

Berks & Beyond

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IN MEMORIAM

Yocum saw what could be

RACC, Yocum Institute benefactor leaves lasting legacy

By Michelle Lynch
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When Susan Rohn first saw the dilapidated former factory, now home to the Yocum Institute for Arts Education, she wasn't sure what to think.

The institute needed a building with more space and room for expansion, and Rohn, executive director of the institute, had gone with James H. Yocum, then president of the board and a longtime benefactor, to check out the building at 3000 Penn Ave. in Spring Township.

Seeing the broken windowpanes and holes in the ceilings, Rohn seriously doubted the neglected building was a good fit.

She was surprised when Yocum turned to her and said: "This is perfect. This is exactly what you need."

It was classic Jim, Rohn said. He had a gift for seeing beyond what was, to what could be.

in shaping the college and its future. His leadership included serving as vice chairman from 1996 to 1998 and again from 2000 to 2002, as well as chairman from 1998 to 2000 and again from 2002 to 2004.

Titles don't begin to capture the breadth of his impact, said Anthony DeMarco, vice president for college advancement and executive director of the Foundation for RACC and Miller Center.

"Jim was much more than a philanthropist and leader," DeMarco said. "He was a friend to faculty, staff and students. We all revered him. His joyous, positive nature lifted the spirits of all around him."

Yocum created the foundation — the philanthropic arm of the college — and served as its first chairman. Thanks to his vision and tireless dedication, DeMarco said, the foundation now holds over \$32 million in assets, making it one of the most successful among community colleges in Pennsylvania.

Yocum also established and endowed 25 scholarships, believed to be the most created by an individual at a Pennsylvania college.

"Hundreds of RACC students have benefitted from Jim's gener-



ities include a black-box theater, art gallery, six dance studios, music wing and a secure arts-based kindergarten and preschool.

Rohn said there are many stories about Yocum, who often approached life with the joy and wonder of a child.

He was known for the colorful and often flamboyant suits and vests he wore to the institute's exhibit openings and performances.

"There are no bad cookies," he'd quip, happily munching at opening receptions, she remembers.

As for his favorite artists, Rohn noted, these were the students of the institute's preschool and kindergarten.

"He was a character, and everyone loved him," said Rohn. "He was so good to everyone. He was a treasure."

Yocum was predeceased by his parents, George Lehman Yocum and Helen (Jost) Yocum, and a brother, George Yocum.

A Mass of Christian burial will be held Tuesday at 11 a.m. at St. Margaret Catholic Church, 925 Centre Ave.

Friends and associates will be received from 9:30 to 11 a.m. prior to Mass.

RACC trustee and benefactor James H. Yocum models a RACC Ravens windbreaker presented to him by Dr. Anna Weitz, college president, in 2018. The college's library was named for the entire Yocum family. **BILL UHRICH/READING EAGLE**