

# The Hallmark of Philanthropy

By Kent Anderson

## Tidbit

The inaugural Mary Eddy Jones Signature Gift goes to support the construction of a new performing arts theatre at Oklahoma City Community College. But this is only part of the story - the students of OCCC are paying for half of the theatre themselves, having voted for a fee increase to fund the project. "That was very impressive to us," says Kirk Hall. "It's a tremendous effort on the part of the students and we wanted to be a part of that success."

**K**irk Hall loves to tell the story of his grandparents, of how his grandmother, Mary Eddy Jones, came to this state in the run of '89. His grandfather, Fred Jones Sr., was a sharp young man from Tennessee who was on a westbound train in 1916 when he developed a toothache. He stepped off the train on Main Street in Oklahoma City and found a dentist nearby. After his tooth was fixed, young Jones took a look around.

"He decided this might be an interesting town with some prospects and decided to apply for a job here," says Hall.


The job for which he applied was at a new factory that Ford Motor Company was building to manufacture its Model T. The factory was at 900 West Main. Fred Jones never looked back. He later worked for and operated Ford dealerships, including the eponymous enterprise at Robinson and Reno, a business that pioneered 24-hour automotive service. During World War II, Fred Jones bought into a business that involved remanufacturing engines and transmissions - a business that continues today - at 900 West Main, in the same building where he first worked for Ford, many years earlier.

Through it all, Fred Jones and his bride, Mary Eddy Jones, established a tradition of philanthropy, particularly in the areas of the arts and community beautification.

"The foundation was a vision of my grandparents," Hall says. "They always had a bent toward philanthropy, and they instilled that legacy in my mother and also their grandsons, and built that responsibility and desire to give back."

Fred and Mary Eddy Jones had a son and a daughter. Fred Jones Jr. was tragically killed in a plane crash in 1950. Their daughter, Marylin Jones Upsher, became the mother of Fred, Boots and Kirk Hall, who would eventually take over both the family business and the family tradition of philanthropy - a tradition that began with the establishment of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma, a gift the Joneses made in honor of their late son. The family's support of the museum continues to this day.

According to Kirk Hall, his grandparents traveled extensively, and Mary Eddy Jones in particular was impressed by one aspect of the cities she visited. "She believed cities were great not because they were engines for business, but had a great climate for the arts and culture," says Hall, who now serves



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Kirk Hall stands outside the iconic Fred Jones Manufacturing Co. building.



Celebrating the 300,000<sup>th</sup> engine remanufactured in the plant.

as president and chairman of the Fred Jones Family Foundation. “Both she and my grandfather believed we needed to have a city for the arts.”

In 2010, the foundation builds on the legacy of Fred and Mary Eddy Jones, by bringing an even sharper focus on the arts and community beautification to the projects they choose to fund. This year the foundation created the Mary Eddy Jones Signature Gift, an annual \$50,000 grant. The first recipient of the grant was Oklahoma City Community College, for the construction of a new performing arts theatre.

While Kirk Hall and his two brothers are the family members currently “in charge” of both the family businesses and the foundation, they have made a concerted effort to include the members of the next generation in the family tradition of philanthropy. There are seven members of the fourth generation, scattered in various locales and involved in fields as diverse as music and social work. But as part of this family, they have a seat at the table of the Fred Jones Family Foundation.

“Philanthropy is a way to bind our family together, and a great way to give back to the city that has given us so much,” says Hall. “We want to make an impact on the arts and culture in central Oklahoma, to make gifts that are large enough to be meaningful to different recipients. We’d also like to encourage the next generation of the family to be part of that impact and have a say in areas they care about.”

The generations of this pioneering Oklahoma family come together to honor a legacy, but to look forward as well. Fred Jones Sr. saw great prospects in Oklahoma City when he stepped off the train here in 1916. His descendents have the same vision in another century, a vision of service, of culture, of helping to create and support a great city. It is a fine vision – not only for this family, but for the community it serves. ●