



Hollins Receives Largest Financial Gift In School History

The Estimated \$5-6 Million Bequest Will Support The University's New Visual Arts Center

Roanoke, Va. – Hollins University has announced that the estate of Eleanor D. “Siddy” Wilson, a 1930 Hollins graduate, has bequeathed between \$5 - 6 million to complete and support the Richard Wetherill Visual Arts Center.

Pending market fluctuations and final distribution of the estate, the specific amount of the bequest will not be known for another week to ten days. However, it is certain that the gift will be the largest in the independent liberal arts university's 160-year history.

“This tremendous gift will serve as a catalyst for ensuring higher and higher levels of quality at Hollins,” said President Nora Kizer Bell. Hollins expects to receive the gift in the next six months.

Wilson was the driving force and the major financial benefactor behind the creation of a comprehensive visual arts center at Hollins. The center is named for Wilson's grandfather, a well-known Philadelphia industrialist and civic leader at the turn of the 20th century.

“For over 70 years, Hollins was the active and abiding love of Siddy's life,” said Tanya Bickley, co-executor of Wilson's estate. “She believed in single sex education and its possibilities to encourage young women to succeed and find their own voices.”

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After graduating from Hollins, Wilson, a native of Chester, Pa., went on to achieve renown as a stage and film actress and as an artist. She co-starred on Broadway with such legendary actors as Tallulah Bankhead and Jose Ferrer, and received a Tony Award nomination for her performance in the 1968 comedy “Weekend.” Wilson was also accomplished in radio, television, and film work and portrayed Warren Beatty’s mother in the film “Reds.”

Wilson retired from the theater in 1984 to focus on her love of abstract painting. In addition to Hollins, her work has been exhibited at the Hudson Guild and Touchstone Gallery in New York City, Widener University, and the Williams College Museum of Art.

After a yearlong battle with lung cancer, Wilson died on May 31, 2002, at her home in Williamstown, Mass.

“Siddy’s passionate desire was that Hollins have an art museum,” said Bickley. “She assiduously followed that dream with a discipline in no way foreign to anyone who knew and loved her.”

Bickley noted that Wilson and her financial advisor secretly spent the last 20 years of her life growing the money that made possible her generosity to Hollins. “One can only imagine Siddy’s private glee as she contemplated such a surprise,” Bickley said.

The Richard Wetherill Visual Arts Center will centralize Hollins’ programs in studio art, art history, and film and photography into one building. It will feature five galleries for students works and outside exhibitions; an outdoor sculpture garden; filmmaking and editing classrooms; studios for painting, drawing, printmaking,

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papermaking and sculpting; large photography darkrooms; and a roof terrace for painting and drawing. The 58,000 square foot renovation and addition, which began recently, is expected to open in 2004.

Hollins University offers undergraduate education for women, selected graduate programs for men and women, and community outreach initiatives. Founded in 1842 as Virginia's first chartered women's college, Hollins was recently ranked the number one school in the nation for overall quality of life by The Princeton Review.

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