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Weill Hall and institute dedicated in celebration of 'an icon for our future'

By Jennifer Campbell

As performers in lab coats danced to "Weill Thing" in the three-story-high windows above them, Sanford I. Weill '55 and wife Joan unlocked the DNA-shaped gate to Weill Hall. The Oct. 16 dedication of the state-of-the-art building and the Joan and Sanford I. Weill Institute for Cell and Molecular Biology marked the conclusion of a day of festivities -- and the culmination of years of effort.



Jason Koski/University Photography

From left, Board of Trustees Chairman Peter Meinig, President David Skorton, Joan Weill, Sandy Weill and architect Richard Meier attend the dedication of Weill Hall, Oct. 16.

Cornell Board of Trustees Chairman Peter Meinig emphasized that Weill Hall is the hub of a wheel of four new science facilities. The other three "spokes" are Duffield Hall (opened in 2004), the East Campus Research Facility (opened in 2007) and the Physical Sciences Building, slated for completion in 2012. "McGraw clock tower and the Johnson Museum are among the most visible icons of Cornell's past," he said. "Today we thank the architect who has given Cornell an icon for our future, and he is a Cornell son."

The architect, Richard Meier, B.Arch. '57, said that he sees Weill Hall as a signal that Cornell is looking to the future architecturally and academically.

Cornell President David Skorton thanked the Weills for being among the most generous donors in higher education and for having the vision to know where they could have the greatest impact. He and Meinig acknowledged several key donors and praised the contributions of a host of administrators and faculty members. Among the academic leaders in attendance were Weill Cornell Medical College Dean Anthony Gotto, Vice Provost for the Life Sciences Stephen Kresovich, former Vice Provost for the Life Sciences Kraig Adler and former Cornell Presidents Dale Corson, Frank Rhodes, Jeffrey Lehman and Hunter Rawlings.

Weill thanked Rawlings for making the "ridiculous request" that led to the Weills' historic gift and for "setting us on a journey we have loved being part of, and for opening our minds to thinking about what we could do."

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Jason Koski/University Photography
Performers in lab coats dance to "Weill Thing" during the dedication of Weill Hall, Oct. 16.

That sense of "we" was prevalent throughout the ceremony with its themes of collaboration, shared passion and world-changing aspirations, which the Weills witnessed firsthand earlier in the day in meetings with faculty in biomedical engineering, veterinary medicine and the Weill Institute.

Calling Weill Institute director Scott Emr "one of the great spellbinders," Weill said, "You want to talk about passion? There is passion: If you could think of somebody who has passion about yeast." Emr has won wide acclaim for his study of the single-celled organism.

"I've spent my time in the laboratory of the financial world," Weill said later, turning momentarily to the economy. "From Sept. 30, a year ago, to Oct. 15, yesterday, over \$10 trillion has been lost in the U.S." The losses affect everyday people as well as university endowments and the availability of student loans, he said. He predicted a deep recession but expressed confidence that recent collaborations among governments will turn things around and projected that a year from now, "I think we'll be seeing an economy on the upswing, and we'll be thanking our stars that Washington and other places were not political, but decided to work together."

Joan Weill brought these parallel lessons of collaboration full circle. "What I felt today, when I heard all of your passion and saw the way you work together, this is a microcosm of what could happen in the whole world," she said.

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