Inspiring new traditions—BSC’s ginkgo trees
he ginkgo tree—a symbol of perseverance and fortitude—personifies strength in the face of adversity. The only tree left standing after the bombing of Hiroshima, the tree has become symbolic for its ability to withstand the mightiest force ever known and remain standing, beautiful, proud, and vibrantly alive.

For Birmingham-Southern students and alumni, the ginkgo trees on campus have always been a beautiful part of the daily landscape, but they are something more. For throughout the many physical changes to the campus, the ginkgo trees remain a constant for generations of students. You may not remember Snavely Student Center, the predecessor to Norton Campus Center, but you’ll remember the brilliant gold of the ginkgo trees in the fall. You may not remember an academic quad with a bell tower, but you’ll remember dodging the stinky fruit shed each year by the ginkgo trees outside Munger. You may not know the current faculty members, but you’ll remember walking the sidewalks and chatting with your professors under the ginkgos’ canopies.

“So many things can change on a campus, and finding the right icon to symbolize your experience as a BSC student could have been difficult,” notes Lisa Harrison ’85 (MPPM), director of alumni affairs. “But the ginkgo leaf just resonates with every alum. Even more powerful is the lovely way it symbolizes the strength and beauty that we believe each one of our graduates—past, present, and future—brings to the world beyond the Hilltop.”

Capturing the essence of the ginkgo trees, the Office of Institutional Advancement initiated two ceremonies that bookend a BSC student’s life on the Hilltop. Each of those ceremonies incorporates the symbol of the ginkgo leaf.

First, on Move-In Day, after the business of settling into the residence halls is done, the college hosts an Opening of School Convocation for first-year students. The faculty lead the students in their first procession as members of the BSC family, and they are greeted with much ceremony by the president, the SGA president, the alumni board president, trustees, and others. Those greetings are capped with a final gift from the Alumni Association, a commemorative coin featuring a ginkgo leaf.

Second, when the seniors have completed their studies and are preparing to leave the Hilltop, the Commencement festivities include a Capping Ceremony. Here, the students choose an individual important to them to “cap” them by placing their mortar board on their heads. After they have been officially capped, each student is presented with a golden ginkgo leaf ornament, a beautiful and long-lasting reminder of where they have been.

“You truly begin your life as a BSC alum on your first day as a student,” Harrison believes. “That awareness of your place in the cycle of the college’s life is important to establish. We think these very real symbols of the beginning and ending of your undergraduate years are thoughtful ways to emphasize that sense of belonging to the body of BSC alumni.”