

## **Ivy Tech names Connie and Steve Ferguson Academic Building in honor of \$1 million gift**

### **Donors say gift is to call attention to school's expansion needs**

Mike Leonard

*The main Ivy Tech Community College facility on Bloomington's west side is now officially the Connie and Steve Ferguson Academic Building.*

The Fergusons, Ivy Tech President Thomas J. Snyder and Chancellor John Whikehart presided over the naming ceremony under a brilliant blue sky late Wednesday afternoon. Workers peeled back a banner covering the building's new name over the entrance of the building as local Ivy Tech supporters and the community college system's state board of trustees witnessed the short ceremony.

Whikehart said he and Snyder asked the Fergusons if they would agree to the naming after Steve Ferguson told him in February that he and his wife wanted to make a \$1 million contribution to the Bloomington campus. Both Fergusons said in separate interviews before the ceremony that one of the primary reasons they wanted to make their contribution now was to demonstrate their support for a 85,000-square-foot, \$20 million addition to the current building, which opened in 2002.

The 148,000-square-foot building was designed to accommodate 5,000 students. The Bloomington enrollment has increased from 2,300 students in 2002 to 6,400 and is projected to continue to increase. The Indiana General Assembly approved the design for a new addition in 2007 and approved bonding authority for construction in 2009. The Indiana Higher Education Commission has not passed a construction recommendation on to the state budget committee for approval, however, and earlier this year indicated it was pulling back all Ivy Tech construction projects for further review.

"I hope we can get their attention," Steve Ferguson said. "It's not like I haven't made my voice heard at those levels. But there's nothing like putting your money where your mouth is. You need to step up if you believe in something, and I believe this campus needs this addition."

Connie Ferguson represented Bloomington on Ivy Tech's Regional Board of Trustees when Bloomington was affiliated with the Columbus region and has served as chairman of the Ivy Tech-Bloomington trustees since the Bloomington campus was created at the Westbury Village location in 2000. She said she believes the opening of the current building in 2002 was a catalyst that made the Bloomington campus one of the fastest-growing in the nation.

"It's one of those cases where the bricks and mortar made a difference," she said this week.

"You can see it in the students — they recognize this institution means something."

The rapid growth of the Bloomington college has forced Ivy Tech to lease about 30,000 square feet of space, mostly in commercial and office buildings along Liberty Drive near the main campus.

Steve Ferguson is chairman of the board of Cook Group Inc., the medical device manufacturer with its world headquarters located very close to the Ivy Tech campus. He also is a former Indiana legislator and former Indiana University trustee.

Ferguson invoked an old Chinese proverb at Wednesday's event. "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day," he said. "Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

"We have over 20 million people in this country who are either unemployed or underemployed," he said when interviewed. "We've got 2 million vacant jobs in this country. It's a gap we have in education and training, and it's also an income gap because people who have an education are earning consistently more than those without. That income gap can only be solved by education."

Connie Ferguson choked up momentarily when she told the audience how much she and her husband value education and access to education.

Over the years, the Fergusons have supported Ivy Tech students through endowed scholarships in biotechnology, nursing, radiation therapy and other programs. They've made other contributions as well, including financial support to launch the Gayle & Bill Cook Center for Entrepreneurship last year.

Steve Ferguson said the growth of the Ivy Tech Bloomington campus has created a special synergy with its increasing cooperation and partnerships with IU and turned Bloomington into an education hub. "It's a gateway here," he said. "Not to take anything away from the other schools in Indiana, but if you think about the two impact institutions in this state, IU has over 100,000 students and the Ivy Tech system has over 100,000 students. I would guess that if you added up all of the other public and private institutions together they wouldn't educate as many people as IU and Ivy Tech."

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HeraldTimesOnline.com

Bloomington

August 13, 2011

Our opinion

## Fergusons' gift should prompt state to move

[Steve Ferguson likened the gift he and his wife, Connie, have given to Ivy Tech Community College as "putting your money where your mouth is."](#) With that commitment, perhaps the state will release funding for a needed expansion of the Bloomington college campus.

Connie and Steve Ferguson have a long record of vocal support for education in Monroe County and the state of Indiana. She has served as chairman of the Ivy Tech-Bloomington Board of Trustees since the Bloomington campus was created in 2000. He served four three-year terms on the Indiana University Board of Trustees and has offered strong opinions on education matters from the public school level through higher education.

The main Ivy Tech facility in Bloomington on Wednesday became the Connie and Steve Ferguson Academic Building to note their support for the college, which includes a \$1 million gift.

"I hope we can get their attention," Steve Ferguson said of state officials. "It's not like I haven't made my voice heard at those levels. But there's nothing like putting your money where your mouth is. You need to step up if you believe in something, and I believe this campus needs this addition."

It certainly does. The 148,000-square-building opened in 2002 when the campus had 2,300 students and was designed to hold 5,000 students.

But phenomenal growth has ensued, and the Bloomington campus now has more than 6,400 students. It leases more than 30,000 square feet of classroom and other space and pays out more than \$400,000 on leased space annually.

An 85,000-square-foot, \$20 million addition to the building is on the drawing board with approval for design and bonding authority, but state officials have been slow to release the money for construction to start.

Hopefully the Fergusons' generosity will prompt the state to move more quickly so Ivy Tech-Bloomington can be even more effective than it already is. They certainly have done their part, and for that we should all be thankful.