The Firm has grown in number and created an imposing atmosphere for opponents, not only at home, but on the road as well. The Firm followed the men's team to Crossroads League rival Indiana Wesleyan University for the conference tournament championship in 2012 and cheered the Cougars on to the title, as well as traveled to Orange Beach, Ala., for the women's NAIA National Tournament run that culminated in a Final Four appearance.

Men's Soccer Head Coach Nathan Miller said his players love the support. "The Firm takes our match atmosphere to the next level. They give a boost to the players and make our environment a special one. The players no doubt benefit from that kind of environment and it makes it really hard for opposing teams to play in."

And while this unique group of students has created a permanent fixture on the sidelines, it is not an exclusive group. All students are welcome to join, participate in cheers and march out to the field together. The Firm meets before each match to go over the plan for the game, get the excitement going and make their grand entrance to the Cougar Soccer Complex.

To stay connected with The Firm, follow them on twitter @SAU_Firm.

[ a look back ]

Written by Susan Panak '12

Shaping teachers has been a priority at Spring Arbor University since its beginning in 1873. Of the two graduates in the first graduating class of 1881, Lillian M. Tefft became a longtime teacher in the Jackson Public Schools. Many years before the Mentoring Alumni Program teacher education program began when Spring Arbor University started offering four-year degree programs, students were continuing their education to become teachers. Spring Arbor Seminary student Zella Emerson Gilmore was one example.

Zella, the niece of founding board member John Ellison, attended Spring Arbor Seminary and then became an elementary school teacher. She graduated from Spring Arbor Seminary in 1914, but remained an additional year for further education. The Seminary, not to be confused with an institution for religious training, did not offer a teacher training program. At this time in history, normal schools trained teachers for the rapidly growing common schools. From 1915 through 1917, Zella attended Michigan State Normal College (now Eastern Michigan University) to receive her teacher training. She spent all of her career in Michigan schools and briefly taught elementary school in Spring Arbor. In 1970, Governor William Milliken gave Zella praise for having taught over 50 years in Michigan schools. In her memory, the former Hanover High School (where she taught for many years), now a museum, named a classroom in her honor. This museum features many artifacts c. 1900, including old-time pupil desks, books, slates and maps. Zella's personal Spring Arbor Seminary memoirs were donated to the Spring Arbor University Archives by Judy Pfaff, Zella's granddaughter.

The memoirs include a scrapbook of her primary and secondary schooling at Spring Arbor Seminary, various pictures of students and buildings (including the town of Spring Arbor) dating from the late 1800s to early 1900s, Zella's grade reports from 1902-1914, and a 1914 class composite. This collection documents the seminary during a time period when many resources had not been collected. Zella also was a great inspiration to her granddaughter, Judy Pfaff, who describes her life in one word — perseverance.

"She taught hundreds of children how to read. It was a special joy, she would say, to teach a child in one year to read, a skill they would use and enjoy throughout their lifetime. As most of her time was spent in Jackson County Schools, she often taught the second and even third generations of children from the same families," said Pfaff.

To learn more about Zella Emerson Gilmore, John Ellison, and to view photographs from Zella's scrapbook of her primary and secondary years at Spring Arbor Seminary, please visit whitelibrary.dspacedirect.org/handle/11210/32.

Zella Emerson Gilmore is pictured top row, furthest right.