The Myrtle Woldson Performing Arts Center will include a 750-seat performance theater that will be named in honor of Father Bernard J. Coughlin, S.J., chancellor of Gonzaga. Featuring areas dedicated to instruction in music, dance and theater arts, it is estimated that the center will be 52,000 square feet in size. Additional details of the facility are projected to be announced in the fall of 2014.

“Miss Woldson is building on the solid foundation for the arts at Gonzaga created by the Jundt Art Center and Museum and the Harry and Colleen Magnuson Theatre, as well as the dedicated work of our exceptional faculty and staff in these fields,” President Thayne M. McCulloh, D.Phil. said.

Gonzaga is grateful for Miss Woldson’s generosity, both during her life and through this bequest. The University looks forward to experiencing the impact that her gift will have on the performing arts at Gonzaga and for the Spokane community as a whole.

An encore gift worthy of a standing ovation

Miss Myrtle Woldson had many loves. She loved her parents, the arts, the Spokane community and Gonzaga. She also loved to give.

Her father helped build the Great Northern Railway and inspired his daughter to carry on the family traditions of investing and philanthropy. Miss Woldson was a successful businesswoman whose quiet, dignified support of her community made an indelible mark. She helped preserve and rejuvenate historical gems in honor of her parents, including the Martin Woldson Theater at the Fox, and Edwidge Woldson Park on the South Hill. She also quietly made several other gifts to the community.

For more than fifty years, she attended Gonzaga events, cheered for the Bulldogs at basketball games and gave generously to support the arts and scholarships. When Miss Woldson passed away on April 11, 2014, she made one final gift: she bequeathed to Gonzaga the funding to design, build and furnish a new performing arts center, which will join the Woldson family of memorial institutions.

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Piano tuner Tom Kuntz recognized a need in Gonzaga’s music department that, to him, was as black and white as the keys on a piano. The 100-year-old grand piano in St. Gregory Music Hall was on its last legs.

“The sound was muddied, the key action was inconsistent and pedaling was a nightmare,” said Keith Davidson (’14), a mechanical engineering student who minored in music. Adding insult to a very real injury, “our previous pianist had to prematurely retire from playing because of the piano,” said Timothy Westerhaus, D.M.A., director of choirs and vocal studies.

Kuntz mentioned the piano’s diminished condition to his mother-in-law, Betty Ries, a friend of the University who established the Dallas E. Stroschein (’53) endowment in memory of her late first husband, a Gonzaga alumnus. Based on Kuntz’s recommendation, Betty and her husband, retired Spokane County Sheriff’s Lt. Clyde Ries, provided a generous gift in addition to funds from the Stroschein endowment and Gonzaga’s Glee Club Alumni toward the piano purchase.

“The piano will be a lasting reminder to students of the continuing relationship we have with Gonzaga and quite possibly motivate them to make future contributions themselves,” said Tom Murphy (’56), a member of Gonzaga’s Glee Club Alumni.

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“The piano has had a tremendous impact on our program,” said Kevin Hekmatpanah, associate professor of music. “The gift has been a true blessing.”
Gonzaga University is ramping up involvement as the Opus Prize Foundation prepares to award $1.2 million for excellence in faith-based humanitarian entrepreneurship on October 16, 2014, right here in Spokane. We spoke with some of the students selected to play major roles in the process.

What inspired you to get involved with the Opus Prize?
I was very interested in being a part of seeing $1.2 million go to recognizing and supporting heroes fighting against social inequity.
– Aaron Danowski ('18)

How has your involvement with Opus helped you to grow?
Learning about the finalists and seeing the impact and work they have done in their communities is so inspiring. The type of work they are doing is what I want to be able to do in the Spokane community.
– Francisca Chau ('17)

What impact do you see Opus having on Gonzaga and the Spokane community?
The Opus Prize will push Gonzaga in the best possible way to experience global service on a whole new level.
– Allison Crha ('17)

You can read more about Tudy Edmonds' life and gifts at blogs.gonzaga.edu/gonzagagiving/tudy.

Tudy is pictured here with her son, William "Bill" Edmonds ('72), in 1983. She endowed a scholarship in his honor and kept in close contact with its recipients.
You might recognize Marissa Harvey (’15) from her letter to Gonzaga alumni and friends earlier this year. She shared her story of a dream to attend Gonzaga, her mother’s battle with cancer and the scholarships that provided hope.

Marissa’s story inspired several gifts to scholarship that will enable other students in need to have the same opportunities. Her story also motivated Maria Lanahan (’09) to make a gift to the Gonzaga Scholars Program and to reach out to Marissa personally, offering words of encouragement and networking opportunities.

Maria’s gesture to Marissa speaks volumes about the generosity of the Gonzaga community and the value placed on giving, whether it is financial or through service to one another, or both.

To read the letter Marissa received from Maria, visit the Gonzaga Giving blog at blogs.gonzaga.edu/gonzagagiving/marissa.