Epperson Gift Achieves WIU’s Campaign Goal

The Western Illinois University Foundation is pleased to announce that its Higher Values in Higher Education Campaign has met its $60 million goal with a most generous gift from distinguished alumni, longtime friends and loyal supporters Dr. Ken and Lorraine Epperson.

“Our commitment to Western and to this campaign is a gift of love and appreciation for what Western has meant to us, and an investment in the future of Western and the Center for the Performing Arts,” said Lorraine.

The Epperson’s seven-figure gift, a combination of an outright gift and a bequest, directs $1.5 million to the long-anticipated Center for the Performing Arts (CPA) to be located on the southwest side of campus, along Western Avenue. Both Ken and Lorraine have selflessly worked to bring a Center for the Performing Arts to the campus of Western Illinois University and the Macomb community since 1970s.

“We will be so happy when the CPA is constructed at last, and believe strongly that it will positively impact the quality of life for the University, the community and the region,” Lorraine added.

The more than 5,000-square-foot iconic lobby of the Center will be named in honor of Ken and Lorraine in recognition of this gift. Ken and Lorraine have been involved with Western in some way for most of their lives.

“Our loyalty to Western has never changed a bit since we were students,” said Ken. “We got our start at Western, and everything we have achieved is possible because of the education we received. We are giving back so that current and future students can be as fortunate.”

The couple met as students at Western and were married the year following Lorraine’s graduation. As students, they were both involved: Ken as a three-sport letterman (football, basketball and track) and Lorraine as the first president of Sigma Sigma Sigma sorority. They both earned education degrees, then went on to education careers – Ken as a teacher, principal, superintendent, and later, Community College Relations director for Western; Lorraine as a teacher and 18 years as guidance director for Macomb High School.

Lorraine entered the real estate business in 1974, and Ken joined her upon his retirement from Western. Together, they purchased the Purdum Real Estate Firm in 1985, and in 1990, acquired a Century 21 franchise.

The Eppersons have strengthened their commitment to Western throughout their lives. As a couple, they have served on the Performing Arts Society Board of Directors. Lorraine was a member of the WIU Alumni Council for several years, serving as its president for two years. She was a Board of Governor’s Trustee, then appointed by Gov. Jim Edgar to Western’s Board of Trustees in 1995, including terms as vice chair and chair of the Board. In 1988, she received the College of Business and Technology’s Distinguished Alumni Award, and in 2006, was awarded Western’s...
Distinguished Alumni Award. She is currently in her third term on the WIU Foundation Board of Directors. Lorraine received the Sigma Sigma Sigma Centennial Woman of Distinction award given by the national sorority. She received her bachelor’s degree from Western in 1948, and master’s degree in 1952.

Ken earned his bachelor’s degree from Western in 1946, and his master’s in 1952, and later, his doctorate in 1969, from Indiana University. He was awarded WIU’s Alumni Achievement Award in 1987, and was initiated into the WIU Athletics Hall of Fame in 1996. Ken is a talented woodworker, crafting the large WIU seal on display in the Registrar’s Office (made in 1974 in honor of Western’s 75th anniversary) and the Ceremonial Mace (a symbol of University scholarship and integrity since the 11th century) featured in convocations and commencements. Ken learned basic woodturning skills while at Western, nearly 70 years ago, from Wayne Wetzel, for whom Wetzel Hall was named.

“The Foundation and WIU are thrilled that this noteworthy gift, the one that achieves our campaign goal, comes from Kenny and Lorraine,” said Vice President for Advancement and Public Services Brad Bainter. “Their relationship with Western and their history of giving, both of their time and resources, makes this particular gift and attaining this goal all the more meaningful. Truly, all of Western is grateful to them for all they do.”

The Eppersons have supported numerous Western initiatives, including the Leatherneck Club, Performing Arts Society, the College of Business and Technology, University Libraries and several scholarships. They made a commitment to the previous Centennial Campaign in 1996, to establish an endowment to support future generations and are among the University’s leading donors.

“It is a day for rejoicing,” said WIU President Jack Thomas. “Not only did we celebrate Founders’ Day at Western Illinois University, we also celebrated meeting our campaign goal, thanks to two very special people who have been connected to Western since the 1940s. We are so happy that they are part of this important occasion.”

The “Set the Standard: Higher Values in Higher Education” $60 million campaign for Western Illinois University began silently in 2006, and went public in 2010. The campaign has focused on increased scholarship support for students, support for faculty, improvements to capital facilities, and enhancing information and technology for all the staff and students of Western Illinois University. The campaign will conclude Dec. 31.

Flip, Learn, and Master iPad Project

John Distefano and CBT Director of Development Becky Paulsen

The flipped classroom is a relatively new teaching model, where lectures become homework and traditional homework becomes classwork. Students access content such as lectures and class readings on a device, such as an iPad, as assigned content outside of class. The classroom is where the instructor spends his/her time on the most complex ideas and is there to help students understand the materials as they work on assignments and projects.

Dr. Mandeep Singh, WIU professor of management and marketing, tried a flipped classroom as part of the Flip, Learn, and Master iPad Project, during the Spring 2013 semester. “The notion appealed to me as I realized that it would free up a substantial part of my class time to engage students in experiential learning-based assignments,” he said.

What started with 14 students expanded this fall to accommodate 100 students; one flipped classroom has evolved into a learning lab within the College of Business and Technology for faculty/student collaboration with this new teaching innovation. A demonstration by Singh to the CBT Advisory Board in April resulted in incremental funding for a “project that provides the unique opportunity to impact both course content as well as the approach to teaching which I believe can make a differential impact for hundreds (if not thousands) of students.”

These are the words of CBT alumnus John Distefano ’80, principal at Ernst & Young, LLP and one of Consulting Magazine’s top 25 consultants for 2012. “I was very fortunate that most WIU professors recognized and were very patient with my nontraditional way of learning,” he continued. “This project has the opportunity to help deliver standardized content and structured learnings through a digital channel that can be customized and individualized by each student.”

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“This method of teaching has a singular underlying imperative: Students cannot passively receive material in class,” Singh explained. “Instead, they gather information largely outside of class, by reading, watching recorded lectures, or listening to podcasts. And when they are in class, students do what is typically thought to be homework, solving problems with their professors or peers, and applying what they learn to new contexts. It transforms the classroom into a collaborative learning space. Learning is not limited to the lecture from the instructor, but rather from the many interactions between students and the instructor.”

And this “ambitious aspiration” is exactly what appealed to Distefano. So much, that he and his wife Kim ’81, have committed $75,000 to enable Singh to expand the number of courses and students taught through this method, and to create a lab devoted to creating new ways of teaching and learning.

“In the spring, the whole concept was to conduct actual applications in class,” said Singh. “We worked with local businesses to deliver a total promotional campaign. Every student participated in terms of input for each business; it was a very friendly environment. Effort was put into brainstorming and coming up with the best possible campaign for the client. It was beautiful and brilliant to watch, because the group taught each other, using their own contacts. The classroom became a community of learners; it got away from the traditional classroom and became engaging and fun.”

Eckman Memorial Scholarship in Honor of Denita Rouse

The respect and admiration between Denita Rouse and Troy and Jennifer Eckman evolved beyond the professional relationship between a teacher and the parents of her student. The Eckmans feel that Rouse was much more than a teacher to their son, Noah; she allowed him to be a normal child, rather than a special education student, and she became a close family friend.

The first Noah Eckman Memorial Scholarship in Honor of Denita Rouse was awarded this fall. Applications are available for the $1,000 annual award for senior level special education majors in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction or at wiu.edu/scholarships.

“I can’t explain how I felt when I found out about the scholarship; I was overwhelmed with emotions,” Rouse said recently. “For the Eckmans to think of me this way and honor me, when Noah was such a big part of my life, leaves me just in awe,” Rouse added.

“We want to help people become teachers like Denita,” said Jennifer, “and capitalize on the difference she made in Noah’s life. Special education teachers have a unique connection with their students, and that certainly was the case with Noah and Denita.”

Rouse was one of the first people the Eckmans met when they moved to Macomb in July of 2000 to open the Women’s Health Center. Rouse was Noah’s teacher at West Central Illinois Special Education class at West Prairie Elementary School, and also provided respite care outside of school.

“Denita made Noah a ‘normal’ child, rather than a special education student,” said Jennifer. She said that Rouse made them feel welcome in the community, and it turned out to be a great place for Noah’s needs.

Noah was 3 at the time and loved going to school.

“He would start laughing as soon as he heard the bus in the morning,” Jennifer said. “He loved Denita and accomplished many milestones with her.”

Noah died on March 5, 2004, at the age of 6. The Eckmans recently established the Noah Eckman Memorial Scholarship in May to honor both Noah and Denita Rouse, and the memories they have of the two of them together.

“We established the scholarship first and foremost to remember Noah, while honoring Denita,” said Troy, “and to give something back to Western.”

Both Troy and Jennifer are graduates of Western; Troy completed a B.S. in biology and Jennifer earned a B.S. in home economics and an M.A. in gerontology.

“It’s kind of fun to do something outside both our fields,” Troy noted. Their daughter, Abbey, is now a student at Western, continuing the family tradition.

“Noah was special to me, and I truly loved him as my own,” Rouse said. “I’m honored to be recognized by the Eckmans this way, and to have my name forever associated with Noah’s.”
Developments
FALL 2013

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

As of Sept. 24, we have reached 100% of our set goal.

Higher Values in Higher Education: $60 million campaign goal.

The public phase of the University's campaign kicked off in 2010 with goals to increase scholarships, support faculty, and endowed programs to support faculty, and endowments.

Improvements and enhancements in information and technology.

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