

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

BIG DON WILLIAMS ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP

Established 2004



“Big Don” Williams
1937-2012

Described as a “tireless, selfless servant who blesses thousands of lives around the world,” Don Ray Williams, or “Big Don” as he is fondly called, mentored countless teens and college students as a youth minister, motivational speaker, and in his role as associate director of church relations at Pepperdine University. In 1969, Don was named Youth Minister of the Year by Lubbock Christian College and in 1970 was chosen as one of the Outstanding Young Men of America.

Born in Cyril, Oklahoma, in 1937, coincidentally the founding year of George Pepperdine College, Don pursued his college education at Abilene Christian University, where he received a B.S. in 1959 and a master’s degree in 1974, both in Bible studies. He was a popular youth minister for many years at the Broadway Church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas, before moving to California and Pepperdine University in 1971, where he taught religion at Seaver College and served as associate director of church services and special counselor with Jerry Rushford.

His 6’5” frame earned him the nickname “Big Don,” along with his enormous sense of humor and constant compassion. Big Don’s charisma as a youth rally speaker was in high demand; he logged some 100,000 air miles annually as he crisscrossed the nation encouraging students from California to Maine. Part of his job was planning the annual Pepperdine Thanksgiving Youthfest, which began in 1972 as the new Malibu campus welcomed its first class of undergraduates.

For the next 21 years, Big Don led the fun, spirit-filled weekends, which grew to serve 800-900 teens. Dr. Jerry Rushford, director of church relations, points out, “We know that this event meant so much to the churches in the west and ultimately drew many wonderful Christian students to Pepperdine.”

Don’s heartfelt, practical messages gave young people his unique perspective on life. For Big Don, what mattered most were people, loving relationships, and the Author of life, God Himself. He led countless teens to Christ, strengthened and restored the faith of many, and mentored all those who looked up to him—which was almost everyone! During his career at Pepperdine, Big Don produced two recordings: “I Dare You—Don Ray Williams Talks to Teenagers” and “Falling in Love with Love and Falling in Love with Jesus.”

Big Don has a special place in the hearts of two 1976 Seaver alumni, Pepperdine Regent Joe Rokus and his wife, Tari. As minister, mentor, and friend, Big Don officiated at their wedding on October 1, 1977. Honoring his love of young people and his legacy as a Christian youth minister, Tari and Joe made a generous gift to establish the Big Don Williams Endowed Scholarship at Seaver College.



SCHOLARSHIP QUALIFICATIONS

The Big Don Williams Endowed Scholarship is given annually to a Christian Seaver College student who demonstrates financial need.