The Eastern Community Celebrates 20 Years in the J. Eugene Smith Library during ‘Love Your Library’ Event

by Kellie O’Donnell-Bobadilla, Access Services Librarian

THE CELEBRATION

In late 1998, the construction of the J. Eugene Smith Library building, and the Foster Clock Tower were completed. The dedication occurred in early 1999 making it twenty years! To commemorate this anniversary, the Library held an event called ‘Love Your Library’ on February 14, 2019. We wanted to celebrate how beautiful, vibrant, and comfortable the building still is! This was our chance to share our pride, good fortune, and thanks for the extraordinary support the Library has received over the years.

The love was mutual as the event was well attended by many, including President Núñez, and lots of students! Brief remarks were made by the Library Director, Janice Wilson, and the Interim Provost and Vice President, Dr. William Salka. The Director welcomed attendees, reminded everyone about the MISO survey (see article – Library Collaborates with IT to Assess Services with MISO Survey), and thanked everyone for coming. The Provost talked about the Library being the center of campus where many services are offered which help students succeed. Our mascot, a living, breathing “book,” walked around and invited patrons to write down their thoughts on the “pages.” (See Tributes.) Guests also got an opportunity to mingle with Library staff. Refreshments such as red and pink cupcakes, red candy and punch, as well as the decorations were inspired by Valentine’s Day. Special exhibits were on display which featured photos of the history of the building, including a real clock hand that fell from the clock tower just after construction and the actual shovel used in the ground breaking. Attendees helped themselves to giveaways and were offered the opportunity to win three baskets filled with donated prizes, for example, gift cards from Willi Brew Pub, Barnes & Noble, and iTunes, as well as candy, snacks, study supplies, winter attire, planting seeds, and books.

THE BACKGROUND

Library staff, spearheaded by then director, Dr. Tina Fu, began planning for the new building at a Library Retreat in 1996. Their mission was to meet the needs of the growing university community. They envisioned “a ‘library as place’ successfully integrated into campus life and offering a place to gather, read, interact, socialize, and wonder!” It took believers, backers, and planners, from the governor, the State Department of Public Works, the Connecticut State University System, to the Eastern administrators, faculty and staff to accomplish the momentous task.

In late 1998, it was time to move the books from the old J. Eugene Smith Library then located in what is now the Alvin B. Wood Support Services Center building. The Library director decided to continue the Eastern tradition of moving the books via a human chain, as had been done in 1971 when the library moved from Shafer Hall. With only 70,000 books to be moved at that time, it was feasible. But by 1998, the collection had grown to over 500,000 volumes, so it was decided to hold a ceremonial human chain on Thursday, December 10, 1998. One hundred and ten (110) books representing the 110 years of Eastern’s history, went from hand to hand. It took fifteen minutes with about 150 people to complete. Participants included faculty, like Dr. Ed Chibeau and librarians like Kris Jacobi, who both still work here, as well as...
as President David G. Carter, staff, students, and Philip Smith, the son of the building’s namesake, J. Eugene Smith, University president from 1947 to 1966. The first book to be handed into the new building was J. Eugene Smith’s book entitled First Hundred Years of the Hartford Courant, which to his son’s surprise was signed by his father and in great condition. This was quite an impressive event and according to Dr. Dimitrios Pachis, Vice President of Student Affairs, “It really signifies what Eastern is all about. This isn’t about moving books but forming a community.” The rest of the collection was handled by a moving company.

As soon as the new 127,000 square-foot building opened, patron traffic increased dramatically. With nearly three-times more space throughout four floors, lots of windows letting in natural light, art installations, such as Dr. Claudia Widdiss’ Healing Curtains, more space to study and learn, including group study rooms and classrooms, more space for the collection to grow, up-to-date computers and technology, and new services, the Library attracted more visitors, as well as the notice of the Eastern community, Windham residents, and beyond. The building was honored with architectural awards and was featured on the cover of the April 2000 ‘Fabulous Facilities’ issue of American Libraries (the official publication of the American Library Association.) Library directors from around the region planning new buildings visited. The new building and clock tower together created an exciting new centerpiece for the main entrance and it also linked the north and south campus. In fact, the University adopted the clock tower as its new logo. The whole effect evoked feelings of transformation, goodwill, pride, and revitalization for the Eastern community.

THE HISTORY

The present J. Eugene Smith Library is the culmination of the remarkable growth that Eastern has undergone. The University began as the Willimantic Normal Training School in 1889 on the third floor of the Willimantic Savings Institute building. The Library consisted of one room with a few books. In 1894, the school opened its own building which housed the Library. Unfortunately, after 48 years it burned down in 1943. By 1947, Shafer Hall was completed, and the Library built up its collection with the help of donations from college and public libraries throughout Connecticut. By 1968 the Library was outgrowing its space in Shafer Hall and plans were started for a new standalone library building. In 1971, the building was dedicated and named after retired president J. Eugene Smith. He got his start at Eastern while he was a teacher at the local high school. During that time, he visited the Eastern Library so often, the staff and he became great friends, leading them to encourage him to apply for an open position which he did. His portrait is hanging in the Library on the second floor.

THE FUTURE

We plan to continue growing and changing to meet the challenges faced by our community. Our building is still beautiful, our services are still of high quality and our staff is as dedicated as ever. But we are also poised to collaborate, share, and lead wherever we can make a difference. As we look forward into the future, we agree with Dr. Tina Fu when she said “We don’t want this to be just a building. We want to get people here.” And we still do!

Thanks to the Eastern Connecticut State University’s J. Eugene Smith Library’s Archives & Special Collections for the documents and photos provided to make this article possible.

TRIBUTES TO THE LIBRARY’S “BOOK” MASCOT

“We love the 4th floor and ALL floors!”
“Thank you for helping us in Mid-Term’s and finals!!”
“Love this Library”
“I love my Library!”
“I love you Book Mascot!”
“I love the Library! It’s my second home.”
“I love books!”
“Happy 20th Smith Library!”
“Thanks for being here.”
In early February 2019, the Library and IT asked for feedback from faculty, staff, and select students through a web-based campus survey, called MISO. This survey instrument, Measuring Information Service Outcomes, MISO for short, is designed to measure how faculty, students, and staff view library and technology services in higher education. It was initially designed in 2002 by a team at Bryn Mawr College. Since 2005, 149 institutions have participated in the MISO Survey. This academic year, we are one of forty libraries offering it, along with William & Mary, Wellesley, University of Utah, Sacred Heart University, Loyola University Chicago, and Champlain College to name a few. According to the MISO Group’s website, the survey provides “actionable, comparable results that can be used by participating institutions to inform strategic decisions and ongoing service improvement.”

MISO measures the frequency of use of services, which services are most important to the user, and whether the user is satisfied with the services available. Questions ranged from the use, importance, and satisfaction of place-based services, like study spaces, laptop loans, and physical collections; online services, such as the online catalog, databases, e-books, the website, interlibrary loan, and research guides; and in-person services, for example, reference, library instruction, circulation, and liaison services.

The MISO team believes that this survey is of high-quality, easy and quick to take, and has exceptional response rates. Results will be compiled this summer. We will then be able to analyze how well we are doing compared with other institutions and have a benchmark in which to measure ourselves in the future. We thank all those who took the time to think about our services and complete the survey! Look to the next Library Newsletter for information about our findings!

**Tara’s Trivia**

by Tara L. Hurt, University Archivist, Head of Archives & Special Collections

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**QUESTION** Do you know what year these students were working on “practice makes perfect” for their archery skills?


Send your answer to askarchives@easternct.edu. Winners will be announced in the next Library Newsletter.
PLEASE CONSIDER BEING A FRIEND OF THE LIBRARY

By designating your tax deductible contribution in one of the categories below, you will be supporting the collections and services of the J. Eugene Smith Library at Eastern Connecticut State University.

_____ Friends of Eastern $50-99
_____ The Century Club $100-299
_____ The President’s Circle $300-499
_____ The 1889 Society $500-999
_____ F. R. Nobel Associates $1,000-4,999
_____ Tower Society $5,000 and above
_____ Other contribution amount

Total amount enclosed: ________________________  Today’s date: ________________________

I would like to make this donation in honor of: __________________________________________
I would like to make this donation in memory of: _________________________________________

The Library will gift plate a book in your name, or in honor or memory of someone you designate, for a donation of $50 or more.

Name: _____________________________________________________________________________

Phone: (optional): __________________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________________

E-mail (optional): ___________________________________________________________________

City: ____________________________  State: ________  Zip: __________

Please make checks payable to the: ECSU Foundation, Inc., and send your donation with this form to the:
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