van and Adelaide Guesman are a remarkable couple. Well-educated and well-traveled, these former teachers could have retired with cherished memories and a great deal of personal satisfaction. Yet something tugged at their heartstrings and pushed them to do more.

Today, at a combined age of 184 years, the Guesmans are still imparting valuable knowledge to California University students and alumni, and to the Greene County community at large. Their lesson is simple: It is more blessed to give than to receive.

The Guesmans should know. They’ve been giving for nearly 70 years. As graduates of California State Teachers College, Adelaide ’38 and Ivan ’41 poured their hearts and souls into educating the youth of rural Greene County. Ivan recalls being excited to land his first teaching job in the Jefferson School District immediately after graduation. Until two weeks before school started, he had no idea that he’d been assigned to a one-room schoolhouse.

“I was sure that my professors prepared me well in all my academic areas,” he says with a smile. “But there was no way they could have prepared me for how to actually teach 17 children in eight different grades — and keep the coal stove burning — all at the same time!”
After a year in the little schoolhouse, Ivan transferred to a new elementary building in the town of Pittgas. He had a seventh-grade homeroom, and he taught geography and handwriting to several of the upper grades.

It was here that a lively, young fifth-grade teacher, Adelaide Ivill, caught his eye. “I used to wink at her when we changed classes,” confides Ivan. “We didn’t realize till later that we were both at California at the same time.”

Adelaide feels lucky that her parents recognized the importance of a college education, even though they were in the throes of the Great Depression. Her father worked extremely hard to support his family while pursuing a degree in mining from the school known then as Carnegie Tech.

“When my dad brought home his first paycheck, he asked my mother to start three savings accounts — one for me and one each for my two brothers — and to add to it every month,” recalls Adelaide. “He wanted to make sure we all had the money to go to college.”

During the summers of 1939–1943, Adelaide traveled to Duke University in Durham, N.C., where she eventually received her master’s degree.

The Guesmans were married in 1943, just 10 days before World War II called Ivan to Europe. Adelaide moved to Jefferson-Morgan High School, and two-and-a-half years later, Lt. Col. Ivan Guesman returned to his bride — and his teaching career.

He went on to pursue a master’s degree in school administration from West Virginia University before becoming the superintendent of West Greene School District.

In 1968, he joined the faculty of the Education Department at California University of Pennsylvania, where he taught for 13 years.

Adelaide retired in 1975, after 35 years in the classroom. Ivan continued to teach until 1981.

According to the couple, their career success is only half of their life story. “When we look back on our tenure, we really have had a wonderful experience,” Ivan says. “But this giving, and seeing the results of our giving, has made our lives entirely different.”

It all started in 2000. Ivan initiated a discussion about giving back, and he never got a single argument from Adelaide. “I think I felt a hand on my shoulder,” she says. “We found we could make a difference, and we wanted to do that.”

Since that day, the Guesmans’ generosity has reached all across Greene County. They funded a prayer chapel, recreation center and classroom improvements at Waynesburg College. They sponsored scholarships for area high school and college students, donated to local health care facilities, supported a building campaign for a church camp, and improved programs at senior citizen centers.

In 2007, they made a significant contribution to the Kara Alumni House at Cal U, creating an overnight guest room in honor of their parents. They also established a Charitable Gift Annuity that will enable scholarships for students in the College of Education and Human Services at Cal.

“We have made so many new friends and enjoyed so many blessings,” says Ivan. “We hear people say, ‘The Guesmans are really looking out for us,’” adds Adelaide. “You can imagine how that makes us feel.”

They have been teachers, mentors and benefactors. And on Dec. 13, 2008, they received yet another distinction. University President Angelo Armenti, Jr. conferred upon Ivan and Adelaide the titles of Doctor of Humane Letters, **honoris causa**, for their lifelong commitment to giving to those in need.

They are the first couple in Cal U’s long history to receive this award.

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