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Celebrating the Arts Sets Big Goal for Ford Center

Campaign launches to build endowment for performing arts

SEPTEMBER 12, 2018 BY TINA H. HAHN

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The Ford Center has cloisonné friendship balls for sale as part of the Celebrating the Arts campaign, which runs through May 18. Photo by Kirsten Faulkner

OXFORD, Miss. – Adding \$1.5 million in endowment for the **Gertrude C. Ford Center for the Performing Arts** at the **University of Mississippi** is the goal of the Celebrating the Arts campaign, which will increase the total endowment to \$3 million.

Mississippi native and UM alumnus Gerald McRaney serves as the celebrity spokesperson.

"It's important to support the arts, as opposed to supporting simple entertainment, because simple entertainment quite often will fund itself," said McRaney, who majored in theatre arts at Ole Miss. "But all too often, the arts – like fine, old books in public libraries – won't be supported on their own.

"They need us to keep them alive, and they are an essential part of our culture. ... Without the arts, without those reminders, we're lost. We're a rudderless ship at sea with no direction home.

"The arts in Mississippi have a long, long history, and I don't want to see that history overlooked, and I don't want to see it end. I want us to continue to make history, not just appreciate it."

To honor donors to the Celebrating the Arts campaign, the Ford Center has unveiled plans for a large bronze tree sculpture commissioned from Sanford Werfel Studio and hand-carved by artist Richard Teller. The sculpture will be a permanent installation in the theater lobby.

Major initial gifts already include those from the Gertrude C. Ford Foundation, of Jackson; Mary and Sam Haskell, of Oxford; and Nancye Stames, of Charleston, South Carolina, with their names to be displayed on the tree trunks. Dr. Ralph Vance and his wife, Douglas, as well as Chancellor Jeffrey Vitter and his wife, Sharon, also have made major gifts, bringing the early total for campaign efforts to more than \$220,000.

Calling the 15-year-old Ford Center a world-class arts and entertainment venue for the state and region, Vitter said providing cultural arts experiences is a key component of the university's mission to prepare well-rounded students and provide opportunities to the greater community.

"As a flagship institution, we're committed to growing the capacity of our extraordinary arts and cultural resources and programs," Vitter said. "The arts keep everything vibrant and relevant; the arts provide an enduring legacy that offers insight into ourselves, as well as cultures of other times and places.

"Friends of the Ford Center have provided amazing ideas and are investing their time and energy to move the Ford Center forward. With continued support of alumni and friends, I am confident that we will have a

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Campus Briefs

Donations Sought for 25th Annual Books and Bears Program

OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children's play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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Thank You To Our Donors

Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship Aims to Build Leaders

OXFORD, Miss. – Twenty-five inaugural recipients of the Mississippi Excellence in Coaching Fellowship – a program hosted by the University of Mississippi School of Education in partnership with the Mississippi Association of Coaches and the Mississippi High School Activities Association – are expected to increase their impact on student-athletes and their communities. The coaching fellowship

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Ole Miss In the News

Clarion-Ledger: New Essay Collection Tells the Story of Meredith's Enrollment

Essays celebrate 60th anniversary of James Meredith's enrollment at University of Mississippi By Lauren Rhoades Oct. 1 marks the 60th anniversary of James Meredith's 1962 enrollment at the University of Mississippi as the school's first African-American student.

successful campaign.”

The campaign will conclude May 18, 2019 at the Ford Center’s inaugural Friendship Ball. McRaney and his wife, actress Delta Burke, are expected to perform A.R. Gurney’s “Love Letters,” a two-character piece in the form of a staged reading of the 50-year correspondence between East Coast bluebloods Melissa Gardner and Andrew Makepeace Ladd III.

Those interested in contributing to the campaign can choose from several levels of support with names engraved on different parts of the tree sculpture. The middle trunk represents the Muse of Music and features Gertrude C. Ford rising from the roots with her violin, while the other two trunks hold figures representing the Muses of Drama and Dance.

Nestled among the trees are various sized boughs – representing gifts of \$20,000, \$25,000 or \$30,000 – and on the ground ensuring future trees, golden acorns for gifts of \$10,000. In the engraver’s brass gold are also 750 donor recognition leaves, for gifts of \$1,000. When a gift is made, the Ford Center will send the donor a form with instructions for personalizing the bough, acorn or leaf.

Most performing arts centers rely upon private contributions from individuals, foundations, corporations and businesses to sustain operations and programming, and the Gertrude C. Ford Center is no different.

University resources can cover salaries and a nominal budget, and other resources come from the Ford Foundation, Friends of the Ford Center and other alumni and friends. These additional resources cover the costs of special appearances or series, as well as programming, advertising and other costs associated with running the facility.

The shows each season are major costs, as large-scale musicals can cost up to \$70,000 to bring to campus, Ford Center Director Julia Aubrey said.

“We want to offer the biggest and the best that our facility can present, and this takes support beyond ticket sales,” she said. “The building is now 15 years old, and to maintain its beauty and functionality, we have to continually repair, replace and upgrade. Our technology also must be updated to keep competitive with today’s expectations.”

Investing time, energy and resources in the Ford Center is a worthy endeavor, said Ole Miss alumna and Ford Center volunteer Susan Meredith, of Oxford.

“The Gertrude C. Ford Center for the Performing Arts is a magical place,” Meredith said. “Where else can live music make your heart soar? Where else can dance make you gasp in amazement? Where else can the spoken word bring tears of sorrow or joy to your soul?”

“And we have this amazing facility right here in our own backyard!”



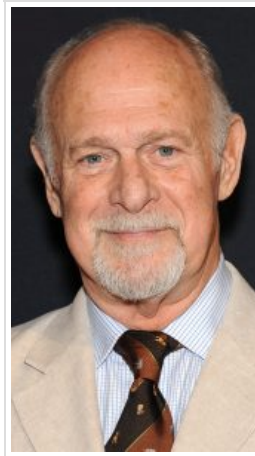
Ford Center Director Julia Aubrey joins UM alumni and friends recently to launch the Celebrating the Arts campaign, which intends to add \$1.5 million to the center’s endowment, elevating it to \$3 million. A bronze tree sculpture has been commissioned to recognize donors to the campaign. Photo by Robert Jordan

Among highlights of the center’s 2018-19 season are national tours of the “Wizard of Oz” (Oct. 21) and “Jersey Boys” (Nov. 9), as well as “Feri-Comejo-Levingston: An Evening of Dance and Music” (Sept. 20), St. Lawrence String Quartet (Oct. 16), Warren Wolf Quartet (Nov. 13), Moscow Ballet’s “Great Russian Nutcracker” (Nov. 30), ensemble 4.1 (Jan. 21), “We Shall Overcome – A Celebration of Martin Luther King Jr.” (Feb. 12), “In the Mood, a 1940s Musical Revue” (Feb. 16), Cirque Éloize Saloon: A Musical Acrobatic Adventure (Feb. 26), Billy Hart and the Academy (Feb. 26) and Junie B. Jones (March 30).

“I believe the arts reflect the heart of a culture and society,” Aubrey said. “We seek out paintings, sculpture and music from the past to learn what people were thinking or feeling – what was important to a previous generation.

“The performing arts that are presented in the Ford Center invite an audience to share someone else’s story for a brief period of time. Whether that story is told through music, drama or dance, we have a chance to share that visceral or intellectual experience. You leave laughing, thoughtful or both, and that makes one a more empathetic human being.”

To make a gift to the Celebrating the Arts campaign, send a check made out to the University of Mississippi Foundation, with the Ford Center campaign noted in the check’s memo line, to 406



UM alumnus Gerald McRaney is the celebrity spokesperson for the Celebrating the Arts campaign. Submitted photo

“James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier,” a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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University Ave., Oxford, MS 38655 or online at <http://www.fordcenter.org/celebrate>. More information also is available on the site, and Vitter's comments from the campaign launch dinner can be found at <http://chancellor.olemiss.edu/celebrating-the-arts-campaign-launch-dinner/>

The Ford Center also has cloisonne friendship balls available for \$50 at its ticket office, with the design featuring the center and Oxford. For more information, contact Kate Meacham, Ford Center marketing director, at kmeacham@olemiss.edu or 662-915-6502.

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