Gifting the Libraries

By Laurel A. Grotzinger, Editor, Gatherings

As a multi-decade citizen of the academic world—and as the 16-year editor of Gatherings—it was my decision to focus this issue on the special benefits that have come to the University Libraries through its friends and supporters. In talking with different members of the University and greater Kalamazoo communities, a number of stories emerged that document how much has been given and how valued are the gifts. Some sense of those stories is seen in the 2007-08 Annual Report of the WMU Foundation, Diversity of Giving, when Foundation President Joseph B. Hemker writes:

Over the years, I have noted the impressive growth in the number of donors to our University. Our donors come from nearly every walk of life and cross the boundaries of many ethnicities, including race, nationality and religion. However, our diversity of giving goes much further than that.

Hemker goes on to note that many different “stories” reflect “enduring assistance provided to Western from its many diverse constituents, for the benefit of an impressive array of WMU programs” and refers to them as “both noteworthy and remarkable.” The same can be said of an academic service found at Western Michigan University that is often referred to as the “heart of the University.” That heart is the University Libraries in all of its physical and electronic manifestations, in its accessibility to all users, in its diverse resources, in its human expertise, in its world-wide interactions and collaborations, and, above all, in its commitment to the University focus “on delivering high-quality undergraduate instruction, advancing its growing graduate division and fostering significant research activities” (http://www.wmich.edu/about/profile/).

The following pages of this 43rd issue of Gatherings describe a variety of gifts to the University Libraries. These gifts are seldom characterized in terms of dollars contributed. They are often impossible to quantify, nor should they be because, as the popular advertisement notes, they are “priceless.” And, in any meaningful accounting, every gift, in fact and in deed, is “priceless.” Each gift has made a difference in one or more lives not only at the time of the giving, but in terms of its ongoing benefits to the Libraries. More important, these gifts benefit all who come to the University—students, faculty, outside scholars, community users, et al.—to find information in its many formats and locations. As you turn the pages, you will see:

• A review of the history and activities of the Friends of the University Libraries, an organization devoted to assisting the Libraries in many ways including purchases of special equipment, unique acquisitions, staff development grants, and programs for the University and community.

• An article on an individual, Pamela Jobin, who has volunteered thousands of hours over 30 years to the Libraries, especially to the Archives and Regional History Collections.

• An overview of monetary gifts for the acquisition of books and collections as well as the gift of actual books and collections from individuals and organizations, gifts in honor of individuals, gifts that funded “places” in the Libraries, and gifts that, when combined, endowed a variety of funds directed to particular areas such as historical children’s literature, miniature books, photography, etc.

• An article, reproduced from the WMU Foundation Annual Report on Diversity of Giving that pays special tribute to Ed and Mary Meader’s “innovative and futuristic ... gifts” to the University.

Gatherings has always been a publication that reflects the breadth and depth of the University Libraries whether its articles describe the latest technological enhancement to searching a database or locating course reserves, spotlight one or more of our service-oriented staff members, or reflect on the essential services of the student employees who keep the 4.6 million physical items on the shelves of Waldo Library and its branches. But one aspect of the Libraries has been underrepresented: the diverse gifts of many individuals over many decades. As a result, this issue is devoted to you, our readers, who have been key to our past and are most definitely key to our future. What Dr. Susan Steuer, Head of Special Collections, wrote in her article definitely bears repeating:

Our donors have made a wonderful difference in the institution called the University Libraries. Their contributions offer our students, faculty, and visiting scholars greater opportunities to realize their research goals and contribute to the scholarly community at and beyond WMU, both now and in the future. All of us in the Libraries hope that our “once and future” supporters will continue to understand the enduring value of a gift to the WMU Libraries for acquisitions, for maintaining our facilities, for conservation and repair of the collections, and for programs that enhance the services of the Libraries and provide expanded educational opportunities for our students as well as the greater world of learning.