

Donors' dedication to occupational therapy leads to \$2 million gift for Western Michigan University (video)

Published: Wednesday, November 09, 2011, 4:30 PM Updated: Wednesday, November 09, 2011, 5:24 PM



By **Ursula Zerilli | The Kalamazoo Gazette**

KALAMAZOO – In Western Michigan University's "Monumental Moment,"

President John Dunn announced a \$2 million gift for the Department of Occupational Therapy.

The gift is one of the largest donations any occupation therapy program has received in the country.

Barbara Rider, the occupational therapy department chair from 1976 – 85, and her partner Fred Sammons, founder of rehabilitation equipment distributor, Sammons Preston Inc., donated the gift.

Sammons, 84, and Rider, 79, serve as members of the Dean's Advisory Council for College of Health and Human Services.

Music, food and students filled the College of Health and Human Services building for the announcement at 1:19 p.m. on Wednesday. Students in golden bodysuits waved signs reading "We love Barbara & Fred" during the event.

"Now is a good time to make a gift because I wanted to be here for the party," said Rider, adding that many people die before they can celebrate a contribution such as this one.

Rider still sees patients and jokingly warned students that being an occupational therapist is a lifetime commitment during her speech. She said her passion for the profession is endless and recalls voting on decisions as a Kalamazoo County commissioner based on her occupational therapy experiences.

"Kalamazoo and Western and this occupational therapy program are the best kept secrets and they are so



Mark Bugnaski / Gazette

Barbara Rider and Fred Sammons are applauded as Western Michigan University president John Dunn announces their gift of \$2 million during the Monumental Moment event at WMU's College of Health and Human Services. Fred Sammons and Barbara Rider donated the gift to WMU's Department of Occupational Therapy for two endowments and funds for innovated projects.

wonderful. So I'm hoping that, with this gift Fred and I are giving, that we'll be able to make the whole world of occupational therapy sit up and listen to Western," she said.

Barbara Rider talks about cash gift

Barbara Rider and Fred Sammons donated \$2 million for Western Michigan University's Department of Occupational Therapy on Wednesday.

The gift comes in three parts with \$1.5 million for the Federic W. Sammons Endowed Chair, \$250,000 for innovative

projects and \$250,000 for Barbara A. Rider Endowed Distinguished Professorship.

The new endowed chair is the seventh in the university and the third in the College of Health and Human Services. The first innovative project will be the creation of an online OT professional journal.

"We are blessed to have support and this allows us to realize a long-time goal of having a third endowed chair and with the online journal, Western will be (disseminating) the current knowledge in the profession," said Earlie Washington, the dean of the College of Health and Human Services.

The Department of Occupational Therapy was established in 1922 and was one of the first five programs in the nation to be accredited. U.S. News and World Report ranked it as one of the top 50 OT programs in the nation. More than 500 students are enrolled in the department.

OT graduate student Marianne Mick, 34, said she first met Sammons last year when they fought over a doughnut.

"They are personable and love OT," she said. "Fred builds AmTryke bikes, (which are therapeutic bikes built for people who could otherwise not ride them,) in his basement. He's dedicated and it's phenomenal."

Dunn said the gift adds to the program's value and will earn respect from other health care providers. He also noted how occupational therapy is a thriving field.

"It's one of those professions that adds so much to the lives of individuals who are fortunate enough to receive services," he said. "It also affirms that our initial hiring continues to benefit the students."

OT undergraduate student Jennica Richards, 20, said she hopes the donation brings more opportunities.

"Hopefully it'll be easier to get a job if WMU is known for this," she said.

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