



Clemson Legacy Connection

PLANNED GIVING NEWSLETTER

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Investing in the Next Generation of Engineers **Mike Brown '89, May 2025**

Mike Brown's Clemson story began in 1986, when he transferred from Auburn University. "I knew I wanted to study engineering, and since my family had moved to South Carolina, Clemson was the natural choice," he recalled. Having grown up in Georgia and Louisiana, Mike didn't know much about Clemson, but he had noticed a classmate in Louisiana who proudly wore a Clemson ball cap every day. "I soon came to understand that pride when I became a Clemson Tiger," Mike said.

He jumped right into classes that summer, quickly discovering that Clemson was more than a school — it was a life-changing experience. Between football games with friends and involvement in the Presbyterian Student Association, Mike found both a solid academic foundation and a sense of belonging.

Real-World Lessons and Lifelong Love

Thanks to Clemson's robust co-op program, Mike spent three semesters working at Torrington, a bearings manufacturing plant in Clinton, South Carolina. There, he met fellow Clemson alumnus Dr. Robert Blackwell '84, M



'91, an engineer who became a close friend — and a connector. When Robert encouraged Mike to attend Fort Hill Presbyterian Church when he returned to campus, he followed the advice and met Clarkie.

Clarkie, a UNC graduate, was working in marketing at Duke Power and volunteering with the church's college group. Sparks flew, and the couple was married at Fort Hill in 1990, with a reception at the beloved Clemson House. "We

have such fond memories of starting our lives together in Clemson," Mike shared.

A Career Rooted in Purpose

After graduation, Mike started his 28-year engineering career, which began at CRS-Sirrine in Greenville, eventually retiring from Duke Energy in Charlotte, North Carolina. "I was fortunate to stay close to design and technical engineering my whole career. Clemson gave me a good foundation and prepared me well academically. The engineering program trained me to use the skills I had developed and further develop my technical skills throughout my career. Of course, everything is what you make of the tools you've been given, and Clemson gave me great tools to work with," Mike stated.

In 2017 Mike retired, and he and Clarkie made their dream of

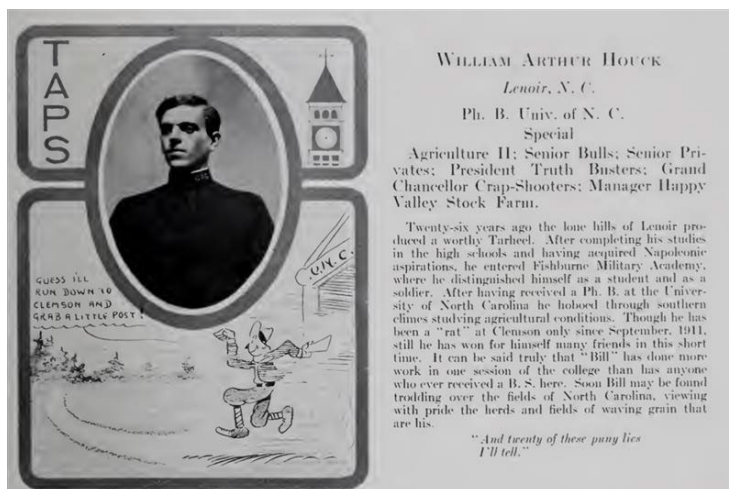
mountain living come true in the Lenoir, North Carolina area. "We started off with 20 acres and through the years, acquired more land as additional tracts became available; we now own around 75 acres," Mike said. One of the tracts of land included a dilapidated 1880s log cabin. What began as a retirement restoration project turned into a journey through history — and a surprising Clemson connection.



The Cabin and the Clemson Connection

While restoring the cabin, Mike and Clarkie found handwritten documents over 200 years old. The last resident, Cora Elma Jones, had lived there into her 80s. Digging deeper, they discovered that in the early 1910s, Cora Elma's sister, Lila, had married William Houck who, they later learned, attended Clemson to study agriculture after graduating from UNC.

Through a bit of research and a road trip to Fredericksburg, Virginia, the Browns connected with Lila and William's son, Stuart Houck. "We had found correspondence between his mother, Lila, and his Aunt Cora Elma," Mike said. "We thought Stuart might like to have those letters, some of which mentioned him as a baby."



When they met, Stuart relayed that his father, William, had studied agriculture at Clemson. He graduated around 1912, a fact Mike verified in the Cooper Library archives, where he found William's photo in the Taps yearbook. "It was really cool for us — with Clarkie being a Tar Heel and me being a Tiger — to find those connections," Mike shared.

The Houck family had been in dairy farming, and during their visit, Stuart

toured Mike and Clarkie around some of those farms, introducing them to cousins and his older brother as well. "It was a great connection between our families, and to have that Clemson tie made it all the better," Mike said. "All of the information that Stuart and his family shared with us helped us piece more of the history together of this log cabin," Mike said.

Education as the Great Equalizer

Reflecting on the story, Mike noted a striking contrast. "On one side of the family, there was opportunity through education: William went to UNC and Clemson; his son, Stuart, earned an engineering degree from Virginia Tech. They did well in dairy farming.

On the other side, Cora Elma lived in poverty in a cabin with no running water. The differentiating factor between those sides of the family was education," he said.



That realization shaped the Browns' decision to support Clemson students. "This is another reason why Clarkie and I believe so deeply in the power of education to change lives. We know how fortunate we are to have received the education we did, and we want to do the same for others," Mike shared. "We hope our planned gift to support future engineering students can help break the cycle of generational poverty for the scholarship recipients," he added.

Creating Opportunities Through Gift & Estate Planning

Mike and Clarkie's planned gift, along with their current support, is focused on mechanical engineering students who demonstrate both need and promise. "Engineering is not an easy degree, but we need engineers in this world. I hope that our planned gift will inspire students to work hard, power through that degree, and then go out and make a difference in the world," Mike said.

At the core of the Browns' faith is a simple belief: Love your neighbor. "For us, that means looking at society and trying to find ways to help everyone be successful," Mike stated.

How Can You Inspire Others?

Planned gifts like the Browns' shape the Clemson of tomorrow. When you include Clemson in your estate plan, you're investing in the next generation of problem-solvers, creators, and compassionate leaders.

Would you consider joining us? Let us help you explore a variety of giving options that can benefit both you and future Tigers.

Whether it's a scholarship, a lab, or a chance to be the first in their family to graduate from college, your legacy can be the spark that lights the way fiercely forward.

Let's Talk

If you're interested in learning how your story can shape Clemson's future, we would love to hear from you.

To learn more about how you can create a legacy through a planned gift, visit our [website](#) or contact the Office of Trusts, Estates and Gift Planning at giving@clemson.edu. I encourage you to review and download our free [Estate Planning Guide](#) to help you navigate important decisions before meeting with an attorney and financial advisers. Please feel free to contact me directly at jovanna@clemson.edu or 864-656-0663.

Thank you for believing in what's possible — and for helping Clemson do more than educate. You're helping us transform lives.

Ever Loyal and Forever Grateful ~

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read "Jovanna". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning.



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