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## Riecker family donates \$460,000 to CMU

By Amber Miles / The Midland Daily News

A classic American one-room schoolhouse on **Central Michigan University's** campus was enough to inspire Midlanders **John and Margaret Ann "Ranny" Riecker** to donate \$460,000 to the university.

The Rieckers recently pledged the money for the continuation and expansion of CMU's **Riecker Literary Series** that kicked off in October 2005 with the presentation of "According to Twain: Accounts, Tales, and Yarns." The performance of adapted excerpts from a myriad of Mark Twain's writings was scripted by communication and dramatic arts professor **Jill Taft-Kaufman**, directed by CDA instructor **Betsy Richard**, and starred CDA instructor **James Eikrem** as Twain.

"We were inspired by the fact that the schoolhouse is a quaint and small place for a group of people to enjoy literary readings and skits," said John Riecker. "It's a donation for the continuation of a literary, dramatic-type program that will feature American authors and poets from 1850 to 1950."

The Rieckers, who previously

financed a re-restoration of the building as part of a past gift, believe "the idea is to provide enough funding to give the literary series a fair chance for a period of years."

Some of the goals of The Riecker Literary Series are to honor the beauty of the language and the word; give students new performance experiences; enrich the curriculum in the area of literary theater by supporting guest artists; and give the community an opportunity to enjoy literary theater in an historic setting, namely the Bohannon one-room schoolhouse.

"The Rieckers' gift will enrich the theater curriculum, provide new and exciting performance and production opportunities for students and faculty and make literature and the spoken word available to the mid-Michigan community and beyond," said College of Communication and Fine Arts Dean Sue Ann Martin.

In October, the university will hold a second production, for which a script now is being conceptualized and written, in the schoolhouse, which holds about 40 people. Martin said she hopes

those involved in creative writing also will use the venue for poetry readings.

"This literary series and the opportunities it gives to students for preprofessional experience would not exist if it were not for the wonderful support of John and Ranny Riecker," Martin said. "Their gift will have a lasting impact on students and on the community."

For more information about the Riecker Literary Series, call CMU's College of Communication and Fine Arts at (989) 774-1885.

### What it means

The Rieckers' latest gift will turn the series into a pre-professional, curricular activity for CMU's interpretive theater program by allowing CMU to:

- present live literary theater productions in alternating years, with the next being in October 2007;
- revamp and record the productions for broadcast on CMU Public Radio and other radio outlets – and for release as a compact disc – during the academic year following the live

performances, with "According to Twain" being taped in January 2007;

- enhance courses in scripting and directing literary theater, including interpretation special topics and seminar courses, and offer fuller course work in the interpretation of poetry and prose fiction;
- select students to participate as paid, preprofessional actors, technicians, assistant directors, production assistants and designers for the series' productions;
- support a professional who specializes in literary theater, with CMU alumnus and noted actor, director and writer John Ammerman slated to fill this role in 2007-08 and another performer expected to do so in 2009-10;
- support a producer for the productions;
- select and compensate faculty members who will serve as technicians and actors for the productions; and
- maintain the early 20th-century effects and ambiance of the Bohannon Schoolhouse. •