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Estate Gift Honors Family and Friends

Wilsons' planned contribution designed to benefit teaching in UM Honors College

JANUARY 19, 2019 BY **BILL DABNEY**



Ron and Jody Wilson (from left) have made a gift to the UM Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College in honor of Mary Lou and Harry Owens. Representing the Honors College is the dean, Douglass Sullivan-Gonzalez. Photo by Bill Dabney/UM Foundation

OXFORD, Miss. – Ron and Jody Wilson, of Oxford, want their planned gift to help generate more **University of Mississippi** courses that will engage and challenge students for generations to come.

The Wilsons recently included Ole Miss in their estate plans, offering the university their home as a way to pay tribute to their late son while honoring two of their closest friends.

The gift establishes the Harry and Mary Lou Owens Excellence in Teaching Endowment, honoring the longtime Ole Miss history professor who retired in 1998 and his wife. Earnings from the endowment will support the **Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College**.

"We hope the endowment will create super-interesting, intriguing and demanding classes for these students to enjoy," said Wilson, a development officer for the UM **College of Liberal Arts**.

The Wilsons wanted to support higher education because it was important to their son, Matthew Wilson of Birmingham, Alabama, who held three degrees from Samford University. He died in 2018 at age 34.

"Our son wasn't in the honors college at Samford, but he graduated eighth in his business school class and was named to Who's Who, so he was one of the leading students on the campus," Wilson said.

"We decided that since we don't have a family member to leave our home to, we would invest in the lives of Ole Miss honor students, pay tribute to Harry and Mary Lou, who have come to love Ole Miss, and also benefit Douglass Sullivan-Gonzalez (Honors College dean), a very dear friend of ours whom I've known since college back in the '70s."

The endowment is designed to support quality teaching, research and service within the Honors College by providing salary supplements and covering expenses associated with research and travel for faculty.

"We greatly appreciate Ron and Jody's vision for the Honors College and their generosity in making a gift that will benefit our students in perpetuity," Sullivan-Gonzalez said. "Many professors on this campus have two or three courses that they would love to create and teach outside of



Ron and Jody Wilson's gift to the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College is 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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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.

their regular curriculum.

memorial to their son, Matthew Wilson.
Photo courtesy Ron Wilson

"That can happen within the Honors College, and the Wilsons' gift will help bring those opportunities to fruition."

The Wilsons hope the endowment will inspire faculty members to develop extraordinary classes similar in academic quality to one that Owens taught during his tenure at Ole Miss when he examined the lives and work of Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Charles Darwin.

"These were three pivotal writers from the late 19th century who changed the world, and that's the kind of intellectual class we want to be developed for these honors students," Wilson said.

The Wilsons and Owens became friends through their mutual love of history and chess, which the two men play almost every Friday.

Who wins?

"It's about half and half," Owens said. "I would say I'm a little bit ahead. I enjoy great conversations during this time with Ron. He is quite knowledgeable about almost everything."

Owens also said he is humbled by the creation of an endowment in his name.

"I do feel very honored," he said. "This gift is very special to me."

To support the Hary and Mary Lou Owens Excellence in Teaching Endowment, send a contribution with the endowment's name written in the check's memo line, to the University of Mississippi Foundation, 406 University Ave., Oxford, MS 38655. Gifts also can be made online at <https://give.olemiss.edu>.

For information about including the university in your estate plans, contact Sandra Guest, vice president of the UM Foundation, at 662-915-5208 or sguest@olemiss.edu.

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"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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