



# Back for the Future

## *Dr. Tom and Vanessa Botzman return to campus to help lead Mount Union's next generation of students*

The cupola of Chapman Hall sits nearly equidistant from the hometowns of Dr. Tom Botzman and his wife Vanessa, with Tom's native Stow to its north and Vanessa's Boardman Spartans to its east. Thus, it is only fitting that Mount Union has been at the center of their lives for a portion of the past three-plus decades, most recently with Tom taking the reins as the institution's 13<sup>th</sup> president in June.

### **Joining the Mount Union Family**

Upon graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in polymer engineering from Case Western Reserve University, Tom, the inventor of 12 United States patents, began his career at Akron-based Goodyear. While there, he earned a Master of Arts degree in economics and began a Ph.D. in business administration, proving his ability to balance responsibilities early in his career.

As Tom was completing his Ph.D., he was hired in his first role at Mount Union as an instructor of economics and business administration. What followed was a 15-year tenure that found him becoming an integral part of what Mount Union is today.

"I want to express that much of what I loved during my initial time here is still going on today," Tom, Mount Union's 1998 Great Teacher Award Recipient, said. "As we grow as a University, we don't have to part with the ideals of Mount Union College. The generosity of the alumni to donate their time, talent, and treasure is absolutely incredible, and they do it because they love Mount Union."

Tom and Vanessa also understand the importance of the role a university plays within its larger community. A registered nurse, Vanessa volunteered with a free health clinic offering healthcare services to those with employment but no health insurance. As an early adopter of high-impact educational practices, Tom values the significance of international education and service-learning and the impact on both the student experience and enriching the community. In fact, their daughter Gabriela '17 often joined in volunteering from a young age, becoming a sort of prophetic family affair.

### **Purple Raider Parents**

Gabriela was born during Tom and Vanessa's first stint at Mount Union, giving the future Purple Raider a unique viewpoint of Mount Union early on.

"I remember bringing Gabriela to her first Mount Union football game when she was very young, but they lost so we left hoping that we weren't bad luck," Vanessa recalled.

It may seem as though Gabriela was destined for Mount Union, but she and her parents did their due diligence during the college search process, and then some. Searching for a new experience while growing up surrounded by higher education, Gabriela was determined to not go someplace where people already knew her. Quick mental math found Tom remembering 17 different colleges on Gabriela's list that met her criteria, but Vanessa mentioned that their daughter never lost sight of Mount Union because of the campus and commitment to service-learning.



**"As we grow as a University, we don't have to part with the ideals of Mount Union College."**

**- President Tom Botzman**  
pictured above during his first year at  
Mount Union in 1989

“It was great to see that the things I enjoyed as a faculty member were things that Gabriela enjoyed as a student,” Tom said.

An early childhood education graduate and former president of Alpha Chi Omega, Gabriela now teaches second grade at an elementary school in Goldsboro, North Carolina. Though the Botzman parents were a few years removed from their time at Mount Union, they were frequently impressed with the experience Gabriela was receiving.

“Gabriela connected so well with both the faculty in the education program and those in other disciplines on campus,” Vanessa said. “We knew she was well-prepared for anything she wanted to do with her career.”

### Presidential Preparation

Armed with experience as a faculty member and administrator at Mount Union, Tom moved on in 2004 to become the vice president of business and finance at St. Mary’s College of Maryland, where he stayed for nine years.

With knowledge in nearly every area of higher education, including preparing a student for college, Tom was well-equipped to take the next step in his career when he became president of Misericordia University in Dallas, Pennsylvania in 2013.

During his service at Misericordia, a private institution of about 2,500 students, Tom led many successful initiatives. Under his leadership, the institution undertook its largest fundraising campaign in history, raising more than \$35 million to date. Misericordia also constructed a new science center and won many accolades for its successful program in support of single parents.

When the job opened up to succeed Dr. Dick Merriman as president of Mount Union, Tom knew it was a job he wanted and was ready to take it on with the encouragement of former faculty and staff colleagues.

“The Mount Union presidency appealed to me because I knew, after serving 15 years on the faculty, how the strong

## THE BUZZ ON BOTZMAN

Mount Union alumni reflect on their time learning from or working with Dr. Botzman during his initial tenure at Mount Union from 1989 to 2004.

“Dr. Botzman was my LS100 professor and academic advisor. He was genuinely interested in making sure we succeeded as students in and outside of the classroom. He listened and explained quant methods so anyone could understand it. He was a great academic advisor and supported those of us who were studying abroad.”



- Dawn Adams '97

Director of International Student Services  
University of Mount Union

“As a professor and colleague, I remember thinking, ‘I wish I had him when I was a student.’ He was unique in his vision, strategic in his thinking, ambitious in his actions, and definitely persuasive in his professional development and research. He created environments that were warm and open to diverse thoughts and populations. He always had a sense of humor.”



- Rachelle (Isles '90) Brown

Network Security Professional

“I was going to say that my favorite memory was Dr. Botzman inviting me to return to Mount Union after graduating to speak to one of his classes about career planning and what life was like in the corporate world. However, Dr. Botzman brought back the memory of me blocking his shot in a basketball game, so as a former 6’6” Mount Union basketball player... I’ll go with the blocked shot!”



- Will McIntyre '93

Manager, Business Analytics  
Goodyear

“Both Dr. Botzman and Mrs. Lloyd, an accounting professor, really changed the entire path of my life with their support and encouragement throughout my time at Mount. The two of them were quite a team and truly cared about me making the most of my future. Their nicknames were, and still are, Mama Lloyd and Papa Botzman. Because of their guidance and belief, I knocked on doors that I never knew existed.”



- Kelly (Pfund '92) Stalls

Financial Services Professional

academic and co-curricular programs supported the mission of preparing students for fulfilling lives,” Tom said.

### Looking Ahead

When asked what they were most looking forward to over the course of the next few years, Tom and Vanessa both shared one thought without hesitation: a sense of normalcy. Changing jobs during a pandemic is one thing, but moving hundreds of miles away to lead a university brings its own set of challenges.

“We have always gone to as many things as we could on campus,” Vanessa said. “From athletics and performing arts to just being present for people. It’s a much more difficult adjustment during times like these.”

“It’s all about building relationships,” Tom added. “For some of our alumni, these virtual events and meetings are just not feasible. It makes it challenging for us to interact with and get to know everyone who engages with Mount Union, but we want to continue to do the best that we can to do so.”

Part of Tom’s vision is to expand teaching to include more high-impact learning opportunities, preparing students for collaboration with their peers and communities upon graduation. While the diversity of the campus community has grown since 2004, Tom, who with Vanessa has volunteered to be a host family for international students in the past, knows Mount Union has progress to make in supporting students of all backgrounds.

“The campus still has room to grow in terms of diversity and inclusion,” he said. “We have absolutely made progress, but there is far more that we can do and far more that I would like to do.”

The Botzmans are ready to take on anything thrown their way to better assist and lead the Mount Union community, for which they are well prepared after beginning a presidency in a pandemic. Their more than 20 years of Mount Union affiliation from various perspectives has them ready to lay the foundation for the next generation of Purple Raider alumni. ■



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**- Vanessa Botzman**

On daughter Gabriela’s ‘17 time as a Mount Union undergraduate

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