

# DAVID EMERY

*Distinguished UW Alumnus*

Distinguished UW Alumnus David Emery has spent his life building community.

Whether he's at his job as executive chairman of Black Hills Corp., an electric and natural gas utility, or chaperoning a high school mission trip with his sons to Jamaica to offer labor and support for severely mentally or physically handicapped children and adults, he's focused on bringing people together and building a better future.

Emery's family is from South Dakota, where he grew up and now lives. Both sets of parents and grandparents were self-sufficient and hard-working. His grandfather on his father's side was a member of the Rosebud Sioux tribe (grandmother was Cheyenne River Sioux) and lived his whole life with very little. He passed on that resourcefulness, telling his grandkids, "You just have to figure it out, to fix it and make it work." His mother's father, too, came from humble beginnings. He was a laborer in the Homestake Gold Mine. His maternal grandmother quit school after eighth grade to clean 7th Calvary officers' houses at Fort Meade. "You made up for lack of money by working hard and making due," Emery says.

Emery credits this resourcefulness, learned from his parents and grandparents, as important to his career success: "I think that's key to being a good leader."

He grew up in an atmosphere of active community engagement with both parents being extremely active. His dad served as a state legislator for 12 years, and his mom served on several state boards and commissions, including a gubernatorial appointment as the chair of the South Dakota State Gaming Commission. "You just grow up around that,"

Emery says. "When the governor stops by your house to visit your parents, not being involved just doesn't seem natural."

Emery came to UW straight out of high school. "I had four criteria for college selection," he says and laughs, "rock climbing, skiing, curriculum and tuition—probably in that order." He had a good group of friends to attend classes and climb with, including well-known climbers Todd Skinner and Paul Piana. They climbed, did road trips, and "even attended class once in a while." They may have scaled the ribs of the classroom building and McIntyre Hall in the middle of the night.

He appreciated the hands-on practical education that UW offers: "In the petroleum engineering program, we had a water well right outside the building. You could walk out the garage door in the basement of the engineering building and take samples and do downhole pressure testing. "It was more focused on practical application, rather than just theory. I think that's served me well throughout the years"

He was happy with his choice of UW: "I really enjoyed the university. In addition to the outdoor activities, UW offered a good mix—a relatively large school where you get to enjoy things like Division 1 athletics but still have relatively small class sizes."

After earning a petroleum engineering degree ('85), he began working in the oil and gas industry, eventually following his father's and grandfather's footsteps by taking a job at Black Hills Corp. He began in the oil and gas division, eventually managing it, and then moving to coal and energy marketing and then on to utilities. He worked his way up to chairman and CEO. On Jan. 1, 2019, he retired as CEO after 15 years in that role and is now serving as executive chairman until he fully retires on May 1, 2020.

As head of Black Hills, Emery continued to build community. The company has certainly provided generous financial support to UW, but, as Emery says, "I'm always adamant that this should be an ongoing relationship. We shouldn't just write checks." There is a large group of UW alumni who work at Black Hills, including former MBA students and engineers.

Emery was initially invited by the College of Business to give guest lectures in the MBA program in the trading and ethics courses. Then Black Hills started sponsoring student projects in the MBA program, hosting them on site. Then UW invited Black Hills for Black Hills Day, where approximately 15 Black Hills employees who are mostly UW alumni come to campus annually and visit classes and give talks and network.

Emery says, "People who graduated from UW have a lot to offer students, and vice versa."



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