

JCP: A Sesquicentennial Celebration: Milligan prepares to celebrate its 150th anniversary

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By David Floyd, staff writer

In the course of its history, Milligan College has witnessed the invention of the lightbulb, the birth of rock 'n' roll and the rise — and fall — of bell-bottom jeans.

And on Dec. 10, 2016, the university will celebrate another historical milestone — its 150th birthday.

Vice President for Institutional Advancement Jack Simpson said the college has been planning the celebration for about two years and has sought suggestions from multiple segments of the campus community.

One of the celebration's centerpieces will be a new commemorative commons called the Sesquicentennial Plaza, which will be constructed in an open area outside the southeast entrance of the P.H. Welshimer Library.

"It's not everyday that a college is able to turn 150 years old," Simpson said, "and we felt like it was appropriate to have a place that felt like it was specifically (intended) to mark that occasion."

The plaza will feature seating areas for students and a pergola, a shaded archway that has a roof thatched out of entangled plant life.

"It's a very well-located, prominent part of campus but a part that maybe hasn't had some of the attention over the last few years and doesn't get as used as much," Simpson said. "So what we wanted to do was create a place that would be kind of a permanent legacy to the sesquicentennial."

The college will also host a gala the evening of Oct. 21 during Homecoming weekend, a formal event will be welcome to students, alumni and local community leaders.

"We're still working on the program, but I suspect it'll involve some of our student talent," Simpson said. "It'll be a celebration of the past, present, future of Milligan and God's provision for Milligan over the years."

Several other events have been proposed for the college's celebration, including a storytelling event, an alumni/student pen pal program and a homecoming concert.

To pay for the celebration, Milligan is selling an historical book featuring photos of the college throughout its lifespan. The college is also offering the opportunity for people to purchase bricks that will be incorporated into the Sesquicentennial Plaza.

These bricks can be emblazoned with the purchaser's name or the names of loved ones and can be made available through a \$150 gift to the Milligan Sesquicentennial Plaza Commemorative Brick Program. To date, about 400 bricks have been purchased.

Milligan alumni will also be in attendance, including Mignon Sewell, a member of the class of 1962.

Sewell grew up in Italy with missionary parents before hearing about Milligan College from an American she and her father met in Paris.

Having spent a majority of her life in Europe, Sewell was initially concerned she would have trouble adjusting to American culture and slang.

"I didn't know where it was, I vaguely knew where Tennessee was," Sewell said, "and it was a perfect fit for me since the faculty was very involved with the students. ... I felt like I got a lot of attention and help in acclimating to America and being around American teenagers and young people."

Sewell believes this kind of stewardship is an integral part of the school and has encouraged her to provide the same kind of service to students who might be experiencing difficulty acclimating to life in the U.S.

"I have a feeling that a lot of kids that come to Milligan are given the attention, the guidance they need to get on the right path and choose a vocation or profession that they'll like," Sewell said.

Sewell stayed in the area after graduating from Milligan and taught foreign language at local public schools. Today, she's still active in alumni programs on campus.

"I'm very proud of Milligan over the past 50 years that I've known the college," Sewell said. "To watch it grow in the arts and in music and in its outreach to the community. ... Milligan has just brought a lot of culture to the region."

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MILLIGAN COLLEGE is a Christian liberal arts college in Northeast Tennessee whose vision is to change lives and shape culture through a commitment to servant leadership. The college offers more than 100 majors, minors, pre-professional degrees and concentrations in a variety of fields, along with graduate and adult degree completion programs. To learn more about Milligan College, visit www.milligan.edu or call 800-262-8337.