



Saturday, November 7, 2009

Standard-Speaker B1

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Wiltsie Performing Arts Center accepts \$100,000 Donation secures naming rights for former HHS auditorium

By **JILL WHALEN**
Staff Writer

The campaign to restore the auditorium at the Hazleton Elementary Middle School received its biggest donation to date Friday: a \$100,000 check assuring that the facility is named after a former Hazleton High School art teacher.

Naming rights for the Alice C. Wiltsie Performing Arts Center inside the former Hazleton High School — also known as The Castle — came through a \$100,000 donation from the late Alice Callaway Wiltsie's nephew, Allan Werst.

And because community organizations matched Werst's gift, the Castle Auditorium Committee pulled in more than \$220,000 for auditorium repairs.

Wiltsie, an art teacher, who died in 1990, was known throughout her 26-year teaching career for her love of art, theatre and classical music.

Presentation of the check marked a milestone in the effort to restore the auditorium.

"It is truly a dream come true," said Alice Kender, committee spokeswoman.

The donation was accepted Friday on the steps leading to the school's main entrance.

"The Alice C. Wiltsie Performing Arts Center is not just a treasure of the school, but a treasure of the entire community to enjoy," Kender said.

"It is a critical piece of the fabric of this community and an important historical venue. I am sure that our drama and music alumni have precious memories of their performances on the auditorium stage. We look forward to providing the same opportunity and experiences to future generations."

She thanked Werst, of Fort Worth, Tex., and Wiltsie's son, Dr. John Wiltsie, of Rochester, Minn. Neither were able to attend the presentation.

"It is because of the thoughtfulness and generosity of Dr. Wiltsie and Mr. Werst that we are able to witness and be part of this memorable occasion," Kender said, showing a banner donated by Karl Wallen of Wallen Graphics, Drums, that proclaimed the new name.

Kender began working with Werst after he contacted the school district two

years ago hoping to aid the auditorium project. Kender said Werst wanted to do something to honor his aunt's memory.

"We took it from that point on. There was much to be ironed out. We wanted everything to be perfect," she said.

Werst, who also graduated from Hazleton High School, wanted to help the auditorium become the showcase it once was.

"I thought, 'What a wonderful way for me to honor the memory of my aunt,'" he said, explaining that Wiltsie invited him to live with her in Hazleton in 1956, a period he called "two of my happiest years."

"I became a faithful Mountaineer fan, became involved in extracurricular activities such as Thespians, chorus, Sea Scouts, and the First Presbyterian Church Youth Group. Yes, I'm a proud Texan, but I'm also a lover of Hazleton and especially the Hazleton High School Classes of 1957 and 1958," he said.

So Werst was thrilled when the auditorium committee and Hazleton Area School Board accepted his idea to name the auditorium for his aunt.

"I am very happy to know that our old Hazleton High School auditorium will forever be known as the Alice C. Wiltsie Performing Arts Center to honor the memory of my dear aunt Alice C. Wiltsie, a worker bee, a faithful art teacher, and truly a distinguished lady," he said.

Wiltsie's son, also a Hazleton High School graduate, supported the auditorium's naming.

"I know mother would be very pleased to be remembered in such a wonderful way as having the former Hazleton High School auditorium transformed into a center for the performing arts programs of your area with the auditorium bearing her name," Dr. Wiltsie said. "She not only was anxious to have those with whom she came in contact learn about art, but also always held a great interest in teaching appreciation of the arts in general."



Alice C. Wiltsie

Bob Shanno, a retired Hazleton High School teacher, remembered Wiltsie as a "truly gifted" individual.

"She worked with her students, teenagers and adults alike, to help them achieve all they could in her many classes,"

he said. "The results were excellent, with many of those students winning awards of their own under her patient tutelage. She was especially devoted to and proud of her many students at Hazleton High School."

Shanno called the naming a "fitting tribute."

"Hopefully, the culture to which she devoted her life will continue to flourish there for many generations to come," he added.

According to information supplied by the family, Alice Callaway Wiltsie was born in 1903 to John M. and Lizzie Dell Beishline Callaway, Hazleton. She graduated from Hazleton High School in 1920 and went on to attend the Pratt Art Institute in New York City; Penn State University and Kutztown State Teachers' College. She earned a bachelor of arts degree and supervised art for six years at Mahanoy Township schools before marrying attorney Charles Sumner Wiltsie of Indianap-

olis, Ind., in 1929.

When her husband died in 1931, she returned to Hazleton and taught art at the high school until her retirement. She also taught evening courses for more than 30 years at the Hazleton Art League, and her work was displayed across the country.

She was a lifetime member of Trinity Lutheran Church, Hazleton, and had sisters, Marion Koehler and Doris Werst, and a brother, Paul Callaway.

As for the matching donations, Kender said they came from the CAN DO Community Foundation, First Federal Charitable Foundation, PPL, an anonymous donor and the Joe Maddon event held last December at the school.

While the generous gift will help lay the groundwork for renovations, Kender said the committee has a "long way to go" to raise funds for the more than \$3 million project.

Anyone interested in donating to The Castle Fund in memory or honor of someone is encouraged to do so.

For information on how to donate to the Alice C. Wiltsie Performing Arts Center or the Have a Seat fundraiser, contact Carmella Yenkevich at 455-5863 or yenkev@ptd.net; or Kender at 497-4475 or akender@ptd.net.



ERIC CONOVER/Staff Photographer

Members of the Alice C. Wiltsie Performing Arts Center auditorium board of directors display a check for \$100,000 securing naming rights for the facility. The contribution was made by Allan Werst, nephew of the late art teacher for whom the auditorium is being named. Front row, from left: Bob Shanno, board co-chairman; board member Alice Kender, lead contact with the Wiltsie family; Francis Libonati, board co-chairman, and Sam Marolo, superintendent of the Hazleton Area School District. Directors in back row are attorney Anthony Dixon, Elaine Maddon Curry, board President Tom Gabos and Treasurer Tony Cusatis.

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REWARD
\$500.00 Reward leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons who stole an XBOX 360 from my home on Wilbur Court sometime after early June 09. The XBOX was Paul "Paulie" Penkala's and it was one of the things in his room that we treasured. Anyone that could steal from this boy's room deserves to be punished. The Xbox had a round black and grey "Glock" sticker and a red and white "G" sticker on it.
Please call Det. Bunchalk @ Haz Police Dept. 459-4940 or 233-4049

