WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY
FOUNDATION

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Organ professor's quest to make great music at Wichita State continues posthumously

Robert Town's impact on Wichita State's cultural fabric continues even in death with an estate gift to the WSU Foundation that will support the Robert Town Faculty of Distinction Endowed Professorship in Organ.

Town died Dec. 10 after a long illness.

During his lifetime, he played an invaluable role in orchestrating gifts to Wichita State that brought prestige and distinction to its College of Fine Arts.

His relationship with Gladys Wiedemann led to a decision by the Wiedemann Foundation to purchase the Great Marcussen Organ and house it in the acoustically pristine concert hall named for the Wiedemanns. And his friendship with Rie Bloomfield resulted in a gift from the Sam and Rie Bloomfield Foundation to fund the Rie Bloomfield Organ Series, which draws some of the finest organists from around the world.

"Very few faculty are as engaged with our patrons as Professor Town was," said Russ Widener, chair of the WSU School of Music. "His relationship with Mrs. Wiedemann has given us one of the finest buildings on campus and one of the finest instruments of its kind in our country. The Rie Bloomfield Organ Series continues to give our community an outstanding concert series. And now Professor Town has given of himself to leave an enduring legacy to Wichita State University and our community."

Town's estate will provide about $475,000 to support the professorship as well as a maintenance fund for the Marcussen Organ, considered one of the most magnificent in the world.

The organ professorship is held by Lynne Davis. It had been named for Dennis and Ann Ross, longtime supporters of WSU's organ program. But in honor of Town, the Rosses moved their support to the opera program, establishing the Ann and Dennis Ross Faculty of Distinction in Opera. The WSU College of Fine Arts announced last month that renowned opera singer Alan Held will hold the chair.

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In addition to being an associate professor of organ at Wichita State, Town was an accomplished concert recitalist, playing across the United States and Europe. He also was a master teacher. His students were successful in competitions across the United States and internationally.

Town began teaching at Wichita State in 1965 and retired in 2006.

"In his lifetime, Bob made a profound impact on the field of organ performance," said James Rhatigan, a friend and WSU Foundation consultant. "But even more importantly, he did so in order that his students and their students and those of us who have the privilege of being the audience would have a glimpse of the beauty of Bob's world, the beauty of music through the magnificent instrument, the organ."

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Media note: A photograph of Robert Town with the Marcussen organ can be found at www.wichita.edu/foundationphotos

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