

AU receives \$10 million from state for new art facilities

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The New York State budget finalized Tuesday night contains an unexpected tribute to the late Senator Patricia McGee, who died April 2. Included in the budget is a \$10 million allocation under the NYS Senate's higher education capital improvement program to expand the facilities for Alfred University's School of Art & Design. President Charles M. Edmondson said the University intends to name the new art facility in honor of Senator McGee in recognition of her efforts on behalf of Alfred University and higher education throughout the Southern Tier district she represented. Edmondson explained that Alfred University was able to secure the state funding because the School of Art & Design is part of the New York State College of Ceramics, which is operated by Alfred University under a contract with the State of New York. The State pays a percentage of the operating costs, and also provides facilities for the statutory programs. The \$10 million for AU's art facilities expansion is in addition to its annual allocation for ongoing operational costs, and is also in addition to approximately \$10 million the University is already scheduled to receive from the SUNY Construction Fund for capital improvement projects. But it would not have been possible without Senator McGee and her colleagues. "More than a year ago, when we were negotiating with Marlin and Ginger Miller for a \$35 million gift to endow the fine and performing arts at Alfred University, we asked Pat McGee to help us secure state funds to expand the physical plant of our School of Art & Design," said Edmondson. "Senator McGee submitted a request for a member item in last year's state budget for our art facilities expansion, but given the state's fiscal problems last year, the entire higher education capital improvement program was vetoed and no funds were forthcoming," said Edmondson. Although the state funds were not awarded last year, Dr. and Mrs. Miller went ahead with their gift, which was announced in mid-February, President Edmondson said. This year, the State Senate again proposed a higher education capital improvement projects bill, but by that time Senator McGee was gravely ill and unable to attend meetings in Albany. "State Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno and Pat's colleagues in the Senate stepped in, and included the appropriation for Alfred University in the bill, even though Pat was too sick to push for it this year," said Edmondson. "Their doing so was both a measure of their respect for Senator McGee and of the high esteem in which Alfred University is held. "Senator Bruno recognized that naming new facilities at one of the world's finest schools of art and design was a fitting tribute," said Edmondson. "Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Governor George Pataki obviously agreed. Otherwise, either one of them, at the 11th hour in the budget negotiations, could have removed the allocation." Alfred University's ceramic art program is acclaimed as one of the premier programs in the world. The Master of Fine Arts degree in ceramic art is ranked number one by U.S. and World Report, and is the only SUNY graduate program to be so highly rated. "Our goal is to extend that level of recognition to other areas is the visual and performing arts," Edmondson said. "We want to make our fine arts and performing arts programs a strategic focus for Alfred University as we move forward," said Edmondson. As part of their gift, the Millers created a \$25 million endowment for the arts that will support the planned expansion of the fine arts program by offering additional scholarships to attract the most talented students, and by funding up to six additional professors. Among the strengths of the Alfred University fine arts program are the facilities, which are unparalleled elsewhere in the country. "We draw world-renowned artists to Alfred University because we have facilities that no other art school can match," said Edmondson. "The expansion of our art programs requires a commensurate expansion of the facilities, and the state funds make that possible." A ceramic engineering graduate who founded and built Arrow International, a medical devices manufacturing company located in Reading, PA, Miller became involved in the arts as a student at AU. That immersion of a "science and math guy" into the visual and performing arts is something that can only happen at a school like Alfred University, Miller believes. "At a big school, art would have just been in another building on campus. I would not have been thrust into that kind of environment," Miller said in an interview for The Alfred Magazine last spring. "The diversity of experiences at Alfred is something really worth preserving, and making sure that it thrives and prospers," said Miller in explaining the reasons for his gift. The Millers' gift also includes \$10 million for construction of a 500-seat proscenium theater. But the Division of Performing Arts is part of Alfred University's College of Liberal Arts & Science, and it would not be eligible for the same state funding as the School of Art & Design.