Roberts Academy Receives Gifts of Art and Financial Support

The Roberts Academy at Florida Southern College received inspiring gifts of art and financial support at a special ceremony on Nov. 10 at the school. Parents, faculty, and members of the community were present for the event, which benefited the Academy, the only private elementary school for gifted children with dyslexia in Florida.

Three heartwarming sculptures by the noted artists Don Haugen and Teena Stern were unveiled in the front of the Academy. The bronze sculptures, of children holding open books, are a gift from Lakeland philanthropists Hal and Marjorie Roberts, whose generous gift funded the Academy and whose further support enabled it to add a sixth grade this year.

The sculptures are intended to convey the promise of reading and learning for children with dyslexia. They are representations of three of the Roberts’ grandchildren, each of whom has dyslexia. Liam, Sarah Reilly, and Anna Taite each wrote a statement that appears in the open books on the sculptures.

In their statements, the children expressed their joy at being able to read. Liam wrote, “We need to learn to read so we can read to learn.” Sarah Reilly put hers in the form of a poem: “Then – Dumb / Could not / Angry; / Now – Smart / Can / Happy.” Anna Taite wrote, “When I learned to read, I was set free to soar.”

Haugen and Stern, of Marietta, Ga., are among the most distinguished figurative sculptors in America. Some of their publicly displayed works can be found at the International Olympic Archives, the Jimmy Carter Library, and the University of Georgia.

In honor of the gifts of the Robertses, their daughter, Julia Roberts ’91, gave the school a large framed portrait of Hal and Marjorie Roberts, which hangs in the lobby of the Roberts Academy.

In addition to the gift of the sculptures, John Snapp ’72, a business consultant with Publix Super Markets, Inc., announced he is giving two financial gifts to the Academy. One gift dedicated a classroom named in honor of his wife, Janet Snapp ’73, a teacher at Roberts Academy. The second gift will fund the Janet Snapp Scholarship for a student to attend the school.

Janet Snapp is a former teacher with the Polk County School District and was the first teacher hired by the Roberts Academy. In his remarks announcing the gifts, which caught his wife by surprise, Mr. Snapp said they were an expression of gratitude.

“Hal and Marjorie Roberts (second and third from right) pose with their daughter and grandchildren and the sculptures they commissioned. From left: grandsons Finn and Liam, daughter Julia ’91, granddaughters Ansley, Sarah Reilly, and Anna Taite (far right).”

“Hal and Marjorie Roberts (left) stand with the portrait their daughter Julia ’91 (third from right) presented to the Roberts Academy in their honor. On Julia’s left are President Anne Kerr and Dean of Education and Head of School Tracey Tedder.”

“Janet ’73 and John ’72 Snapp stand outside the classroom where she teaches at the Roberts Academy. John Snapp gave a gift to the Academy naming the classroom in Janet’s honor.”