dooley's support of the University Libraries and its lasting impact. It was also a way to posthumously honor Vince, who had passed away in fall 2024.

University leadership—including University Librarian and Associate Provost, the Vice President for Development and Alumni Relations, the President of the University—and members of the Dooley family agreed that the "Friends of the Libraries" award would honor those whose commitment to the Libraries mirrored the Dooley family's own through financial generosity, service to the Libraries and the University, and the deep connection to and investment in the Libraries' work. A key factor in garnering University leadership's support was helping them understand the award's vision and purpose, and that, most importantly, it would steward multiple donors.

The next step was identifying Library partners who could be the inaugural recipients of the award. As it happened, this was not a difficult task.

## **Celebrating Coastal Connections**

Craig and Diana Barrow were exactly the kind of partners meant to be honored by the Vince and Barbara Dooley Friends of the Libraries award. The Barrows were founding members of both the UGA Libraries Board of Visitors and the UGA Press Advisory Council and had been dynamic, long-time supporters of the Libraries.

The Barrows reside at Wormsloe, a historic property on the Isle of Hope near Savannah. In 2013, Craig Barrow III donated roughly 15 acres of Wormsloe land to the University of Georgia to establish the Center for Research and Education at Wormsloe (CREW), which is administered by the UGA Libraries.

This gift not only solidified the Barrows as lead donors to the Libraries but also represented an ideal space for the award ceremony and reception. The DeRenne Library, also on this site, held the founding materials for UGA's Special Collections Library, and could serve as an event location based on its proximity to both the Barrows' home and CREW.

## **Aligning the Award and a Board Meeting**

Choosing to honor the Barrows at their home served an additional purpose as well: it gave the Libraries fundraising team the opportunity to host their fall Board of Visitors (BOV) meeting in Savannah and highlight the recently constructed CREW Experiential Learning Building, adjacent to the Barrows' property.

BOV members, members of the UGA Press Advisory Council, and other local friends of the Libraries were invited to the award reception to showcase the historic site, and in particular, the DeRenne Library. While the library's materials moved to the University of Georgia in 1938, attendees were still able to see pictures and descriptions of Wormsloe and the Barrows' ancestors since its founding, an Italian tile mosaic of the DeRenne coat of arms, and unique architecture. Showcasing these physical materials helped connect attendees to the location and to the importance of preserving and maintaining history.

Additionally, board members saw the concrete impact of giving to the University Libraries. The University Librarian and Associate Provost presented the Barrows with the Dooley award and, during his remarks, broadened the concept of what a “friend of the Libraries” and the University looks like. He detailed the legacies of the Barrows and the Dooleys, describing their support not only in giving but also through service, leadership, and insight. Board members and other guests understood more fully how the Dooleys and the Barrows exemplified the impact of philanthropy and service, giving them a chance to reflect on their own legacy and relationship with the Libraries.

The day after the award ceremony, the Board of Visitors met in the new CREW building. The programming was designed to showcase the kind of work taking place at the site and, more broadly, University research that the Libraries support. For example, a student researcher presented on her study of ticks in the area, and CREW Executive Director Mary Socci provided an overview of both Wormsloe and CREW.

BOV member and former DeKalb County CEO Michael Thurmond also presented on his new book, focused on James Edward Oglethorpe and the founding of Georgia in Savannah. Attendees also released monarch butterflies whose time being studied was coming to an end.

The location and programming for this board meeting were all designed to offer a tactile experience that enhanced board members’ understanding of the reach of UGA Libraries’ work beyond the campus, and the Libraries’ connection to groundbreaking research with state- and nation-wide implications.

To steward donors after the event, the Libraries sent a copy of Mr. Thurmond’s book, published by the University of Georgia Press, to all board members. Mailing the book was also an opportunity to connect with those who had not been able to attend, to ensure they knew they had been missed.

The reception and board meeting were key engagement opportunities for Libraries stakeholders, donors, and prospects in the area and offered a chance to highlight special relationships and unique work managed by the Libraries. This award created a focal point for these events, attracted attendees, created a more complete sense of the UGA Libraries for our volunteers, and strengthened relationships with donors, board members, and friends.