

Alfred University marks 35 years of Bergren Forums

4/04/05

Alfred University's popular Bergren Forum Series is marking its 35th year this semester. According to Dr. Stuart Campbell, professor of history emeritus, "the series is one that began in 1970. Rick Bergren, who taught here in the 70's, started the forums because he was inspired by the gatherings that the (Alfred University) students in the 19th century used to have in Alumni Hall."The "gatherings" held in Alumni Hall in the early years of Alfred University were to discuss community issues.After Bergren's death in 1974, the university decided to continue the tradition in his name. Campbell became the primary coordinator of the forums."During this time, the forums only met about five times a semester. It met in the Campus Center, then at Howell Hall, while the Campus Center was being renovated, then back into the new campus center, in Nevins Theatre," Campbell explained.Campbell also says that, in the beginning, the Forums met on Wednesdays, not Thursdays. It wasn't until the university developed a scheduling system that made Thursdays a light class day that the forums changed to that day.Campbell also recalls how relatively easy it was to get people to sign up to give the lectures."I usually had people volunteer. One of the tricks of our trade is that we professors enjoy talking, especially about a subject we know a lot about," he said.The professors who didn't volunteer were also not that difficult to encourage, according to Campbell."I had a few tricks. One of them was that I'd ask the people who volunteered to go early on in the semester. That way, other people [who may have been apprehensive about it] would be at ease about going later on in the semester," he explained.Campbell also liked to plan ahead for the forums, since there were so many per semester. He says he never asked people to do it the next semester. He always gave them plenty of time telling them he was interested in having them give a forum, two semesters in advance.Following Campbell's retirement, the forums were then taken over by Division of Human Studies Professors William Dibrell and Emrys Westacott. The Bergren Forums are a campus staple, held at 12:10 p.m. each Thursday that school is in session. They are now held in Nevins Theatre and are free and open to the public. Coffee and tea are usually provided and people are encouraged to bring a brown bag lunch.