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Honoring a Visionary

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Honoring a Visionary

Ole Miss Women's Council creates endowment for Ellen Rolfes

AUGUST 22, 2020 BY TINA H. HAHN

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Ole Miss Women's Council founding member Ellen Rolfes expresses her appreciation upon the surprise announcement of a scholarship endowment established in her name. Photo by Bill Dabney/UM Foundation

OXFORD, Miss. – Ellen Rolfes has always taken her crayons and colored outside the lines, so to speak.

In her vision for the **Ole Miss Women's Council for Philanthropy**, she saw a need for a **University of Mississippi** scholarship program that would provide students with mentors, leadership development and cultural experiences, as well as give a voice to women philanthropists.

The OMWC is thriving with a scholarship endowment of \$17 million, and the scholarship awards have grown to be among the largest on the Oxford campus, at \$40,000 each. During this, the council's 20th year, its members have created the Ellen Robinson Rolfes Ole Miss Women's Council Rose Garden Endowment to honor the program's pioneer.

"I have always said innovators are those kids in kindergarten who color outside the lines because they see a different picture than what was drawn there," said Rolfes, of Memphis, Tennessee. "I have been guilty of that all my life."

The new endowment will fund programming for male and female students selected for the OMWC scholarships. The goal of the programming and experiences offered is to increase scholars' self-awareness and their awareness of others.

"They can begin to see through the lens that people different from them use to see the world," Rolfes said. "By virtue of the leadership, scholarship and mentorship experiences, our students are called to shape a more caring and ethical society and, in doing so, they must gain a grasp of all perspectives."

Rolfes, a philanthropy strategist and a book packager, had joined the university as an academic fundraiser when she envisioned the OMWC. As she got to know Gloria Kellum, then-vice chancellor for university relations, she asked about the status of women's leadership at UM.

"That wise woman told me to go figure something out, and I had a week to do it," Rolfes recalled. "Soon, I returned with the concept paper for the Ole Miss Women's Council for Philanthropy. If it weren't for Dr. Gloria Kellum and then-Chancellor Robert Khayat, the OMWC would have never been born.

"That day, the whole world changed for me as those two brilliant, servant leaders gave me the journey of a lifetime. I owe them everything."

At its inception, the OMWC was a new institutional model created from intentional inclusion by women

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Campus Briefs

Civil Engineering Professor Receives Most-Cited Paper Award

OXFORD, Miss. – Peer recognition is a rewarding experience for anyone, but University of Mississippi researcher Amir Mehrara Molan was elated when an article he co-authored recently received the Most Cited Paper Award at the 102nd Transportation Research Board meeting in the nation's capital. The International Journal of Transportation Science and Technology presented the civil engineering

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Ole Miss In the News

Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to

from diverse geographic, economic and racial backgrounds who came together to embrace a shared vision. The inaugural members represented donors, alumnae, friends, faculty and staff who pledged to demonstrate the power of the feminine face of philanthropy.

"Together, we have reshaped the university's culture by bringing parity to the philanthropy table," Rolfes said. "The serendipity is that, through it all, we now share an unbreakable bond of love and respect for one another.

"Another truth is the number of council members who've gone on to serve in top alumni leadership roles throughout the university and especially on the University of Mississippi Foundation board of directors."

Paying tribute to Rolfes is an essential part of the 20th anniversary year, said Mary Susan Gallien Clinton, of Naples, Florida, the outgoing council chair and a UM Foundation board member.

"The OMWC was created because Ellen inspired the founding council members to invest their time and resources into blueprints that would give deserving Ole Miss students much more than financial assistance – although scholarship funds obviously are transformational," she said. "What has been built is a multifaceted program that truly prepares our scholars to graduate and make significant contributions through their personal and professional lives.

"To be engaged with our scholars and involved with fellow council members has become an important part of my life. It will be absolutely fascinating to watch our scholars enrich society."

Edith Kelly-Green, of Memphis, Tennessee – a member of the Patterson School of Accountancy's Hall of Fame and the Ole Miss Alumni Hall of Fame – led the OMWC as its first chair and witnessed the impact of Rolfes' idea at work.

"While I was the inaugural chair of the Ole Miss Women's Council, it was Ellen Rolfes who had the vision, and it was her tenacity that convinced me that the council could be of great value," Kelly-Green said. "It was her enthusiasm and energy that made the other 23 inaugural board members commit to an idea that has made such an impact on this university – an outcome seen by the 157 scholarships we now have awarded.

"Many of our scholars would not have been able to attend college without the assistance of our major scholarship awards. Our scholars who have graduated are making a difference in their communities, cities, nation and the world. Ellen surely deserves to have an OMWC endowment in her name and much, much more."

Rachel McPherson, of Brooklyn, New York – a founding member, the second OMWC chair and a member of the Ole Miss Alumni Hall of Fame – said the time had come for an organization like the council to be born.

"Ellen came to New York in a snowstorm to get me to join the council," recalled McPherson, a native of Monticello. "And, I did. I wanted to find a collected voice of women at the University of Mississippi.

"I aligned with Ellen because we both knew we needed to educate the best and brightest in order to shape a more caring and ethical society. Looking from afar, I knew deep inside that was what my home state and my country needed most. Little did I know how much that would mean at this day and time."

Rolfes' "big, bold vision" led Kathryn Black, of Oxford, not only to join the council on the ground floor, but also more recently to make a gift in her parents' names to the Rolfes Endowment.

"Ellen was the visionary who came up with this organization," Black said. "She had all these extraordinary experiences as an entrepreneur and strategist in Memphis, and she brought all of those to the Ole Miss Women's Council table. Ellen has an endearing personality as well as strong leadership skills.

"When I have been around the scholars, the most intriguing thing is their strong bond with each other, which helps in their college experiences. I have also been impressed with the younger women – 'movers and shakers' and community leaders – who have become members of the council."

Rolfes looks at the success that's grown out of the OMWC, and the council members who have become deeply committed to the scholarship program and other university initiatives.

"It's just like in the movie 'Field of Dreams': you see it first in your heart and mind, then you build it," she said. "They will come but they also must first see it in their hearts and minds."

To make a gift to the Ellen Robinson Rolfes Ole Miss Women's Council Rose Garden Endowment, mail a check, with the fund's name written in the memo line, to the University of Mississippi Foundation, 406 University Ave., Oxford, MS 38655, or give online at <https://give.olemiss.edu/where-to-give/ole-miss-womens-council/>.

For more information on establishing an OMWC scholarship at the \$125,000 or \$250,000 levels, joining the Global Leadership Circle at \$25,000 or joining the Rose Society at \$1,000 annually, contact Suzanne Helveston at shelveston@olemiss.edu or 662-915-2956 or visit <https://omwc.olemiss.edu>.

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