Edwards Honors His Parents With Gift to New Music Center

D.M. EDWARDS reels off the dates of Tyler historic events so well that one would think he was there when they happened, and in some cases he was.

He recently reflected on one such time in 1979, when he attended a ceremony on campus where then Texas Gov. Bill Clements signed a bill into law that turned Texas Eastern University into The University of Texas at Tyler, making it part of The University of Texas System.

“They had invited everyone to come out for the ceremony, and I was happy to be one of about 250 people there that day for the joyful occasion,” Edwards said.

He also recalled other magnificent moments in local history, such as the 1997 grand opening night of UT Tyler’s R. Don Cowan Fine and Performing Arts Center. That night, he and others experienced the splendor of Vaughan Auditorium for the first time with a piano and singing performance by the late Broadway composer Marvin Hamlisch.

Edwards now eagerly awaits another grand Tyler progression, this time as a key participant in helping to make it happen. Edwards gave $250,000 to fund the orchestral hall in the new UT Tyler Center for the Musical Arts, an addition to the Cowan Center expected to be completed this spring. He is the chairman and CEO of D. M. Edwards Investments, which owns commercial real estate properties in Tyler, Houston, Odessa and Shreveport, and operates a warehousing and distribution business.

“We are so grateful to Mr. Edwards for his support of the university, the School of Performing Arts and Music in the East Texas area as a whole.” — DR. MICHAEL THRASHER, DIRECTOR OF THE UT TYLER SCHOOL OF PERFORMING ARTS
School of Performing Arts and music in the East Texas area as a whole,” Dr. Michael Thrasher, director of the UT Tyler School of Performing Arts, said. “He’s been a friend and encourager for many years, and his gift has made a tremendous impact in helping this project become a reality.”

The 15,000-square-foot Center for the Musical Arts will provide needed instruction and rehearsal space for the university’s rapidly growing music program, in which the number of music majors has increased 70 percent in the last six years, UT Tyler President Dr. Rodney Mabry said.

The $6.5 million addition will house the 80-plus-seat band and orchestral hall that Edwards’ donation is funding, as well as a 72-seat choir room, teaching studios for individual instruction, a music library, offices and break areas. Its halls and teaching rooms will be acoustically engineered to be soundproof for optimal rehearsal opportunities.

Edwards’ generosity will help many thousands of young musicians over the years become better performers, help propel the university’s music program to even greater heights, and have a lasting benefit like his many other contributions to UT Tyler through the years, Mabry said.

Edwards is chairman of the UT Tyler College of Nursing and Health Science External Advisory Council and established two endowed presidential scholarships at UT Tyler through the years, Mabry said.

“Mr. D.M. Edwards is one of those individuals who contributes to our community and university in a truly effective way without making a fuss. He is very bright, analytical and caring at the same time, and always positive and fun. That makes him one of our favorite people,” Mabry said.

Edwards said he devotes time and money to education because it is a lasting gift.

“You’ve heard the old phrase that if you give a man a fish, he can feed himself that day, but if you teach a man how to fish, he can feed his family for a lifetime,” Edwards said. “That’s why UT Tyler as a higher education institution is so vital to the progress and growth of our entire region of Northeast Texas.”

CONTINUING A FAMILY LEGACY

Edwards named the new rehearsal hall, The Dr. Welby C. and Davida M. Edwards Orchestral Room, in honor of his parents.

“My family has always supported higher education,” Edwards said.

His mother worked as an area supervisor for the Texas Education Agency and oversaw 14 counties in East Texas in the early 1950s. When the Texas Eastern School of Nursing at Tyler Junior College first formed, she was called upon to help recruit its first class of students from those counties because of her familiarity with the region.

His father, too, helped foster the area’s growth and development. He was an organizer who helped found Meals on Wheels in Tyler in 1973. In 1991, East Texas Baptist University awarded him an honorary Doctorate of Humanities in recognition for providing substantial funding and support for the creation of its school of nursing. He had previously served in the U.S. Army Air Corps in the Pacific during World War II and was the state chaplain for the Disabled American Veterans Department of Texas.

In 1959, Edwards’ parents also founded the Tyler Saddle Club to promote horsemanship, proper care of horses and fellowship among horse lovers in East Texas.

“My parents were tireless civic workers for church and for community activities. That’s why I was happy to underwrite this orchestral rehearsal hall in their honor, because they were always so supportive of the growth of Tyler, Smith County and the East Texas area,” Edwards said. “Whatever they could do to help our region grow and develop economically and culturally, they were always there to help move the process forward.”

A fourth-generation resident of Tyler, Edwards inherited his parents’ passion for serving the community and fostering the region’s growth.

In addition to his support of UT Tyler, he has served as president of the Camp Fannin Association, president of the Rotary Club of Tyler, president of the East Texas State Fair and chairman of its senior citizens program, president of the Smith County Historical Society, and chairman of the Smith County Historical Commission. He also is a longtime member of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and a deacon at First Baptist Church of Tyler.

Perhaps most noteworthy is his love of music. He served more than once as chairman of the board of the East Texas Symphony Orchestra, which will benefit from the new music center at UT Tyler.

“We like to use the slogan with our symphony orchestra that music feeds the soul. And we’re fortunate to have Dr. Michael Thrasher as the director of the School of Performing Arts,” Edwards said. “The Center for the Musical Arts will help Dr. Mabry and Dr. Thrasher lift the School of Music at UT Tyler to new heights of musical excellence.”

The support for and celebration of the arts at UT Tyler is universal throughout the community and is guided by wonderful individuals such as Edwards, said Dr. Martin Slann, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

“D. M. Edwards represents the best of the best in Tyler,” Slann said. “He is a successful business person who wants to give something back and has been doing so for the last several decades. We are and will remain most grateful for his continual support and generosity.”

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