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Recommended Citation

Henderson, Trennis and Ouachita News Bureau, "Ouachita's renovated Wright Choir Room honors dedication of Dr. Charles Wright" (2016). *Press Releases*. 287.

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OUACHITA
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NEWS

For immediate release

Ouachita's renovated Wright Choir Room honors dedication of Dr. Charles Wright

By Trennis Henderson, OBU Vice President for Communications

September 8, 2016

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Honoring the influence and impact of longtime Ouachita Baptist University professor and administrator Dr. Charles Wright, more than 100 students, faculty and staff members gathered recently to celebrate the rededication of the Charles W. Wright Choir Room in Ouachita's Mabee Fine Arts Center.

Dr. Wright, professor emeritus of music, retired in 2004 following a 40-year career at Ouachita, including serving as dean of Ouachita's School of Music and School of Fine Arts as well as acting vice president for academic affairs from 2001 to 2003. He returned to the university staff in 2013 as a development officer and served as interim president in 2015-16.

In recognition of his retirement from teaching and his service as dean, the choir room was named in his honor in 2005. It was rededicated this semester after an extensive remodeling project that includes new carpet, risers, chairs, audio-visual equipment and LED lighting as well a new conductor's podium and stand, music filing system and storage cabinets.

"This is obviously a very, very special day in my life," Dr. Wright said. Affirming the significance of the updated facility, he added, "Now it's fantastic. It's great now. How many students are going to be blessed as they rehearse here and take that talent that they learn here out to the world and represent Ouachita and our Lord? This is a treasure and today I am overwhelmed by it."

Dr. Wright's academic responsibilities at Ouachita included teaching choral music education courses, conducting and voice. He served as conductor of the Ouachita Singers for 25 years and conducted the Concert Choir until his retirement. He holds three degrees from Ouachita: a Bachelor of Arts degree in speech and drama, a Bachelor of Music Education degree in choral music and a Master of Music Education degree in choral music as well as a Doctor of Education degree in music education from North Texas State University (now the University of North Texas).

Dr. Gary Gerber, current dean of the School of Fine Arts, noted that "a project such as this is not accomplished by just one person but by several. Many individuals have given of their time and their talents, their resources and their love of Ouachita to complete this project. We're so grateful for each of them."

He introduced Dr. Charles Fuller, dean of the School of Fine Arts from 2004-2007, who provided a major gift for the renovation project along with his wife, Cindy, a former Ouachita voice and music education instructor.

"There's not a name or a face that has had more to do with the faithful excellence portrayed in the division and the School of Music at Ouachita Baptist University since the mid '60s than Charles Wright," Dr. Fuller said. "What we owe him, those of us who are professionals, those who are students, who carry degrees from Ouachita in music, who carry working at Ouachita on their resumes, is immeasurable.

"When Charles retired the first time back in 2004, we decided it was important to honor that excellence even then and so we did a fundraiser for a scholarship in his name and we named the choir room the

Charles W. Wright Choir Room.” Noting that the recent renovation restores the facility “to a level of excellence that it started out with in 1975,” Dr. Fuller added, “Charles, it’s a great honor to get to do this, to plant these seeds to influence musicians and develop young people for maybe another 40 years.”

Alexis Morgan, a senior music education major from Frisco, Texas, represented Ouachita’s music students at the rededication service. Expressing appreciation to the School of Fine Arts’ four deans who have served over the years, she said, “Thank you for your years of service and your years of excellence. We are so inspired by all of you and what you have done.”

Declaring that “we can all agree that this choir room is amazing; it’s so professional,” she said, “When new students come in and they see this, they’re going to know that Ouachita means business, that the choir that they see is going to inspire them to become a future music educator, a future performer of music. There’s nothing like the experience that you have when you come together with people and you share the passion of music that you have and you make something beautiful.”

Ouachita President Ben Sells said that as he has visited with Ouachita alumni and heard their stories and memories, “I probably heard the names Charles and Margaret Wright as many times as any other names.”

Dr. Wright’s wife, Margaret, also retired in 2004 after serving 35 years at Ouachita. Mrs. Wright, who passed away in 2013, had served as a professor of accounting and chair of the Division of Business and Economics as well as director of corporate and foundation programs.

Although “I’ve only known Charles since April 7” when Dr. Sells was elected president of Ouachita, he said, “Let me tell you my history with Charles Wright. His very first words that morning I was on campus were words of encouragement and that has typified every interaction I’ve had with Charles.

“You have been so consistently encouraging to me,” he told the guest of honor. “I know from my own experience that one of the reasons this room needs to bear your name is you are an encourager. When a student comes into this wonderful room now, what an encouragement it is to them in their own pursuit of music. It exemplifies who you are and it is all the more fitting that it has your name on it.”

Voicing appreciation for the renovation, Dr. Wright said the choir room “has made a difference in Ouachita through the years and will continue to make a difference now. I want to say thank you to my dear friend Dr. Charles Fuller and his wife, Cindy. ... We did something special when we hired Dr. Fuller and we did something really special when we also got his wife.”

Reflecting on “how many hours of my life I have spent in this room,” Dr. Wright said he estimated he spent about 10,000 hours in the choir room directing rehearsals for the Ouachita Singers, Concert Choir and other groups.

“Ouachita is a special place to spend your life,” he concluded, emphasizing that Ouachita students “make this place *what it is*. *You’re* special to us.”