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Construction Begins on Environmentally Innovative Phyllis Litoff Building, Oberlin's New Home for Jazz Studies

*Editors Please Note: Effective April 22, 2010, the Litoff Building was renamed.
Oberlin's new home for jazz studies, music history, and music theory is now the Bertram and Judith Kohl Building.*

OBERLIN, OHIO (August 13, 2008)—The syncopated sounds of jackhammers and backhoes heralded the much-anticipated groundbreaking for the Phyllis Litoff Building on July 30, 2008, when site clearing for the project began on the Oberlin College campus. Construction on the environmentally innovative home for jazz studies at Oberlin's Conservatory of Music began in earnest on August 8, 2008. Krill Construction of Cleveland, Ohio, is the general contractor for the project, which is expected to take 14 months to complete. Plans are for the building to open during fall semester 2009, and arrangements are being made for a gala dedication ceremony and grand opening. More detailed information will be announced at a later date.

Oberlin's intentions for the building are manifold. Besides housing Oberlin's renowned Jazz Studies Department and a world-class recording studio, the Litoff Building will also provide a vibrant archive for the largest privately held jazz recording collection in America. The Conservatory's academic programs in music history and music theory will relocate to the new facility, which will also stand as a permanent tribute to two individuals: Wendell Logan, Professor of African American Music and Chair of the Jazz Studies Department, and the late Phyllis Litoff, beloved New York City jazz impresario and cofounder of the famed jazz club Sweet Basil.

The architectural firm of Westlake, Reed, Leskosky (WRL) has designed the ambitious facility to meet these various goals, all while striving to hit the high bar that Oberlin has set for the building's environmental sustainability: to become the first music facility in the world to achieve a LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] Gold rating. WRL's design intends to accomplish this objective by employing building practices that include the use of local and recycled materials, carpets and paints that do not produce off-gases, occupancy sensors that monitor ventilation demands, and a closed-loop geothermal heating and cooling system.

Oberlin College consistently appears on national short lists of environmentally responsible campuses. The *Kaplan College Guide 2009*, published by *Newsweek*, named Oberlin one of the nation's 25 environmentally responsible schools. *Grist*, an online publication that provides environmental news and commentary, placed Oberlin fifth nationwide on its list of top green colleges and universities in 2007.

At a ceremonial groundbreaking held early in June to coincide with Oberlin's Board of Trustees meeting, Oberlin College President Marvin Krislov said that the Litoff Building "will be more than just a cutting-edge green building. It will be the physical manifestation of Oberlin's great traditions of inclusion, creativity, leadership, and innovation." Lead architect Paul Westlake spoke about Oberlin's "remarkable values," and said that "there is a conspiracy of excellence in its processes and people. Innovation is embedded in the DNA and culture of Oberlin."

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The Cleveland Chapter of the American Institute of Architects has already honored Westlake's firm with a merit award for the project's master plan. According to Kevin Robinette, WRL'S project manager, the building's stunning exterior will be constructed of aluminum composite panels, ipé wood siding (ipé is a Brazilian hardwood that is harvested exclusively from naturally sustainable forests), and glazed curtain wall systems comprised of acoustically rated glass and fritted patterns that will reduce solar heat gain.

"The Phyllis Litoff Building will be the premier facility of its kind anywhere in the world," said Dean of the Conservatory David H. Stull at the June ceremony. "It is ultimately a manifestation of the collective vision of a great faculty, a phenomenal student and alumni population, and a few of the finest individuals I have had the pleasure of knowing who have financed this project. It is an extraordinary accomplishment for Oberlin."

The lead gift for the project—\$5 million from Cleveland businessman Stewart Kohl '77 and his wife, Donna—is said to be the largest private gift in support of jazz education at a U.S. college, and honors Phyllis Litoff, a close friend who died in 2002. In his remarks at the ceremony, Stewart Kohl spoke about the project and his philanthropic muse: "Today we put a little scar in the earth from which will emerge a beautiful building and a great addition to the life of Oberlin College. And from this building perhaps will emerge a future Louis or Wynton. Our highest motivation is to honor Phyllis Litoff. The building has to meet her high standards."

Professor Wendell Logan expressed his gratitude to the Kohls and the project's other major donors, and to Oberlin's "irrepressible and intrepid dean, David H. Stull. This building is a testament to our students, who came here and went on to achieve successful careers. They are what make this building possible." Mel Litoff held aloft a photographic portrait of his late wife, noting that before she died she remarked that she "wanted her life to mean something."

The lead gift made by the Kohls was followed in short order by a record donation from the Kulas Foundation. Other major donors include Oberlin graduate Clyde McGregor '74 of Chicago, Illinois, a member of Oberlin's Board of Trustees who pledged \$4 million to the Litoff Building in honor of his mother, Lilly Marie Smith '43; and Joseph Clonick '57, also of Chicago, who had made a gift of \$1 million dollars early on; he followed that with a pledge of an additional \$4 million to support a recording studio and performance space for the project.

Chicago resident James Neumann '58 and his wife Susan have donated to Oberlin their collection of more than 100,000 jazz recordings—the largest privately held jazz recording collection in the United States—and a vast array of related posters, ephemera, and iconography, and it will be archived in the Litoff Building. The Jim and Susan Neumann Jazz Collection will be an invaluable resource for students, faculty, and scholars. "We're focused first and foremost on using the collection to support our performance training program," Dean Stull told John McDonough of *Downbeat* magazine earlier this year, and Oberlin plans to achieve this objective through a large-scale digitization project that will culminate, said Stull, in "the largest online jazz archive in the world."

Oberlin offers a premier undergraduate jazz studies program, chaired by Professor of African American Music Wendell Logan, that prepares students for careers as professional jazz musicians and for advanced study in jazz. The jazz studies faculty includes composers and performers who, in addition to teaching lessons and coaching ensembles, maintain active performing careers throughout the world. Numerous Oberlin alumni have achieved success in the jazz idiom, among them keyboardist Ted Baker; pianist and composer Stanley Cowell; bassist, composer, and arranger Leon Lee Dorsey; pianist, arranger, and producer Allen Farnham; bassist Ben Jaffe; composer and pianist Jon Jang; writer, composer, and saxophonist James McBride; and trumpeter, trombonist, and composer Michael Mossman.

About the Oberlin Conservatory of Music

The Oberlin Conservatory of Music, founded in 1865 and situated amid the intellectual vitality of Oberlin College since 1867, is the oldest continuously operating conservatory in the United States. Renowned internationally as a professional music school of the highest caliber and pronounced a “national treasure” by the *Washington Post*, its alumni have gone on to achieve illustrious careers in all aspects of the serious music world. For more information about Oberlin, its commitment to environmental sustainability, and the Phyllis Litoff Building, please visit www.oberlin.edu.

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