



FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY
NEWS SERVICES

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Ferris History Commemoration Task Force re-dedicates Williams Auditorium

BIG RAPIDS – Ferris State University President David L. Eisler and the Ferris History Commemoration Task Force will re-dedicate G. Mennen Williams Auditorium during a ceremony Nov. 8 at 11 a.m.

The Big Rapids and Ferris communities are invited to join University officials in the auditorium lobby for refreshments, a portrait unveiling, reflection and speakers.

It was G. Mennen Williams' leadership and support that set the foundation for favorable legislative action in securing state-college status for Ferris Institute. At the time this all transpired Judge Raymond Starr was serving on the Board of Control – a man with whom Williams had a warm personal and professional relationship.

Initially holding the namesake of Judge Raymond Starr, the auditorium opened in 1961. It was originally dedicated and named after Williams in 1986 – 25 years after Ferris State College bestowed upon the former Michigan governor an honorary doctoral degree.

Now, nearly 20 years later, the auditorium is being re-dedicated to spotlight why Williams was important to Ferris.

“The community is strongly encouraged to join us as we highlight another important figure in Ferris' history,” Mary Kay MacIver, History Commemoration Task Force chair, said. “Part of the rededication process is to permanently display artifacts that describe who G. Mennen Williams was and his historical significance to the University.”

Williams was born in Detroit on Feb. 23, 1911, to Henry Phillips and Elma (Mennen) Williams. His father's family owned a prosperous Detroit pickle factory and was active in Michigan real estate, while his mother's father founded the Mennen Company, a well-known soap and pharmaceutical company. The Mennen Company is where Williams' nickname “Soapy” was derived.

He served not only six consecutive terms as governor, but also was United States assistant secretary of state for African affairs (1961-66), ambassador to the Philippines (1968-69), elected to the state of Michigan Supreme Court (1970), became chief justice (1983) and taught at the University of Detroit School of Law. Williams died on Feb. 2, 1988.

CAPTION – On May 17, 1949, Gov. G. Mennen Williams signed the Smith-VanderWerp Act making Ferris Institute a state educational institution. Witnessing the signing are (left to right)



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Charles Fairman, Donald Worcester, co-author of the bill Sen. Colin Smith, Ferris Institute President Byron Brophy, co-author of the bill Sen. Don VanderWerp, Alfred Cramer and Lewie Hull.