
DONOR PROFILE:
RALPH AND GLORIA FRIEDGEN



For the Friedgen family, athletics, arts and academics are always in play.

Ralph, Gloria and Kristina Friedgen
photo by Mike Morgan.

It's the Tuesday of spring break and the campus is all but deserted, but Maryland's head football coach is hard at work in his office, taking advantage of the relatively quiet time to catch up on the myriad tasks that are the head coach's lot. Known around campus and throughout the national sports world as "the Fridge," Ralph Friedgen will put in whatever time is necessary and do whatever it takes to sustain an excellent program for his students, not only on the field but in the larger arena of life.

"One of the great things I see about the University of Maryland is that you have so many options. I think that education is the sum of all your experiences — and you have opportunities in this area to develop yourself culturally, academically, and socially," he says.

His wife Gloria, who works at the university as coordinator of Alumni Affairs and Outreach for the College of Health and Human Performance, echoes that sentiment, and says that the Friedgens pretty much cover all the bases at Maryland — in athletics, academics and the arts. "We give our support to the College of Health and Human Performance, the Terps football program and to the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center," she says, "because we believe in the total enrichment of the individual — the mind, the body and the soul."

Both Ralph and Gloria are Maryland alums, and in fact met when they were both in grad school here. The couple left the College Park area in the early '70s, returned in 1982 when Ralph served as the Terps' offensive coordinator under coach Bobby Ross, and left again in 1986. In 2000, to much delight, he was named head coach of his alma mater. The rest is football history.

"When I met Dr. Mote for the first time, he was telling me that he wanted the university to be the best in everything — academics, athletics, the arts — and that's when I got excited about the job because that's what I'm all about," Ralph says. "We're excited to be back. We feel that this

is our school and we have a tremendous love for this school in all areas."

When the family returned to Maryland in 2000, Ralph and Gloria were aware of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center but didn't know that much about it. Daughter Kristina, who was in high school at the time, was planning to major in theatre and was looking at Northwestern University and New York University because of their theatre programs.

"They were more traditional theatre-major schools," Gloria says. "But we all came over here for a tour of the Center, saw the beautiful venues and the newness of the department's facilities, and heard about the tremendous opportunities for students. When Kristina was accepted into the Distinguished Scholars Program, that was it — she made her decision to come to Maryland. It made the whole family happy."

The Friedgens are a close family whose three daughters — Kelley, an attorney with Arnold and Porter in DC; Katie, a senior in high school; and Kristina — all share their mother's love of the arts. "I'm the football coach with the artsy daughters," Friedgen laughs.

Kristina has been in several productions to date and has also worked in the costume shop. Ralph is always in the audience when she's on stage, even when time is scarce.

"Ralph is very busy. If his daughter is on the 'bench,' he doesn't go to the game," Gloria says, and Ralph agrees, laughing. "But he always goes to see her when she's in a production." Ralph takes obvious pride in his daughter's success in her own arena. "When Kristina came home from auditioning for the scholarship, I asked her how her singing went and she said she sang pretty well for an actress. Then I asked her if there was any pressure because anyone recognized her last name, and she said 'Dad, I hate to burst your bubble but I'm not sure anyone in the theater department even knows who the football coach is.' So I guess the answer is no."

It's a story he clearly loves to tell. ■