



Dr. Stephen R. Briggs

I can't emphasize it enough: A personal suggestion about a college is more effective and credible than any message sent to a mass of people.

# By your word of mouth

Students find their way to Berry in all sorts of interesting ways. Take Preston Stewart (17C), who first visited Berry when he was 14. His mother, Michelle Tart, and her husband, Steve, brought him to campus to hear Super Bowl-winning coach and inspirational speaker Tony Dungy at the Gloria Shatto Lecture. As they wandered around campus the preceding afternoon, Stewart and a friend were tossing a football for fun when, out of the blue, up walked Coach Dungy.

The future NFL Hall of Famer talked to the boys for several minutes, threw each a pass and left them with a memory to last a lifetime. And although Berry had no football program at that time, Stewart returned in four years as a member of the college's inaugural team. He became a three-year team captain and a first-team all-conference linebacker as well as a management major who now works for a London-based software company.

Stewart's visit to Berry didn't happen by chance. His family heard about the college from a friend, Wanda Riggs Mack. She didn't attend Berry, but her mother, Sally Keown Riggs (33H, 37C), did, and her grandfather was a Berry legend. Gordon Keown (1905H) was one of Berry's earliest graduates and later became Martha Berry's right-hand man, negotiating many of the college's land purchases.

Mack has long been an enthusiastic champion of Berry and introduces many

friends to the school. She also now serves as chair of the Board of Visitors and as an ex officio member of the Board of Trustees.

Her predecessor in these board roles, Bill Pence (76C), also has been an advocate for Berry. Ten years ago, Pence's son and his buddies were looking at colleges. Pence thought one of his son's friends in particular, Darren Barnet, might be a good fit for Berry and brought the two young men from Florida to visit campus.

Barnet was interested in sports and communication and attended Berry as a member of the first class of Gate of Opportunity Scholars. The new program was demanding, but Barnet graduated in 2013 with a degree in international studies. He now lives in Los Angeles, where he has found success in the entertainment business, both as an actor in shows such as *This Is Us* and, most recently, as winner of Best Original Story at the New York Film Awards.

Last year, Pence brought a couple of more prospective students for a campus visit, and this August his stepson, Caleb Enright, will start at Berry as a first-year student.

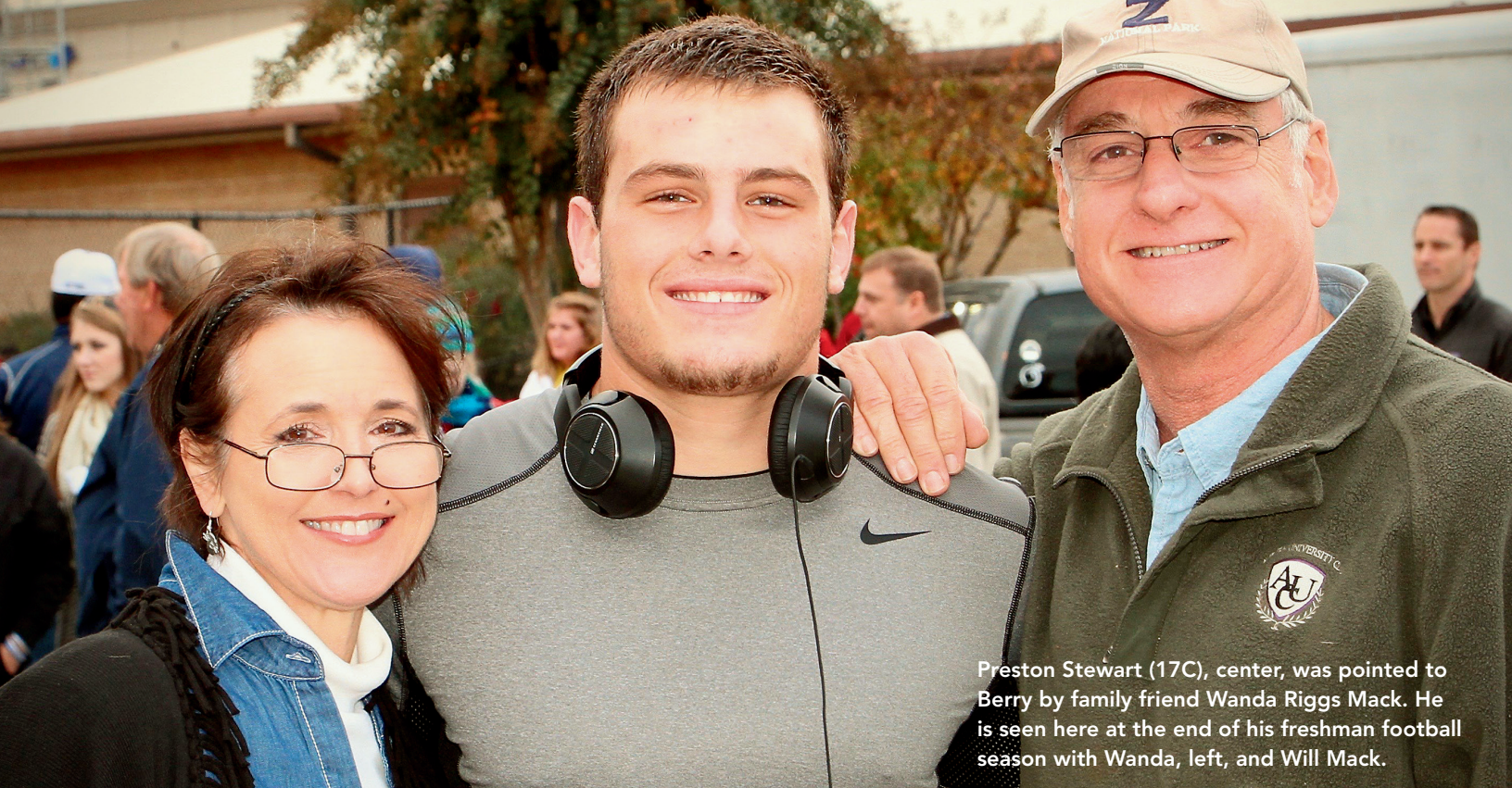
As these stories demonstrate, many students first hear about Berry from family or friends. At Mountain Day this past October, I asked a group of approximately 100 first-year parents how their students learned about Berry. Although there is some overlap, their answers sorted into three primary categories.

- **Almost half of the students** discovered Berry through a search process, typically using the internet, but also including college fairs. Some searches focused on particular academic interests (e.g., animal science, environmental science or creative writing); others focused on particular features (campus culture, personal attention or varsity sports).
- **Fifteen percent** – often those located more regionally – knew Berry by general reputation or had visited campus previously (e.g., Governor's Honors Program or WinShape camps).
- **More than a third** learned about Berry from a family member or friend.

To be honest, it is this pathway – learning about Berry from a friend or family member – that we hope to grow. Attending a private college is a major investment, even at Berry where we intentionally use our resources to make it affordable to as many as possible. Those who know us well and embrace the value of Berry and what we have to offer in terms of experiences and opportunities are best able to steer the right students in our direction. They can ascertain *fit*: the type of students who will be successful at Berry, make the most of the opportunity and be great additions to our campus community.

## THE MORE YOU KNOW

For the last year, we have been studying



Preston Stewart (17C), center, was pointed to Berry by family friend Wanda Riggs Mack. He is seen here at the end of his freshman football season with Wanda, left, and Will Mack.

how to grow the number of students interested in attending Berry. We are updating our market-research studies in order to remain successful in the competitive college admissions environment, and we will refresh our marketing strategy, web presence and admissions materials this fall. All of this is a necessary and ongoing endeavor. Still, we are convinced that our most fertile prospects often come from personal referrals – recommendations from someone like you.

The influence of a direct connection should not be surprising. Prospective college students today have been inundated with advertising messages since childhood, and they rightfully ignore much of what they receive. College marketing messages, whether digital or print, seem like more of the same to this media-savvy generation.

Recommendations from a friend, however, are received differently. They are accepted as advice rather than discarded as a sales pitch. They are grounded in trust and appreciated as genuine interest. I can't emphasize it enough: A personal suggestion about a college is more effective and credible than any message sent to a mass of people.

#### SIBLING SUPPORT

Multiple siblings attending Berry has been a common occurrence since the college's earliest days. I interviewed Senior Class President Anna Walker in front of 500 guests at this spring's scholarship

dinner. She recounted falling in love with Berry when her older sister came to campus for a visit – even before her sister had decided to attend. Both Elizabeth (16C) and Anna (18C) are now graduates, and their brother, Ben, is a current student.

Sam Jones (16C) transferred to Berry after a year at a large state university in part because his sister, Sarah Jones (14C), was having the kind of college experience he was missing, one that combined challenging academics with deep friendships and meaningful practical experiences. Sarah is now a speech therapist and Sam a financial research analyst in the health care sector. Their parents, Adam and Anne Jones, live in Florida and have encouraged several friends from their church to send their children to Berry.

#### CREDIBLE ADVOCATES

Berry alumni working in education have a special opportunity to identify potential

### How to help

If you know a student who would be a perfect fit for Berry, let us know today by completing the online referral form:

[berry.edu/referastudent](http://berry.edu/referastudent)

Berry students. Joel “Joey” Rogers (88C) has encouraged five recent students from Northeast Georgia to attend Berry, and Dan Russell (11C) has done the same with a comparable number from Chattanooga, Tenn.

Perhaps the most influential recommendations come from a parent whose daughter or son is having an exceptional experience as a current student. A comment made to a co-worker, the neighbor across the street, the high school student working a summer job in your office, or the client whose child is interested in your profession can explain the value of a Berry education in an especially compelling way.

#### OUR ADMISSIONS NETWORK

In coming years, it is vital that we communicate Berry's story, purpose and value in creative ways and with a well-executed marketing strategy. We need to make sure that prospective students know that a place like Berry exists – a college that cares deeply about the personal and professional success of every student and provides a multilayered community of mentors in which students learn firsthand both from mentors and as mentors.

Do you know a student who would thrive at Berry? Let them know, and let us know. Nothing is more effective than word of mouth. *Your* word of mouth.