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OUACHITA
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NEWS

For immediate release

NEA Chairman Jane Chu returns to Ouachita to present Birkett Williams Lecture

By Haley Martin

September 30, 2016

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

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – Dr. Jane Chu, a lifelong daughter of Ouachita Baptist University, returned to her alma mater Sept. 27 to present this semester's Birkett Williams Lecture. Dr. Chu, a 1979 OBU alumna and chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, addressed the issue of "National Endowment for the Arts: Supporting the Arts and Creativity in American Communities."

The Birkett Williams Lecture Series, endowed by 1910 Ouachita alumnus Birkett L. Williams, is held each semester on the Ouachita campus. The lecture series, which rotates among Ouachita's seven academic schools, was hosted this semester by the School of Fine Arts. More than 480 people attended the event, filling McBeth Recital Hall and an overflow room that provided a livestream feed of the lecture.

The daughter of Chinese immigrants, Dr. Chu was raised on the Ouachita campus. Her father, Dr. Finley Chu, taught economics, and her mother, Rosemary "Mom" Chu, served as a hall director for more than 40 years. Dr. Chu earned her Bachelor of Music degree in piano performance and Bachelor of Music Education degree from Ouachita in 1979.

Reflecting on her time at Ouachita during her visit to campus, Dr. Chu said, "Ouachita has held a deep and meaningful place in my heart. The thing that really hits home for me about Ouachita is that they care not only about what you learn but they care about you as a person."

After graduating from Ouachita, Dr. Chu went on to earn a master's degree in piano pedagogy from Southern Methodist University, an MBA from Rockhurst University and a PhD in philanthropic studies from Indiana University.

"It was great to have such a distinguished person in the arts at Ouachita, but on top of that what made it special was that Dr. Chu is an alumna," said Dr. Gary Gerber, dean of Ouachita's School of Fine Arts. "She is one of us and always will be."

During the lecture, Dr. Chu described the goals of the NEA as an independent federal agency, how it operates and the importance of society engaging with the arts. The NEA seeks to provide equal access to the arts and arts participation in communities across the nation. Since its establishment in 1965, the NEA has awarded more than 145,000 grants totaling \$5 billion to organizations and groups in all 50 states and U.S. territories.

"At the heart of the work of the National Endowment for the Arts is this mission that the arts belong to all of us," she explained.

"When it comes to the arts, there is no such thing as a marginalized population," she added. "We are very committed to making sure that there are ways for every individual from child to grandparent and everybody in between to have an opportunity to find their creative voice through the arts and live in a community where creativity can thrive."

“We believe the arts can instill our lives with value and connection and creativity and innovation,” Dr. Chu said. “They make our world a richer and more rewarding place to be.”

She discussed the grant decision-making process of the NEA and its efforts to keep up with how society evolves in order to give more people the opportunity to engage with and benefit from the arts.

“Art is found on museum walls and it’s also found on stage, but it is not removed from the rest of society, and it is not isolated in an ivory tower because the arts are all around us and they touch every aspect of our world, whether we are aware of it or not,” she emphasized.

“It was good to hear her speak of how the arts can impact not only a community, but all of the aspects of a community from businesses to education,” Gerber noted.

From helping impoverished neighborhoods flourish with art to helping veterans with invisible wounds cope with stress to connecting non-English speaking families to their communities, Dr. Chu highlighted the impact that the arts continue to have on society.

“Art for art’s sake and art for the sake of celebrating beauty in our lives and art for the transformational power of connecting us to so many other aspects of our lives,” Dr. Chu said, “it all counts.”

For more information about the Birkett Williams Lecture Series or Ouachita’s School of Fine Arts, contact Dr. Gary Gerber at gerberg@obu.edu or (870) 245-5128.

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