

SPECIAL ORIENTATION ISSUE

The Behrend College

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Benson's million dollar gift



Hands-on experience important to alumnus

Penn State-Behrend has recently received a one million dollar gift from the Jim and Gerda Benson Family Foundation, an endowment fund established within the Erie Community Foundation.

James O. Benson, a founder and chairman of the manufacturing conglomerate PHB, Inc., is an adviser to the endowment. It is the second time the young college has received a million dollar gift from an alumnus.

"I have been very fortunate," said Benson, who received a degree from Penn State-Behrend in drafting and design technology in 1957. "I think it's important to give back to the community in order to allow others to fulfill their dreams."

Benson made his gift in the hopes of enhancing the College's commitment to working with area manufacturers.

"As an engineer, I understand the need for educators to work closely with industry," he said.

"Penn State-Behrend is doing an outstanding job of addressing regional needs. I want to support their efforts because they are utilizing their facilities and technology in a way that I believe will benefit the community."

Benson also commented on the importance of students receiving hands-on experience during their academic careers.

"Penn State-Behrend has responded to the requests of regional manufacturers to give students experience in the real world while they're still in school," he said.

The College will name the fourth and final building in its six million dollar Engineering Complex the James O. Benson Building in his honor. Benson joins four other industrialists from the region who have made serious commitments to the complex: Richard J. Fassenmyer, chairman and CEO of RJF International Corporation; Joseph J. Prischak, president of the

Plastek Group; and William C. Witkowski, president of Port Erie Plastics. The large atrium connecting the four buildings is named in honor of Paul and Margaret Roche. Roche was the founder of Erie Plastics.

"From the time Jim enrolled at Penn State-Behrend in the mid '50s, he has made a major contribution to the life of the College: as student leader, alumni leader, and now, benefactor," said Dr. John Lilley, provost and dean. "The entire Penn State-Behrend community is enormously grateful for his outstanding example of good stewardship."

Upon graduation, Benson received numerous offers from companies around the country, but family considerations eventually led him to accept a temporary position with the Parker White Metal Company. "The 'temporary' position ended up lasting about 37 years," he said.

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JAMES O. BENSON: Founder and chairman of PHB, Inc, Benson is the second person to make a million dollar gift to Penn State-Behrend.

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Ground broken for new residence

Ground was broken August 2 for a new residence hall for University Scholars and Honors students studying at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College.

The Almy Hall Living and Learning Center will house 128 students in single-sex suites of four students each. Each wing of 16 students has its own study lounge; all students must agree to abide by quiet study policies.

The new hall is intended to be a living and learning environment that fosters academic excellence, out-of-classroom intellectual and social experiences, and mentoring relationships.

The new hall will be located west of the trio of suite-style residence halls built in 1991. In keeping with a college tradition that names all residential facilities after people and ships

associated with the Battle of Lake Erie, it carries the name of Thomas C. Almy, sailing master of the Somers, part of Oliver Hazard Perry's fleet.

"Like real life, college life is

"What students learn in the classroom must be applied throughout their lives."

-John M. Lilley, provost and dean

not compartmentalized," John M. Lilley, Penn State-Behrend

provost and dean, told groundbreaking guests. "What students learn in the classroom must be applied throughout their lives, and what students learn (from) their co-curricular activities can be used to promote learning in the classroom. We must bring all aspects of University life together in order to produce students who lead successful and well-integrated lives. Almy Hall is expected to do just that."

Other groundbreaking speakers were University Trustee Edward P. Junker III, vice chairman of PNC Bank, and Thomas V. Gibson, Penn State's assistant vice president for Auxiliary Services.

Construction of the new residence hall is funded by Penn State Housing and Food Services.



GROUND BREAKING: Construction was begun on the new honors residence August 2.