

Family ties help colleges draw in future students

By JUDY STRINGER
clbfreelancer@crain.com

For freshman twins Jeff and Jon Hatgas, John Carroll University has been a part of life since childhood — from stories of their father's time at the school to overnight visits during sibling events.

"I became familiar with John Carroll from a very early age, and that definitely gave me a certain level of comfort with the university," said Jeff Hatgas, who is undecided on his major.

The Hatgas brothers — in addition to following in the footsteps of their father and siblings — are two of the many "legacy" students scattered across Northeast Ohio colleges.

Most local universities consider a "legacy student" to be any relative of an alumnus. And while some schools define legacy a bit differently, all consider familial connections to be crucial in attracting students.

Tom Fanning, director of admissions and retention at John Carroll, said 27% of the students in the school's freshman class are legacy admissions. He said courting the children of alumni is an important aspect in the school's ongoing effort to identify qualified students who want to enroll.

Children of alumni often have a deeper connection to the university than those without family ties. They are more likely to have visited the campus, and they may have a favorable view of the university based on relatives' experiences or career successes.

What's more, parents invariably compare any other college with their

own, Mr. Fanning said, making a parent's alma mater a natural place to start a child's college search.

"High school students and their parents have 3,000 colleges to choose from, and they are inundated with information," he said. "If you are able to build and maintain that personal relationship with them even before they are thinking about colleges, you have a greater chance of making it to the top of the list."

Ties that bind

For Baldwin-Wallace sophomore Jim Rodriguez, deep family roots are what made B-W a front-runner during his college-hunting days.

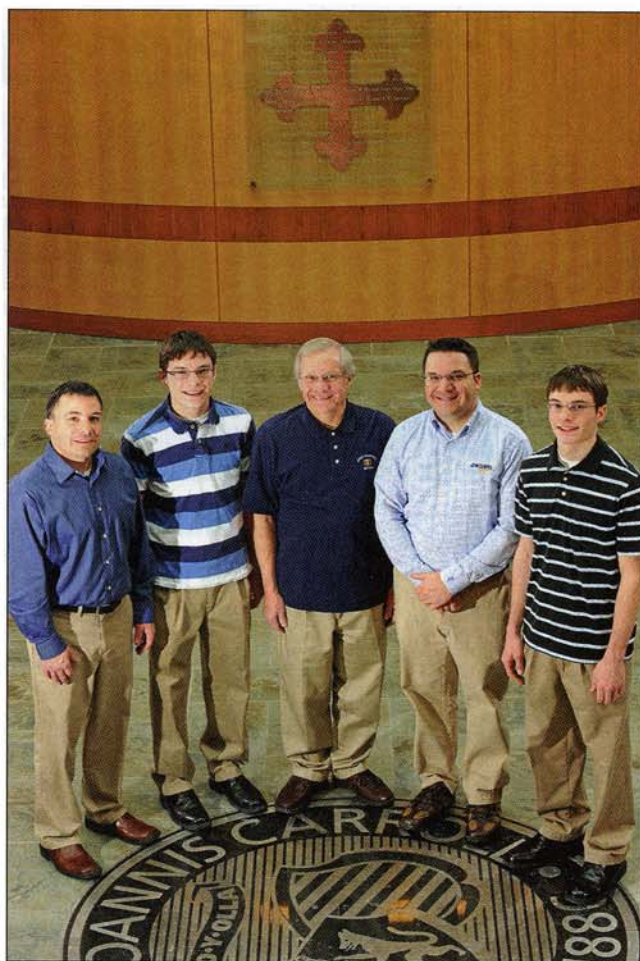
Both of Mr. Rodriguez's parents attended Baldwin-Wallace, as did his grandfather and two uncles. The North Olmsted native considered other colleges, but said Baldwin-Wallace always was No. 1 largely due to the positive experiences of his family members.

B-W boasts 296 legacy students among its 3,000 undergraduate students. Across town, Case Western Reserve University welcomed 49 legacy students among its 1,200 incoming freshmen last fall. Those 49 students joined more than 200 CWRU undergrads whose relatives also attended the university.

Many legacy students attribute their college selection — at least in part — to the fact that one or more relatives had good memories.

"My parents talked about John Carroll and the wonderful time they had there," said sophomore Maura Jochum, "and that did have an impact on me when I was considering colleges."

See **FAMILY** Page 27



MARC GOLUB

From left, brothers Joe and Jon, their father, Mike, and brothers Kevin and Jeff Hatgas attend or have attended John Carroll University. Many children are attracted to their parents' alma maters.

Family: Connections don't mean automatic college qualification

continued from **PAGE 26**

Mike Hatgas, however, may have the market cornered when it comes to inspiring legacies. In addition to freshmen Jeff and Jon, the 1970 John Carroll grad's two other sons attended the university.

While Mr. Hatgas is very passionate about John Carroll, he said he was careful not to pressure his sons.

"College is a very individualized experience," said Mr. Hatgas, who lives in Middleburg Heights. "It was a good fit for me, but that does not automatically make it a good fit for my children. My oldest son said John Carroll was not his first choice precisely because he wanted a different experience than I had."

No preferential treatment

While local universities deny they aggressively recruit prospective legacy students, most do target legacy students by hosting family-oriented alumni events or by asking alumni for the names and ages of their children.

A new program at Cleveland State University even rewards alumni who refer a new student, including their own children, with perks such as recreation center passes and basketball tickets, said marketing director Brian Johnston.

Despite such efforts, John Carroll's Mr. Fanning said the notion that these students are given preferential treatment is a little silly.

"The goal of any admissions officer is to make sure the student is ready to be successful at our school," he said. "We do not admit a student because they are a son or daughter of an alumnus."

That said, the majority of legacy applicants are very strong on their own, he added, and their legacy status simply adds more weight to the admission decision.

"We do assume legacy students will have a pretty good fit because they know the campus and have a good understanding of the university," Mr. Fanning said. ■