



# postscript. Never lost, Just Misplaced

**R**edication ceremonies for Ellison Hall as the newly renovated home of the College of Arts and Sciences had been scheduled for the building's tree-shaded front lawn. But October in Oklahoma often comes with challenges, and deteriorating weather conditions caused a hasty regrouping by A&S and Public Affairs staffs to move the ceremony to an indoor conference room. With his hands already full, the college's development officer, Von Allen, was a little impatient when called to the reception desk to talk to a floral deliveryman. Allen's attitude quickly improved.

"He told me he had something we might want," Allen recalls.

The "something" was the original bronze plaque memorializing Dr. Gayfree Ellison, installed when the building was renamed Ellison Infirmary in the early 1930s. The deliveryman, Kevin Williamson, had liberated the plaque from the Kappa Alpha fraternity attic about 1990, storing it under his bed for the past 15 years. How it came to be in the fraternity's possession remains a mystery.

Williamson rushed home, retrieved the plaque and turned it over to Allen in time for the ceremony. "It literally still had cobwebs clinging to it," Allen says. He hurriedly wiped off the plaque and covered it with a couple of linen napkins borrowed from one of the building's kitchens so Dean Paul Bell could unveil it for the overflow rededication crowd. Among those attending were several generations of Ellisons, including his daughter and daughter-in-law, both in their 80s, who used the occasion for a family reunion.

Ellison came to OU in 1910 as instructor in surgical anatomy, subsequently professor and department head of bacteriology. He later transferred to the botany department and in 1929 was named director of the Student Health Service and Infirmary, located on Elm Avenue in the new Hygeia Hall, named for the Greek goddess of health and well-being. Ellison died in 1932, and the building was renamed for him.

At one time the infirmary contained examination and treatment rooms, hospital rooms and even operating rooms. When in 1971 Goddard Health Center was constructed across the street, OU student government moved into the redesignated Ellison Hall, later joined by a Chick-Fil-A restaurant and the popular breakfast/lunch spot, Baker's Dozen.

Quite a scramble for the vacated space ensued when student



Robert Taylor

The original dedication plaque has been returned to the completely renovated Ellison Hall, shown from the east plaza side, now home to the College of Arts and Sciences.

government left Ellison in 2000 for the new Archie Dunham Conoco Student Leadership Wing of Oklahoma Memorial Union. Providing a centralized, visible location for the College of Arts and Sciences was judged the best use.

With significant private funding from alumni and friends, all interior remnants of Ellison's varied past were removed, and the building was completely renovated, brought up to code and beautifully finished. As has become the custom with OU's new spaces, the building features handsome woodwork, overstuffed leather chairs and sofas, mission-style furniture and Southwest-ern art.

The Cal Hobson Student Services Center and a large conference room dominate the first floor of the building, while the offices of the college's dean and administrative staff occupy the third floor. On the second floor are faculty offices for Native American Studies, African and

African-American Studies, the student lounge and another conference room. On the east side of the building is a spacious new outdoor plaza.

After professional cleaning and construction of a special stand, the historic plaque will stand outside the dean's office under a 1920 Patricio Gimeno portrait of Gayfree Ellison, on loan from the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. In the meantime, it is being stored in an undisclosed location, safe from the elements and fraternity jokesters.

—CJB

