Philanthropy has always played a major role in higher education in America. One of the very first gifts was to Harvard College which is named after John Harvard, a young minister who, upon his death in 1638, left his library and half his estate to the new institution. Further, a Yale University treasurer’s report from 1831 states:

_The College is in want of funds for the relief of necessitous students. Individuals of this class have not unfrequently risen to the highest stations of influence and authority in the nation. The welfare of our republic requires that such men be educated. Other colleges very generally offer education to them at reduced price, Yale must therefore do the same, both to promote the interest of the community and to secure her own prosperity._

Countless buildings and endowed funds across America acknowledge the donors who have made them possible. No one who has attended a private or public college or university in America has paid the real cost of their education. Gifts from generous donors or tax funds have always subsidized the cost of higher education in this country.

On February 7, 1889, Abbot Leo Haid accepted a gift of 36 acres on Lake Jovita from Judge Edmond Dunne for the founding of Saint Leo College. In the years that followed, this institution has had eleven name changes and thousands of benefactors. It has been a college, a preparatory school, a high school, a junior college, and now it is a university with graduate programs and an international presence. A common thread throughout its complicated history is that people have cared about Saint Leo and supported it financially.

We live in a charitable society. In 2005, 89 percent of Americans together contributed more than $260 billion. Charitable contributions to colleges and universities in the U.S. reached $28 billion in the year that ended June 2006; an increase of 9.4 percent from 2005. The alumni participation rate for colleges and universities nationwide was 14.6 percent.

At Saint Leo University, 2,185 donors gave $2.3 million in fiscal year 2005-06, a year that was highlighted by a $1 million gift for scholarship endowment from the Goizueta Foundation. One year later, the number of donors dropped to 1,959 and giving totaled just $1.4 million (revealing the impact a large gift can have on any one year’s overall results). The alumni participation rate for that year was under five percent. However, it is important to remember that our alumni population is much more diverse than almost any other college or university in the United States, with the majority of our alumni having attended classes at one or more of our regional center campuses or online. That does have an impact on alumni giving.

Gifts are an important component of higher education funding, but nationwide they account for less than 10 percent of annual expenditures. At Saint Leo they are an even smaller percentage of the annual budget. The real impact that philanthropy has on a university is the measure of excellence it is able to offer its students. Private support can make the difference between a good university and a great one.

Is a gift to Saint Leo a good investment? Consider that question from another perspective. Would you invest in a company with:

- seven consecutive years of seven figure surplus
- a 250 percent increase in net assets over the last 10 years
- a 20 percent increase in net assets in fiscal 2007 alone, compared to a national standard of five to six percent?
Those are all statistics that President Kirk presented during a speech delivered on August 23. In addition:

- *Consumers Digest* named Saint Leo number five on the “Best Buy” list of private colleges and universities in the nation, ahead of Syracuse University, Notre Dame, and others who were included in the top 25.
- We enjoyed record enrollments in University College, graduate programs, and the Center for Online Learning.
- Eight new faculty positions were added for the 2007-08 academic year—26 in the last two years.

As our world becomes “flatter” and technology continues to generate rapid change, Saint Leo is positioned better than most to offer effective ways to deliver a quality education. Our University Campus, Regional Centers, Center for Online Learning, Graduate, and Evening and Weekend programs offer opportunities for almost any student living anywhere in the world.

But the really unique part of a Saint Leo education is that, regardless of the delivery method, its mission is always based on the 1,500-year-old Benedictine tradition, seeking balanced growth in mind, body, and spirit for all members of its community. We take seriously our Core Values of excellence, community, respect, personal development, responsible stewardship, and integrity and they are infused into the academic curriculum, extra-curricular programs and activities, and everyday life of the University.

Everyone who supports Saint Leo has their own personal reasons for doing so. It may be simply a recognition that Saint Leo made a real difference in their life or in the life of someone they care about. Some want to “gift back” the support they received as students. Others have a very specific project they want to benefit. For some, charitable planned giving can be a useful estate planning tool.

Whatever the reason, a gift to Saint Leo is not simply a gift to charity; it is a social investment that provides a return many times more than its original value. It provides opportunities to students, both young and more mature, who will make a difference in society.

Saint Leo University has matured into a leading Catholic teaching university of international consequence for the twenty-first century. The mission is clearly defined and worthy, the curriculum is solid, and the infrastructure is in place. Enrollment is increasing each year, clear evidence there is a demand for what we offer.

Increased philanthropy will help us take the next step toward greatness and enhance the experience for current and future students. Surveys show the great majority of alumni are very satisfied with their student experience and we hope to encourage them to “give back” to their alma mater to ensure that the next generation of Saint Leo students will have the same satisfaction with their education. Non-alumni and businesses have a stake in what happens at Saint Leo because we are educating the next generation of business leaders, teachers, and social workers—people who affect each of our lives every day. Isn’t it reassuring that they have been impacted by an institution that lives the mission and espouses the core values that Saint Leo University has dedicated itself to since 1889?

In her book, *The Greater Good*, Claire Gaudiani states, “Many people think that Americans are generous because we are rich. The truth is that we are rich, in significant part, because we are generous.” A gift to Saint Leo is an investment in something much greater than the institution. Thanks for joining us for the ride on the journey to greatness!

Sincerely,

David Ostrander
Vice President for University Advancement