

# Eleanor Saunders Morris '55

If anyone knew our campus, Chapel Hill, the rites of passage at Carolina, Eleanor Saunders did. Freshman orientation wasn't high on the priorities list for the daughter of J. Maryon "Spike" Saunders '25 Alumni Secretary from 1927–1970, so she skipped it. Comeuppance was waiting around the very first corner, when young Eleanor had to call home to get the meaning of the building abbreviation before her first class.

In the years after 1952, any further evidence of lapse in attention to detail has been long lost among the accolades, local and national alike, for one of our University's most loving and distinguished servants.

Who would disagree that Eleanor Saunders Morris had a tough act to follow? Yet, she moved well clear of her father's shadow, into a niche of her own making at the place that for many people has been the University's front door, the financial aid office.

Eleanor thought she might go to graduate school and teach, but believed she hadn't the patience for teaching. Instead she pursued a challenge most teachers probably would doubt they had the patience for — one moment clearing a path through federal red tape to get needy students the financial help that makes or breaks their dreams of scholarship, the next, gently encouraging the more fortunate Carolina alumni and friends who sought the most satisfying way to pair their gifts with those needs.

If a career can be described in a single word, for Eleanor it is *access*. *Access* is, for her, the essence of what has made our University great: that so many have started here with so very little and have gone on to distinguish themselves professionally and to serve Carolina.

One of Eleanor's specialties is the perfect match, drawing upon her knowledge of the people and the history of our University to create a special relationship — a bond, almost — between donor and recipient. It may be as simple as knowing where the giver is from and finding a potential recipient in the same county. "I want to *know* about the people for whom the scholarships are named," Eleanor says. "That's the way you bridge generations."

It's a personal touch in a business often thought of as a dull dance with government guidelines.

Eleanor is proud to have helped develop a different approach to financial aid. Patiently, she has addressed Washington's many bureaucratic changes to assure that anxious students in long lines outside her Vance Hall office always find a sympathetic and responsive face. And like her dad, Eleanor is no stranger to long hours. Simply put, Eleanor understands her purpose is to serve Carolina's students.

Along the way Eleanor has earned a stellar reputation in her field. In fact, a national leadership role preceded her to Carolina. As chair of the College Scholarship Service Assembly of the College Entrance Examination Board while financial aid director at UNC-Greensboro, Eleanor was at the forefront on policy decisions for the nation's largest financial need analysis service. As early as 1984, four years after returning to Carolina, she was elected president of the Southern Association of Student Aid Administrators. In 1991 she earned the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators' Distinguished Service Award.

Among Eleanor's most significant achievements has been her able administration of Carolina's largest need-based scholarship program funded by the James M. Johnston Trust. Of this UNC System President Emeritus William Friday LLB '48 says "the success and the enormous importance of the James M. Johnston Scholars Program to the University are directly attributable to the stewardship of Eleanor Morris. Her thorough, intelligent, and compassionate leadership have given hope, self-esteem and a bright future to those deserving scholars."

Eleanor smiles and reflects on the suggestion that there's an irony in her father having served with such tireless care those who had left Carolina, and her having devoted the same diligence to those who want so badly to come here.

"It's almost like it could have been intended," she says. Blessed with one of the most lucious campus views through her Vance Hall window, Eleanor finds herself watching the Graham Memorial, anxiously waiting for for the day, soon, when it will come full circle. Until the late 1960s Graham was the center of life for students, so many of whom had come to her for *access*. The Johnston Trust, is providing the major funding to renovate Graham Memorial for the honors program — including restoration of the classic lounge.

"It's going to be a student center again," Eleanor says, reflecting the deep sense of time and place that has made Carolina lovingly accessible.