

6-12-2015

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Recommended Citation

Henderson, Trennis and News Bureau, Ouachita, "Ouachita honors Elrods with June 11 dedication of new Elrod Center facility" (2015). *Press Releases*. Paper 139.
http://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/press_releases/139

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OUACHITA
BAPTIST UNIVERSITY



NEWS

For immediate release
June 12, 2015

For more information, contact the OBU News Bureau at 870-245-5208

Ouachita honors Elrods with June 11 dedication of new Elrod Center facility

By Trennis Henderson, OBU Vice President for Communications

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Declaring that “this dedication has been long anticipated by me,” Dr. Ben M. Elrod expressed appreciation to family, friends and colleagues who gathered for the June 11 dedication of the new home of Ouachita Baptist University’s Ben M. Elrod Center for Family and Community.

“This beautiful building is like a dream come true,” Dr. Elrod said. “It will be a worthy house for the home of the center.”

Dr. Elrod, who served from 1988 to 1998 as Ouachita’s 13th president, created and endowed the center in 1997 to coordinate and facilitate public service, volunteerism, servant leadership and community engagement by Ouachita students, faculty and staff. Trustees named the Elrod Center in his honor following his retirement.

The new two-story office complex is located on the corner of 6th and Cherry streets on the Ouachita campus. It features the Heflin Community Room named in honor of the Heflin family, including special appreciation to Sharon Heflin who chaired the fundraising committee for the new facility. Other named rooms include the Whipple Conference Room named in honor of Ross and May Whipple who have supported the work of the Elrod Center since its inception both personally and through the Ross Foundation and the Palmer Conference Room named in honor of Gordon and Melbaree Palmer, personal friends of Dr. and Mrs. Elrod who wished to honor their service to Ouachita.

The new center also includes several staff offices as well as a reception area and kitchen facilities. The facility is being funded by gifts from the Heflin Family Foundation, J.E. and L.E. Mabee Foundation, Keith Smith Company, Morris Foundation, Olds Foundation, Ray White Lumber Company and the Ross Foundation as well as generous gifts by Dr. and Mrs. Elrod and several other individual donors.

Welcoming guests to the dedication service, Jay Heflin, chairman of the Ouachita Board of Trustees, said, “You can tell it’s an event honoring Dr. and Mrs. Elrod because it’s standing room only.”

Affirming that “today is indeed a special day to be at Ouachita,” he added, “We have the privilege of celebrating and honoring two Ouachita legends as we dedicate the Ben M. Elrod Center for Family and Community. Dr. and Mrs. Elrod are truly difference makers.”

Citing the Elrod Center’s mission to involve students and faculty in “dedicated service to humankind through the educational experience,” Heflin said, “In 2014 alone, the signature Elrod Center programs like ElderServe, America Reads, America Counts, Tiger Serve Day and others had over 2,100 volunteers who have almost 20,000 volunteer hours. By the Elrod Center’s encouragement and example to the rest of the

Ouachita community, right at 3,800 volunteers gave over 55,500 hours of volunteer time to the Arkadelphia community” during the past year.

“Dr. and Mrs. Elrod shine a beacon for all of us to follow. Their example has been lighting the way for others on Ouachita’s campus for decades,” Heflin emphasized. “Dr. and Mrs. Elrod have exemplified service above self.”

Ian Cosh, vice president for community and international engagement, has served as director of the Elrod Center since its inception. Noting that the work of the Elrod Center “is a story that’s tied to the transformed lives of students impacted over the past 18 years,” he said a primary goal of the center is to equip Ouachita graduates “to be generous men and women in all the ways that generosity can be measured,” including time commitment, compassion, creativity and sharing material resources.

“Thank you for being here today for the opening of this beautiful building that will facilitate the flow of compassionate students, faculty and staff who wish to honor God with their hearts and their minds and to love others as Christ has taught us to do,” Cosh concluded. “I hope we are going to wear this building out through the energy and creativity that our students always bring to their endeavors and in particular their commitment to serve.”

Ouachita President Rex Horne said the dedication service provided a reminder of a family, a man and a mission as well as a great resource and a great impact. Citing the influence of Dr. Elrod and his family, Dr. Horne described Dr. Elrod as “a man who showed great courage, great wisdom and continues to do so on behalf of Ouachita.”

The Elrod Center’s mission of service “is a huge part of what Ouachita is and should always be,” President Horne said, adding that the center is a vital resource that equips and encourages students to be involved in activities that impact people’s lives.

He expressed appreciation “for the Lord using people like Ben and Betty Lou Elrod who give of their time and treasure to Ouachita Baptist University to make us the university that we are and the university that we aspire to be.”

“I want to thank all of you for sharing this dedication with us today,” Dr. Elrod responded. “It’s always a pleasure for us to come back to Ouachita where so much of our lives have been invested.”

Since his retirement as president in 1998, Dr. Elrod said, “I am still under God’s mandate to ministry. The center was the answer to my continued ministry, helping young people to realize there’s life outside themselves and that being a servant, serving other people is to be like Christ.” He said that goal is being accomplished as the Elrod Center helps “teach young people how to serve and not be served.”

For more information about the Ben M. Elrod Center for Family and Community, visit www.obu.edu/elrod.