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Groundbreaking ceremony launches construction of new Elrod Center



By: Trennis Henderson, OBU Vice President for Communications

June 13, 2014

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

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. -- Declaring that "life is found in reality only when you give your life away in the service of other people," Dr. Ben M. Elrod helped break ground June 12 for Ouachita Baptist University's new Ben M. Elrod Center for Family and Community.

The Elrod Center was established in 1997 to fulfill the mission of "initiating, encouraging, coordinating and facilitating public service, volunteerism, service learning, servant leadership and community engagement." It was named in honor of Dr. Elrod who served from 1988 to 1998 as Ouachita's 13th president and has served as chancellor since his retirement.

The Elrod Center's offices, currently located on North 6th Street on the Ouachita campus, will relocate to new facilities across the street on the corner of 6th and Cherry streets. Construction is slated to begin in July on the two-story, 5,200 sq. ft. facility which will include two large meeting rooms for campus and community programs, a conference room and several staff offices as well as a reception area and kitchen facilities.

The \$1 million construction project, expected to be completed next spring, is being funded through more than \$800,000 in gifts from individual donors as well as a \$210,000 challenge grant from the J.E. and L.E. Mabee Foundation.



The official groundbreaking, held on the edge of the recently cleared lot, included Dr. Elrod; Ouachita President Rex Horne; Gene Whisenhunt, chairman of the OBU Board of Trustees; Dr. Brett Powell, vice president for administrative services; Irwin Seale of Seale Construction, general contractor for the project; and Steve Elliott of Lewis Architects Engineers. Dr. Elrod and his wife, Betty Lou, were joined at the ceremony by their children and spouses, Cindy and Mac Stroud and Bill and Angie Elrod, and other family members.

“This is really an exciting day for the Elrod family and for Ouachita and for the community of Arkadelphia,” said Dr. Wesley Kluck, vice president for student services. He welcomed the crowd on behalf of Elrod Center Director Ian Cosh, vice president for community and international engagement, who was traveling overseas and unable to attend the ceremony held in conjunction with Ouachita’s summer Board of Trustees meeting.

Kluck said the ceremony was designed “to celebrate a new facility that will enhance the important work of the Elrod Center and also celebrate the legacy of the Elrod family.”

Cosh previously noted that “the plans to construct a new Elrod Center are evidence of the strong institutional commitment at OBU to prepare our students to become engaged members of society. The work of preparing students to serve society in transforming ways will be reinvigorated through the provision of a beautiful new building that will serve Ouachita students well into the 21st century and beyond.”

Emphasizing that “it takes the efforts of many people to put together a project of this significance,” Dr. Powell said Cosh, the Elrod Center staff and others involved in the project “looked to the future of the Elrod Center to ensure that what we build here will serve the programs of center well in years to come.” He added that the new facility “will be a beautiful addition to the Ouachita campus.”

Paying tribute to Dr. Elrod and his family, President Horne told the crowd, “We all love the Elrods here at Ouachita. We’re thankful for their leadership. We’re thankful for their commitment to family, their commitment to Christ, their commitment to the church and, of course, their undying devotion to Ouachita Baptist University.

“I’m thankful for the Elrods and for the Elrod Center,” Dr. Horne added. “When a name matches with the mission, that’s a win-win. The mission of the Elrod Center is related to faith and family and community and service.

“Today we celebrate the Elrods, we celebrate new construction, we celebrate the ministry that takes place through the Elrod Center that will only be enhanced in the coming months as we see this building constructed and the service that will be emanating from this very location,” Dr. Horne concluded.



Affirming that the Elrod Center strives to help young people move from self-centeredness to lives of service, Dr. Elrod said, “Christ led the way in telling us how to do that. When in life one discovers that giving life away is the secret to life, he’s becoming like Jesus.

“That’s what this center has been all about,” he explained. “It is helping young people to make that transition from self-centeredness to God-centeredness and other people-centeredness.”

One of the Elrod Center’s signature ministry projects is the semi-annual Tiger Serve Day community service project. Since its start in 1997, Tiger Serve Day volunteers have donated more than 65,000 hours of service in the Arkadelphia area. Other Elrod Center initiatives include such efforts as America Reads and America Counts tutoring, ElderServe, Backyard Bible Clubs and Big Brother/Big Sister programs.

Reflecting on the groundbreaking service, Dr. Elrod said, “It’s a great day for my family. God bless you and God bless Ouachita Baptist University – the greatest little university in the world.”

For more information about the Ben M. Elrod Center for Family and Community, visit www.obu.edu/elrod. Individuals who would like to contribute to the work of the Elrod Center or other university projects may contact the OBU Office of Development at 870-245-5169 or www.obu.edu/give.