

Reconnecting with campus history

OPEN HOUSE

Renovation of Stephens Hall makes it ready for a new century of scientific research

An old campus landmark is getting a new lease on life. Stephens Hall, the longtime home of MU's fisheries and wildlife program at the corner of College and University avenues, has been extensively renovated into state-of-the-art molecular biology labs, a conference room and offices for the Department of Biochemistry.

The University community is invited to an opening ceremony at 1 p.m. and an open house from 2 to 5:30 p.m., Friday, Oct. 11, to see all the changes. The newly renovated Stephens Hall will now be home to the research teams of biochemistry professors Linda Randall and Gerald Hazelbauer. The couple joined the MU faculty two years ago from Washington State University. Hazelbauer is chair of biochemistry and Randall is MU's first Wurdack Chair in

Biochemical Sciences.

Built in 1936, Stephens Hall was named for Columbia businessman E. Sydney Stephens, an avid outdoorsman who in the 1930s helped spearhead a statewide drive to create the Missouri Conservation Commission. One of the new commission's first actions was to establish the wildlife research unit at MU.

At Mizzou, pioneering wildlife scientists like Rudolf Bennitt trained generations of students who went on to leadership positions in wildlife research and with state and national conservation agencies.

Replicas of the original plaques on Stephens Hall that honor Bennitt and Stephens will be presented to the College of Natural Resources. Two of Bennitt's grandsons will be on hand for Friday's event to receive

another replica of the plaque that celebrates their grandfather's important role in the conservation movement in Missouri and around the country.

And the couple is reaching out in interdisciplinary collaboration with academic programs outside the life sciences. Randall and Hazelbauer commissioned two original works for Stephens Hall by MU art faculty and donated them to the University.

One is a ceramic mural by Bede Clark titled "Broken Images." Another is a work by Jim Calvin named "Fish Flow" that features bronze silhouettes of trout inlaid in the floor of Stephens Hall.

After the couple had commissioned that last work, they discovered it would be yet another link between Stephens Hall's past and future. As historian Jeff Crane researched

the building's history, he discovered that as military service during World War II scattered his students, Professor Bennitt kept in touch with them through a regular newsletter.

In one of those wartime newsletters, Bennitt wrote, "The animal tracks have finally been put in the floor." As the renovations got under way, Randall was curious about what they would find on the floor of Room 101. The construction crew "took the tiles up very carefully, and sure enough there were the tracks stenciled on the floor," she says - the tracks of 42 mammals and 10 birds.

As the opening celebration winds down and the research teams start work in their new home, another generation of innovative scientists will begin to make some history of their own.