

## ANDREW McDONALD – HONORARY FELLOWSHIP

Professor Day, members of the University and honoured guests,

Imagine a management meeting at a bank in New York. During a break in the agenda one man turns to another and asks if that was a British accent he heard. It was. They talk. The American says he studied in England. The Brit asks where. In Newcastle comes the reply. And suddenly a connection forms, built from a shared love for a place and its people.

This is not an imaginary conversation. The Brit in this story (and its source) is our honorary fellow Andy McDonald, whom we celebrate today. The American is the current Chief Operating Officer of Wells Fargo, Scott Powell. Making such conversations possible has been one of the aims of ‘The United States Friends of the University of Newcastle upon Tyne’. This is the full name of a charity better known as ‘US Friends’, founded to receive donations in support of US citizens studying at the university, and so to create generations of students who now carry fond memories of the North East with them across the Atlantic.

Andy has been both a donor to and an essential figure in the running of US Friends for well over a decade. An alumnus himself of the university, graduating with an MSc in Applied Science in 1973, he went on to pursue a long career in financial services, which culminated in his appointment as Senior

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Vice-President at Wells Fargo. This position allowed him to host US Friends board meetings in the company's Manhattan offices on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. It also – and in the words of the president of US Friends – made him an 'absolute no-brainer' for the post of Treasurer. In this voluntary, unpaid role, Andy managed donations, collaborated with the university's alumni development teams, and kept on top of all the paperwork a 501(c)(3) non-profit organisation requires.

All those who worked with Andy, in the USA and at Newcastle, speak highly of him. A helpful, enthusiastic, dependable, perceptive, charming and efficient man, whose spreadsheets, according to one board member, were always 'very carefully done'. These qualities and more helped Andy restore US Friends's charitable status when it was briefly, worryingly – and mistakenly – removed by the Internal Revenue Service. These qualities also made Andy an excellent host for a few events held in New York, with occasional speakers from the University and many opportunities for alumni to share and compare their stories about Newcastle.

During Andy's time as Treasurer, money directed by US Friends sponsored research studentships, helped to sustain Newcastle University's student hardship fund through the Covid-19 pandemic, and, above all, made sure that American students received financial assistance to support their studies in the North East. From towns all over the States, these young people came to spend a year in

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Newcastle. If they flew into Heathrow and took the train north from London, their first encounter with the city would be a view of its bridges across the Tyne. If they had lectures or seminars on the main campus, they'd walk through the arches and the gardens of the quadrangle to them. If they liked theatre, they'd go into Northern Stage. If they were musical, they'd join a university band, or attend gigs around the city. If they enjoyed nightlife... well, they would certainly have no shortage of it.

And if they played sports, they would be welcomed too. Sports were a part of Andy's own time at Newcastle, where he played football in the First XI. As treasurer, he proposed that the final cash reserves of the US Friends were used to support American involvement in the University's sporting culture. Not in football (or, rather, 'soccer'), but in basketball, as he had heard – in another conversation he'd had about Newcastle – of what a difference small stipends would make here. The board approved the plan and thought it to be a fitting final act for the organization, a positive way to close decades of activity that enriched lives on both sides of the Atlantic. In this way, the US Friends will help to build on the success of Newcastle's elite basketball programmes; our Men's team was ranked number 1 in the country for 2021/22 and our Women's team ranked number 4.

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Maybe, at some point in the future, there will be another conversation, somewhere in America, at a meeting, in a bar, or on a sports pitch, where one person tells the other that they once played basketball in Newcastle, England. And someone else will reply with their own happy experience of the city.

The University is busy renewing its commitment to the USA and hopes that Andy will be a part of that still. But for now, and for today, it honours all the connections and friendships Andy has made possible through his work as Treasurer.

Professor Day, in recognition of his outstanding service to the US Friends of Newcastle University, I present to you Andrew McDonald, to be accepted into the Fellowship of Newcastle University.

James Harriman-Smith

Public Orator

10<sup>th</sup> June 2023