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Couple gives \$1 M to Harding project

by [Jordan Gass-Pooré](#) | August 7, 2015 at 2:27 a.m.

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A Russellville couple has donated \$1 million toward a Harding University construction project.

Roy and Becky Reaves' donation will help fund half of the renovation and expansion of the Rhodes Field House on the university's Searcy campus.

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Construction will begin sometime after basketball season next spring, Roy Reaves said Thursday.

The project involves adding a 2,000-square-foot entrance to the building, a hospitality box and an 11,000-square-foot athletic practice facility and basketball dressing rooms.

Currently, Harding's volleyball and men's and women's basketball teams use the Rhodes Field House for practices and games, which makes it difficult to schedule events, Reaves said.

"To me, it's just a much-needed project" for a building that holds personal significance for him, he said.

During his first year at Harding, Reaves was invited to join university faculty members in pickup basketball games played in Rhodes Field House, he remembered.

Many of these people are still his friends, he said.

"The way they treated me; they treated me just like they treated each other," he said of his motivation to donate to the project. "I held them in high esteem."

With "low self-esteem because of financial reasons," Reaves transferred to Harding, a private liberal arts university associated with the Churches of Christ, from a public school in his home state of Missouri.

He grew up a "very poor" sharecropper's son in southeast Missouri, he said.

Most of his family was content with this life, but Reaves said he wanted more.

It was at Harding -- in the Rhodes Field House -- where this transformation began, he said.

Reaves received a bachelor's in business administration in 1965 from Harding. Three years later, he began making regular financial contributions to the university.

He also has an MBA from the University of Arkansas.

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For more than 40 years, Reaves served as CEO of several Arkansas banks. He founded First Arkansas Valley Bank in 1997, which later merged with Liberty Bank and then Centennial Bank.

Today, Reaves is a cattle rancher and investor. He is also serving his first term as chairman of Harding's board of trustees.

Trustees approved adding Reaves' name to the Rhodes Field House -- now the Rhodes-Reaves Field House -- at the board's semiannual meeting in May, he said.

"Roy and Becky love Harding and her mission," Chancellor David Burks said in a news release.

Burks and Reaves were classmates at Harding.

"I am very appreciative of their generous gift to help make this important project a reality. The added space is really needed for our athletic programs. I am glad they recognize the importance of this facility to the Harding family."

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