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Reynolds Journalism Institute Receives \$30 Million Endowment

Reynolds Foundation guarantees permanent funding for journalism institute.

Story by Erik Potter

Updated Nov. 8, 2012

Establishing large endowments is not something that the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation does often. Endowments, as permanent sources of funding, vouch not just for a program's current quality but also the worth of that program for years to come.

With a \$30.1 million endowment gift for the Reynolds Journalism Institute, the Reynolds Foundation gave a



Photo by Rachel Coward.

large endorsement to the quality of journalism education and research at Mizzou.

“When you make an endowment gift, it’s always a concern whether the program really merits the long-term funding,” says Steven L.

Anderson, president of the

Reynolds Foundation. “What we saw early on is that the very nature of the Reynolds Journalism Institute is to pioneer new ways of doing journalism and new ways of designing the business of journalism. It’s for that reason we know the RJI will continue — because its mission is to change. No matter what that change is, whether it’s two years from now, 20 years from now or even 100 years from now, they’ll be there.”

Anderson and several university leaders gathered Thursday in the Reynolds Journalism Institute to announce the gift — the largest endowment gift in the university’s history.

“It makes me feel tremendously good that anyone would have that much trust in the University of Missouri and the School of Journalism,” says Chancellor Brady J. Deaton.

The Reynolds Foundation was already the largest donor in Mizzou's history with more than \$55 million in gifts supporting journalism education, medical research and construction of the Reynolds Alumni Center. Its \$31 million gift in 2004 to construct the institute is the largest one-time gift in MU history.

The institute, dedicated in 2008, is part of the MU School of Journalism and conducts research aimed at strengthening journalism.

Randy Picht, executive director of RJI, says their mission is to “strengthen democracy through better journalism.”

With the endowment, which will generate approximately \$1.5 million a year, the university will have the resources to pursue that idea in perpetuity, says Dean Mills, dean of the J-School.

The Reynolds Fellows program brings up to six scholars and professionals to campus each year to develop thoughtful ideas and strategies for media industries.



Randy Picht, Reynolds Journalism Institute director, hands Steven L. Anderson, president of the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, a bottle of maple syrup to commemorate the \$30.1 million gift given by the Reynolds Foundation to establish an endowment for the Reynolds Journalism Institute. The gift made reference to the reaction of Walter Williams, founder of the J-School, who allowed his plate of pancakes to overflow with syrup when Ward Neff [as in Neff Hall] told him he wanted to build a building for the journalism school.

RJI welcomed the American Society of News Editors earlier this summer when the organization moved its Washington, D.C., headquarters to Columbia. The association partners on industry research with institute staff.

The institute also helped create the Local Independent Online News association, a group of startup websites that local publishers have made profitable with solid advertising and business strategies, increased engagement with their communities, and better journalism through new technologies.

Twenty-three full-time researchers, technicians and support personnel work in RJI's 50,000-square-foot facility, which includes seminar rooms, laboratories, a television studio and the nation's first university-based Microsoft application development lab.

Donald W. Reynolds, BJ '27, whom Deaton described as a "scrappy young man," was fired from his first three jobs after college before he figured out what he wanted to do: building the Donrey Media Group by acquiring newspapers in small but growing communities.

Reynolds established his national foundation in 1954. Headquartered in Las Vegas, the foundation has committed more than \$145 million nationwide through its Journalism Program.

Update: *This story incorrectly attributed the description of Reynolds as scrappy to Anderson. Also, the original version of this article had the wrong year of RJI's dedication. It was dedicated in 2008.*

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