Mim and George. Annie and Ben. Yes, the Kaplans. Though the family has been associated with the University for so many years that one hardly needs to add the last name.

Now, through a significant leadership gift to the University’s Campaign of Commitment, the Kaplan name, as well as the name García, will be known by future University of Hartford students for many years to come. Ben Kaplan ’79, ’80, and Annie García Kaplan ’79, ’81, ’97, have established the Kaplan and García Scholarship Endowment in honor of their parents. The endowment will create accessibility for those who would not otherwise be able to go to college, with a preference for minority students.

The late George B. Kaplan, Ben’s father, who was one of the University’s most active alumni, graduated from Hillyer College in 1953, four years before it merged with the Hartt School of Music and the Hartford Art School to form the University of Hartford. It is not easy to summarize George Kaplan’s involvement in the years following because he served in so many ways—as an active alumnus; as a member, and eventually vice chairman, of the Board of Regents; as an adjunct faculty member; and, as this editor fondly remembers, a columnist from time to time for The Observer. He was chair of the search committee that recommended Stephen Joel Trachtenberg as the University’s third president in 1978. Trachtenberg delivered the eulogy at George Kaplan’s funeral in 1997.

At Commencement in 1983, both of Ben’s parents were honored with the University Medal for Distinguished Service, a bittersweet occasion for the family because the award to Mrs. Kaplan was made posthumously. The late Miriam “Mim” Krauskopf Kaplan, Ben’s mother, was a graduate of Stanford University with a degree in chemical engineering who adopted the University of Hartford as her own through active involvement in the Women’s Association and the many classes that she audited. She worked so long and faithfully for the Alumni Association that in 1973 she was named an honorary alumna. A 1984 Observer article noted that “Mrs. Kaplan’s involvement with the University meant so much to her that her children [Ben and his brother, Rick, and sister, Sara], while still in their teens, each pledged to give the University $50 for the next 10 years.” Those gifts continued long after the first 10 years, with the family’s establishment of the Miriam Kaplan Library Fund for the Humanities during the University’s Capital Campaign in the 1980s. The family set up the fund because their mother had so loved auditing classes, especially studying Chaucer with Frank Chiarenza.

Annie’s parents, Hilda R. García and the late José García, first became involved with the University when their daughter, who was born in Cuba and raised in Spain and Puerto Rico, arrived in Connecticut to attend the University of Hartford.

Ben and Annie met when they both were undergraduates. He majored in business and she in political science. They both received their bachelor’s degrees in 1979. Ben went on to receive a master’s in professional accounting. Annie went on to earn an M.B.A. and then, in 1997, a Doctor of Educational Leadership.

In 1981, in honor of Annie’s earning her M.B.A., her parents presented the University with rare first editions of all 21 issues of El Historiador, a newspaper devoted to science, literature, and the arts that was published in Madrid from 1850 to 1851.
Ben and Annie have continued the family tradition of devotion to the University. A recipient of the Alumni Association’s Distinguished Service Award, Annie has served on the Alumni Council, was secretary of the Hartford Regional Alumni Chapter, was an Alumni in Admissions volunteer, and has served as a mentor to students from Puerto Rico. A former teacher in the Dominic F. Burns Elementary School in Hartford and Bassick High School in Bridgeport, she is now an active volunteer, serving on the boards of the Yale–New Haven Hospital Auxiliary, the Tommy Fund for Childhood Cancer, and the Friends of the Yale–New Haven Children’s Hospital, which honored her last year with its Dr. Babar Distinguished Service Award. She is a former president of the Yale–New Haven Hospital Auxiliary, a former member of the Yale–New Haven Hospital Board of Trustees, and worked in the Hospital’s Volunteer Services as a translator and interpreter while volunteering with the Child Life Department. She also volunteered with the Special Olympic World Games in New Haven and at Paul Newman’s Hole in the Wall Gang Camp as part of her doctoral internship, working with sister schools in Hartford and Glastonbury.

Ben, a current University regent, has received numerous University honors, including the Alumni Association’s Distinguished Service Award. Following graduation, Ben went to work as an accountant with Arthur Andersen & Co., where he remained for 17 years, working his way up to senior manager and eventually becoming a partner in the New Haven office. He then became chief financial officer of Canberra Industries in Meriden, Conn., which later became Packard BioScience Company before being taken over by PerkinElmer last November. Though the Kaplans have now moved back to West Hartford from their previous home in Woodbridge, Conn., Ben continues his active involvement in the New Haven organizations of both United Way and the YMCA.

Beyond the good friends (including each other!) that they made at the University, the Kaplans both stress the strong impact that the education they received at the University has made on their lives and how that has motivated them to establish the Kaplan and García scholarship fund.

 compelled by Sept. 11

Although they had been planning to set up such an endowment, the Kaplans were compelled by the events of Sept. 11 to do so immediately. Students at the University who lost parents in the World Trade Center disaster also suffered financial losses that threatened their continued education. President Walter Harrison promised these students that they would be allowed to complete their educations at Hartford. While many charities nationwide helped victims of that tragic day, the Kaplans saw an opportunity to assist victims such as the students and, at the same time, benefit their alma mater.

For both Ben and Annie, their commitment to their alma mater is an important part of a value they share: their desire to be involved in the community. “The University is an integral part of the community and to help the University is to help the community,” Annie says.