People and programs that keep the school healthy and vibrant

Penn State University (his dad’s alma mater). Agnew, MD ’01, and Perricelli, MD ’02, each would become president of his class. The struggle to get there only increased their attachment to the school. “I felt like I had something to prove,” says Agnew, now a general surgery resident at the University of Washington. He didn’t disappoint: Agnew co-ordinated the Surgical Interest Group, served on curriculum committees, was elected to the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Society, and started the Class of 2001 Fund. During his fourth year of med school, Agnew sent e-mails to his classmates, called them on the phone, even stopped them in the hallways, to ask for a pledge to their school, whatever they could afford, once a year for four years after they graduated.

Perricelli, now a general surgery resident at UPMC Presbyterian Hospital, showed the admissions committee they hadn’t made a mistake in choosing him for one of those coveted 150 spots. Like Agnew, he helped to lead the Surgical Interest Group; he also was awarded the Merck Book Award for student leadership and started a class fund. Perricelli set up a network of some 20 graduates, each responsible for calling 10 classmates to remind them of their pledges.

The enterprising ways of Agnew and Perricelli make their classes stand out. On average, less than a quarter of the members of a class donate to the School of Medicine after graduation. Yet, so far 60 percent of the Class of 2001 has made donations. Similarly 59 percent of the Class of 2002 pledged donations—at a time when grads have an average debt burden of $128,000.

Officers for both classes plan to meet at Pitt during their five-year reunions to decide how to use the funds. Some possibilities include endowing scholarships and professorships, funding projects and student groups—anything that adds texture and value to the learning environment at Pitt. “Maybe,” Agnew says, “in 50 years we can pay for everyone’s education.”

Beyond the money raised, Agnew and Perricelli agree, a class fund is a chance for classmates to keep in touch with one another and the University and start a tradition. “A lot of people go through their education without ever feeling a real attachment to a place,” says Agnew. “If you’re part of something larger it makes your time there and afterward a richer experience.”