

FRIENDS OF UFW:

‘The future belongs to the young’

Through their membership of Friends of UFW, alumni support activities for students and recent graduates that help them get ready for the job market. ‘You should spend your money on the things that are the best investment.’

TEXT ANJA JANSSEN PHOTO'S GUY ACKERMANS



Last summer, hydrologist Peter La Follette received University Fund Wageningen’s Thesis Award. He earned this distinction with his Master’s thesis on reducing the number of errors in hydrological models. ‘I’m delighted that my research is recognized in this way,’ says La Follette, who graduated cum laude and is now living and working in the US. ‘Knowing you could win this prize gives you extra motivation when you’re writing your thesis.’

The Thesis Award is an annual accolade for WUR students who have written an excellent Master’s thesis (graded 9 or above). It is one of the activities made possible by the Friends of UFW, an initiative that arose in October 2020 when the alumni association KLV was dissolved. The Friends support activities for students and young alumni, some of which were supported by KLV in the past. Besides the Thesis Award, this includes network meetings, competitions in which students come up with innovative solutions to societal problems, and training courses to prepare

students and young alumni for the job market. The Friends also put 10,000 euros into the emergency fund for students that was established during the Covid crisis.

JOB PROSPECTS

Partly thanks to a round of phone calls with ex-KLV members, there are already nearly 1000 Friends of UFW. One of them is Lidwine Delleart (WUR, Plant Breeding 1972), a senior expert with development organization PUM Netherlands. Over her long career, she worked in numerous management positions, such as director of Statistics Netherlands (CBS) and director of seed production at what was then De Ruiter. ‘I’ve been a member of KLV ever since I graduated. I think it’s a pity the alumni association was dissolved but I’m glad UFW is now ensuring that the activities for students and recent graduates continue. It was an obvious step for me to become a Friend of UFW and support those activities financially.’

Delleart thinks it’s important to help students and recent graduates get ready



Competitions encouraging students to come up with innovative solutions to societal issues are supported by Friends of UFW.

for the job market, and to actively nudge them to join alumni networks. 'Because it can increase their chances of getting a job and they will benefit from it in their work.'

SHARING EXPERIENCE

For freelance consultant Han Swinkels (WUR Zootechnics 1988), it was obvious that he would join the Friends of UFW. As the last chair of KLV, he was closely involved in the development of the initiative. 'The project team for dissolving KLV came up with the idea. Lots of KLV members have been loyal to their alma mater for many years, and we thought it would be a very nice way for them to continue expressing that loyalty through some kind of membership.'

For Swinkels, this is a friendship for life. 'It's just like my old football club, that I've belonged to for 51 years. Why? Because I had a good time there. The same very much applies to my time in Wageningen. That period was incredibly formative in making me the person I am now.'

Swinkels also sees a role for the Friends in giving workshops and helping students and young alumni via their networks. 'I hope the student committee of the UFW, which organizes the activities programme for final-year students, will make use of the Friends network and approach alumni to get them to do some sessions now and then.'

Swinkels himself gave a workshop on networking, for instance. 'That was fantastic. There were about 30 final-year students there, from all over the world. I shared my experience with them and of course I hope that they got something out of it. I really enjoy that kind of interaction with young people. What is more: you should spend your money on the things that are the best investment. The future belongs to the young. I hope they will think back to this when they get older and are comfortably off.'

American graduate Peter La Follette is grateful to all the donors. And not just because he was so pleased to win the prize. 'I am working on hydrological

models now at the American firm Lynker Technologies. At my job interview I could tell them about how I won the Thesis Award. They reacted very positively to that. The prize could well have contributed to their decision to hire me.' ■



FRIENDS OF UFW

Wageningen alumni can join the Friends of UFW for a contribution starting at five euros a month. From 120 euros a year, there is the option of making a tax-deductible multi-annual donation. On Friends Day, members can meet up and also get to know various projects and students. Friends receive a newsletter and a welcome gift on joining.
Info: www.universityfundwageningen.eu/friendsofufw