



# Communities of COASTAL GEORGIA FOUNDATION

## ENCOURAGING EXCELLENCE

by Valerie A. Hepburn, PhD, President & CEO, Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation



HARLAN HAMBRIGHT



**T**hey met in a Cultural Anthropology class at University of Santa Clara. After graduating from Georgia Tech, he was stationed there with the Army and looking for a way to meet girls. She was pursuing her education and seeking knowledge. Though he never completed the class, they both got what they wanted! And, ever mindful of the ways that socio-cultural contexts frame opportunity and education, JoAnn and Ted Davis have sought to change their small corner of the world for the better.

Before they relocated to Coastal Georgia, JoAnn and Ted had a long history of community and volunteer leadership. After the Army and Harvard Business School, Ted's role as president of Dorcy International took them to Columbus, Ohio. During his tenure, Dorcy was

recognized as one of the state's best companies in which to work. Ted was active with the local opera board, the hospital board, and Big Brothers. Both JoAnn and Ted coached soccer.

It was JoAnn's activism as a mother and an education volunteer that really shaped their thinking and lifelong focus on helping youth. While raising their three children, JoAnn was elected to serve on the local school board and her advocacy for K-12 education was cemented. Through her work in developing and directing the nationally recognized I KNOW I CAN and the Village to Child programs, JoAnn learned firsthand about the value and importance of youth mentoring and a "whatever it takes" approach to helping those who

youth symphony. Support for marching bands meant the school system did a pretty good job of teaching students in horns, woodwinds and percussion. What the community lacked was an instructional base for the key ingredients of an orchestra: strings. And so, strings and the teaching of violin, viola, cello and base became the early focus of the Davises and a small cadre of volunteers. In 2005, the Coastal Youth Symphony, now Golden Island Youth Orchestra (GIYO), was born.

In the past decade, GIYO has grown immeasurably in scope, scale and skill. The group, which has engaged some 400 young people across Glynn County and beyond, is now known and cherished for its sweeping and sold-out perfor-



are first in their families to aspire to attend college. In that work, JoAnn was recognized as one of former President H.W. Bush's Thousand Points of Light.

Ted sold his company, though he continues to chair its Board of Directors, and the Davises made Coastal Georgia their permanent home in 2002. Both are classical music fans, and through the Newcomers Club they were introduced to the Coastal Symphony. Ted was tapped by the Coastal Symphony Board with exploring what it might take to form a

mances. For the Davises, however, the orchestra is about much more than music – it serves as a vehicle for students to learn about effort, perfection, self-respect and to evaluate and aspire to something greater. And, the data reinforces these beliefs: 100% of the youth symphony's student members have gone onto college.

And, the reach of GIYO continues to expand. This academic year, a new program, STRING-on!, began with the goal of introducing every 5th grader in the Glynn County School System to the violin through *(continues)*

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one week of lesson immersion and hands-on instruction. The Davises secured a grant from the Plum Creek Foundation to buy, and now store at their home, the 30 violins necessary to provide this opportunity. While JoAnn and Ted have been the longtime, determined champions of the youth orchestra, they are quick to

mentors to hundreds of students during their years in Columbus, and have actively continued that role in their new home. Additionally, each year, they actively work with several youth to support their post-secondary studies.

The Davises learned long ago that resource limitations can force kids to feel like “school



give credit to the Glynn County School System and the many amazing and unanticipated “gifts” which have made the program thrive, like an outstanding volunteer board, generous donors, and amazing teachers and talent.

Though the Davises are most known for their work with young musicians, they have an equally significant role mentoring and nurturing young people across the community and the social spectrum. JoAnn has been a longtime volunteer with Glynn Academy, where she continues to tutor students in ACT Test Prep, Latin and AP Human Geography. Through that work and through strong relationships with teachers and the school system, JoAnn and Ted found themselves learning about young people who had tremendous promise but limited resources. They had been engaged

out-ies.” When that happens, kids disconnect and most often fail to achieve their full potential. So, when the Davises see need and promise, they are quick to bridge the gap. A sponsorship in Girl Scouts, fees for the high school baseball program, a prom dress, college application fees, ACT/SAT registration, or field trip funds – whatever it takes to help a student be included and have the same experiences and options as other kids. They see these as small acts, but they add up to big differences for these youth. The Davises open a window of opportunity, whether it’s buying their mentees a United States passport when they graduate or hosting their first airplane ride. The Davis’ extra efforts, heartfelt investments, and their many gifts – whether small or large – allow these kids to participate, to dream – and to succeed.