

**Executive Summary:**  
**Dennis and Gretchen Eck gift to the University of Montana**

Since 2014, University of Montana (UM) alumnus Dennis Eck '68 and his wife, Gretchen, have worked closely with UM, the UM Foundation and the College of Humanities and Sciences to make significant improvements to the Liberal Arts Building, the academic building housing the college. Their total contributions to the project have now reached \$8,367,055. The Ecks have a long history of support for student scholarships, and Mr. Eck is a former Trustee of the Foundation.

The purpose of the \$8.3 million gift is to substantially renovate classrooms and enhance technology in the Academic Hall of the Liberal Arts Building. In consideration for this generous gift, and with the approval of the Montana University System Board of Regents, the University will name the Academic Hall of the Liberal Arts Building the **Dennis and Gretchen Eck Academic Hall**. The University has previously named six renovated classrooms and associated technological improvements and will also be naming a newly renovated basement-level auditorium (125-seat capacity) and new south entry in honor of the Eck family.

Dennis grew up in Wolf Point, Montana, near the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, and Gretchen is a native of Butte. As a young boy, Dennis helped stock shelves at Gillette Pharmacy and delivered handbills, took phone orders and sacked potatoes at Buttrey Food & Drug. Learning the fundamentals of business at a young age would serve him well throughout his career in corporate retail and as a successful venture capitalist. Dennis and Gretchen, along with Dennis' three siblings, attended the University of Montana, and Dennis received a bachelor's degree in history and political science. Dennis started his career with the grocery retail giant, Jewel Companies, Inc., and rose from the manager of produce buying to executive vice president. He later assumed executive leadership positions with The Vons Companies, Cole Myer, and Ulta Salon Cosmetics & Fragrance. Today he sits on the board of Ulta Beauty and is the principal of DKE Retail Studies. Dennis and Gretchen have two children and five grandchildren and reside in Las Vegas, NV and Corona del Mar, CA.

Dennis and Gretchen have dedicated themselves to improving technology, education and social and economic conditions throughout their home state of Montana and beyond. In addition to extensive political involvement nationally, the Ecks have provided capital support for their grandchildren's Montessori school and are currently engaged with a cancer program providing scalp cooling caps to women undergoing chemotherapy treatment. Dennis' past civic roles have included service as chairman of the Alfred Hospital Foundation and leadership in the development of a private university tied to Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia. One of Dennis' proudest accomplishments is the significant role he played in developing a community outreach program for high school dropouts in Australia. Using an employee reward system for advanced education, the program had dramatic success in re-engaging former dropouts in higher education and improving their employment opportunities.

Initial support from the Ecks in 2014-2015 helped the UM College of Humanities and Sciences create a suite of six “high-tech” classrooms in the Academic Hall of the Liberal Arts Building. This effort helped brighten tired classroom spaces; added more energy-efficient Oval-facing windows; improved ventilation and natural light; provided modular furnishings; and offered some of the most advanced audio/visual resources for teaching and research. This early investment also provided the necessary funding to develop a comprehensive master plan for the Liberal Arts Building.

Gifts made by the Ecks in 2016-2017 supported renovations that are currently underway, including: renovation to lower-level offices and a theater-style auditorium classroom with a seating capacity of 125; replacement of an unreliable chair lift system with an accessible elevator; creation of student lounge and gathering spaces on three floors; and construction of a more prominent central entrance to the building off the Oval. These improvements are slated for completion in fall 2017.

Finally, with the Ecks’ most recent 2017 commitment, the College will, over the next two summers, be able to renovate at least 11 Oval-facing classrooms in the Academic Hall; make critical electrical upgrades throughout the Academic Hall; and remodel all Academic Hall restrooms. Improvements to Academic Hall classrooms will include new window packages which will bring the building closer to its historic design and provide a more climate-controlled and inspiring environment for students to learn. All of these improvements have made it possible for the University to also install a new fire sprinkler system and to replace the Academic Hall roof.

Of the \$8.3 million committed to the University of Montana Foundation by Dennis and Gretchen Eck, \$6,170,150 has been received 2014 - 2017. The remaining \$2,196,905 will be paid 2018 - 2019.

### **About the College of Humanities and Sciences**

Comprised of 23 departments and numerous interdisciplinary and pre-professional programs, the College of Humanities and Sciences is the largest college at the University of Montana. The College is committed to providing general education for all UM students while ensuring high-quality teaching and focused research in the pursuit of knowledge. The College promotes substantive interactions between the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities and stands at the forefront of insight and discovery as the *Heart & Soul* of the University.

### **About the Liberal Arts Building**

Situated on the University of Montana’s historic Oval, the Liberal Arts Building is home to the College of Humanities and Sciences. Each semester thousands of students take more than 600 classes in 30 classrooms in the building. The vast majority of UM students take multiple classes, including a significant number of general education courses, in the building. The Liberal Arts Building was originally constructed in 1953 with a second phase completed in the early 1960s. It has not seen any positive improvements since its construction.