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# The BCC Gets A Gift

By Jonathan Friday

The dream of a free-standing Sonja Haynes Stone Black Cultural Center came one large step closer to becoming a reality on Thursday, Sept. 23, when it received part of a \$28.6 million gift donated to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill by the estate of alumnus David Benjamin Clayton, who died in 1978.

Of the \$28.6 million going to the University, the interest from an \$11 million bequest (approximately \$250,000 a year) will go to the BCC—the result of allocations that Michael Hooker, former chancellor of UNC-CH, outlined in his discretionary fund before his death on June 29.

Carol Ben-Davies, program coordinator at the BCC, was elated to hear about the gift. “When I first heard the news, I cried. After all these years, we finally have a free-standing BCC,” she said.

Acting Director of the BCC, Harry Amana said, “We’ve had a dream of a free-standing building since Sonja’s death in 1991, and this is the first time that it will be a reality.”

The new center will be built between the Bell Tower and Coker Hall on South Road. The 40,000 square-foot building will contain a library, an art gallery, a media center, performance space and classrooms. The center will also hold the Institute of African American Research and the University’s Upward Bound Program. Since

1988, the BCC has been located in the Frank Porter Graham Student Union.

“This is an opportunity to showcase our heritage,” said Lorie Clark, program coordinator and publicist for the BCC. “A lot of people have put in a lot of hard work and this is the payoff. It has been a long struggle, but the struggle really isn’t over yet,” she said.

Ben-Davies also commented on the struggle for a free-standing BCC. “People were arrested for this,” she said.

Despite the hard work of past students and staff, many still question the need for a Black cultural center. Allison McKamey, a 1996 alumna said: “I think there should be a cultural center, but I don’t think you should single out one culture. They’ve worked really hard to get the funding for the center but I hope they take into account the total diversity of the campus.”

But the BCC staff claims the center and its programs are diverse. “I think we are very inclusive,” said Clark. “We are preparing a Cuba Conference and an Arab Conference, and that should serve as an example of how open-minded we are.”

Amana addressed the claims that the BCC was lacking diversity in a Sept. 29 letter to the “Daily Tar Heel.” He noted that the BCC has sponsored dialogues on Native American identity, homosexuality and gender, for example.

The letter also stated: “It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the BCC may be the most diverse and inclusive institution on campus. Indeed, the DTH would be hard-pressed to match us. In fact, maybe you guys at the DTH should drop by sometime. Pick up a copy of last year’s annual report or this year’s program guide before you write your next editorial.”

Lorie Clark said that there should be a Black cultural center on campus because “it’s an opportunity for us to share our heritage. It’s an opportunity for people outside our race to embrace our culture.”

“We’re the first public university in the nation, and to have something like this on campus would add to this great university,” Ben-Davies said. “History books are exclusionary and everything is so Eurocentric, and until we can get past that, a Black Cultural Center and other cultural centers will add to our personal growth.”

“I want to hold on to Dr. Stone’s legacy,” said Clark. “We’re just saying that we want to be here.”

Dr. Sonja Haynes Stone was director of the Curriculum in African and African American Studies from 1974 to 1979. In July 1988, the BCC was founded and Stone served on the Advisory Board. She also remained an Associate Professor until her death in 1991.