León Tribute

An evening devoted to honoring former MSSU President Dr. Julio León and his wife, Vivian, was held on April 26. The tribute re-engaged many friends of the university. It had the feel of a family reunion, with so many people greeting and reminiscing about their Southern experiences and their lives since then.

A fundraising campaign honoring the Leóns was successful in bringing in $1.5 million in donations of cash, pledges and planned gifts. These gifts were designated for scholarships and capital projects. As a result and with action of the MSSU Board of Governors, the Health Sciences Building was named the Julio S. León Health Sciences Center. A formal dedication for the building will be held on Aug. 27.

Dr. León spent 38 years at Missouri Southern State University and served 25 of those years as president. In addition to securing university status for Missouri Southern, his time as president saw the development of the International Mission and the Honors Program. Numerous building projects were completed during his tenure, including the Leggett & Platt Athletic Center, the Mayes Student Life Center, the Bud Walton Theatre and Webster Hall.

Dr. León expressed his gratitude as he addressed the guests at the April 26 event and said how excited he was to be able to visit with so many friends.
Two major gifts have been received by the Missouri Southern Foundation for a new baseball stadium that will be ready for the 2015 baseball season. Rod and Janice Anderson, from Monett, made a $25,000 gift to the campaign. To honor this gift, a suite at the stadium will honor the Board of Governors. Anderson has been a member of the Board of Governors since 2003, serving two terms as chair. He is a longtime supporter of Missouri Southern and the Lionbacker Booster Club. Don and Christy Swanson have contributed $10,000 and will have home stands named in their honor. Don is an MSSU alumnus and a member of the Missouri Southern Foundation Board of Directors since 2011.

The fundraising campaign is a collaboration between the university, the MSSU Baseball Advisory Committee and the Missouri Southern Foundation. The stadium will feature state-of-the-art synthetic turf, regulation lighting, seating for 500, a viewing deck and other amenities.

“We’re thankful for these generous gifts,” said JoAnn Graffam, executive director of the Foundation. “They are going to make the new stadium a reality for the campus and the community and we couldn’t do it without them.”

An endowed scholarship for students seeking a bachelor’s degree in education has been established by the daughter of a couple whose legacy remains tied to the continued success of Missouri Southern State University. Connie Billingsly Godwin, of Joplin, created the scholarship in honor of her parents, Dr. Leon and Sue Billingsly.

Dr. Leon Billingsly was named the fifth dean of Joplin Junior College in 1961, and later became president of what was then known as Jasper County Junior College. He served as the first president of Missouri Southern State College – as it transitioned into a four-year school and made the move to the Mission Hills campus – from 1964 until his death in 1978.

“Education was central in the lives of my parents,” said Godwin, who teaches at Missouri Southern. “I wanted to honor them and all they did to help students through their roles at Missouri Southern and this seemed to be a fitting way to have their memory live on.”

A former teacher, Sue Billingsly’s passion for helping students succeed became one of the cornerstones of her years at Missouri Southern. She became the first director of the Missouri Southern Foundation in 1979. Under her leadership, the Foundation became a more active fundraising organization with the development of the annual Phonathon. The annual fundraising campaign remains the cornerstone of the Southern Annual Fund.

The scholarship will begin to be awarded in the fall of 2014. Any student seeking a bachelor’s degree in education with a minimum of a 2.5 GPA may apply through the financial aid office. Additional contributions can be made to increase this endowment by those who would also like to honor the Billingslys.

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The Music Department at Missouri Southern has added a new dimension to their curriculum — steel drums. Several donors stepped up to help finance the purchase of these unique instruments. Following a debut performance at the World Music & Cuisine Festival two weeks earlier, the Steel Drum Ensemble presented a concert on May 2 in the Bud Walton Theatre. With a relaxed, island vibe, their sound was definitely a change of pace!

The drums were purchased through the efforts of the Missouri Southern Foundation with assistance from the Institute of International Studies. The total amount raised was $25,000.

The drums will also facilitate an educational outreach to area schools, including bringing children on campus for after-school activities as part of the World Percussion Academy. Area musicians and interested individuals will be able to play with the ensemble, building their connection to the arts. Community members across the region will have the opportunity to enjoy performances both on and off campus, diversifying their education and exposure to other cultures.

“I’ve always said that if you want the percussion area and music department to have something nobody else in the area has, this was it,” said Brian Fronzaglia, interim head of the Music Department who also performs with the group.

### Steel Drums

Jere Marcum and Bob Corley, major contributors to the steel drum fundraising campaign, proudly show their steel drum member T-shirts presented to them by the ensemble before their May 2 steel drum performance.

### Other Gifts to The Foundation

- Harrison and June Kash have created an endowment through the Missouri Southern Foundation. Its purpose is to fund the Harrison and June Kash International Film Society. It will provide funds for securing film rentals and performance rights for films shown as part of programs sponsored by the society and for an annual lecture on the topic of foreign films.
- The Mary Jane Landreth Trust has established an endowed gift to the Foundation to provide scholarships for students in the nursing program at Missouri Southern.

### Walmart Contribution to Music Department

The Music Department was able to purchase state-of-the-art musical instruments and equipment, thanks to a $50,000 contribution from Walmart in the spring of 2014. Many students will benefit from the gift, including music performance majors, music industry majors and music education majors. The department is the primary provider of teacher education graduates to area K-12 school districts, and also prepares students to work in the business and production areas of the music world, as well as performing artists.

The gift was facilitated by Missouri Southern alumnus Mike Moore ('87), the executive vice president and president of Walmart Central.

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The recently completed Lantern Society Donor Wall was formally dedicated on July 31, 2014. It recognizes gifts to the Missouri Southern Foundation Lantern Society and is located in the hallway outside Connor Ballroom in Billingsly Student Center. Dedication ceremony speakers included JoAnn Graffam, executive director of Missouri Southern Foundation; Sam Sturgis, a 2006 MSSU graduate and president of Images-in-Tile, the firm who constructed the tile wall; Mike Pence, president of the Missouri Southern Foundation and Dr. Alan Marble, president of Missouri Southern State University. Guests enjoyed viewing the wall with glass panels listing donors and their levels of giving as well as videos about donors and the scholarships or projects they chose to support. The wall will be updated annually to reflect cumulative amounts donors have given to the Foundation.