

BEHIND THE GIFTS: A SOUND INVESTMENT

By Matt Schnepf

As a wealth management advisor, Brian Ford (ME'07) helps his clients achieve financial wellness by applying the organizational and problem-solving skills he developed in college.

Growing up in Hammond, Indiana, Ford had aspired to attend a Big Ten school and ultimately decided on Purdue's School of Mechanical Engineering. Grateful for his Purdue education, he recently designated the university as owner and beneficiary of a life insurance policy. Through this agreement, Ford pays a \$5,000 annual premium that Northwestern Mutual then matches via a program available to the company's representatives and home office employees.

While a policy's future illustrated value includes projected dividends and is not guaranteed, Ford's policy is expected to reach \$2 million. Half of it will provide the Minority Engineering Program (MEP) with essential funds for programming, scholarships, textbooks, and computers. The other half will support efforts by Purdue Athletics to recruit more diverse talent in the classroom.

"I believe younger alumni can make a major impact on the next generation of students," Ford says. "Our collegiate experience is still relatively fresh, giving us the ability to relate to them on a different level."

The enduring relationships Ford developed within the College of Engineering, particularly MEP, enhanced his education. "MEP became like family to me," he says. "I also remember participating in Purdue Grand Prix with the National Society of Black Engineers. I was the crew chief responsible for making sure we were prepared. I stayed up the entire night before the event so everything was ready."

Upon graduating from Purdue, Ford achieved early career success in engineering. "I was quickly promoted into executive management, overseeing a team of engineers plus sales, marketing, production, and customer service," he says. After several years and some personal reflection, however, Ford changed career paths. He has been with Northwestern Mutual for seven years but still relies on his engineering experience.

"The curriculum at Purdue is extremely relevant to my current work," Ford says. "The engineering coursework does a phenomenal job of preparing you to approach real-life scenarios where you obtain information, make assumptions, and use equations to solve the problem in front of you." This serves him well as he prepares customized financial recommendations for his clients.

Ford assists physicians, business owners, entrepreneurs, and athletes with adopting healthy financial practices, creating comprehensive financial plans, and learning how to evaluate and adjust those plans over time. He also advises retirees on asset management, helping to give them peace of mind regarding their future financial security. His expertise covers many areas: wealth management, investment strategies, business risk management, life insurance planning, and more.

“I enjoy working in a field that has a direct impact on people’s lives,” Ford says. “Through the relationships I build, I have the opportunity to develop lifelong friendships.”

That strong commitment to investing in others helped Ford earn a place in the Northwestern Mutual Forum, which is reserved for the most productive advisors in the company. Equally devoted to Northwestern Mutual, he also mentors colleagues who are newer to the team.

Outside of work, Ford enjoys weightlifting, football, golf, and spending time with his family. His wife, Ashley (Lowe) Ford (HHS’08), owns and operates Ashley Ford Interiors, which specializes in real-estate staging and interior design. The couple has three young children: Carter, 7; Alaura, 5; and Anyssa, 3.

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