The Center for Family Business was renamed the Stevens Center for Family Business at SVSU during a ceremony at the group’s regular meeting Thursday, Feb. 10.

“A family business is the heart of our regional economy,” said Julie Stevens, a member of the Center’s executive council. “It is essential that we encourage their entrepreneurial spirit, especially in the early years when family businesses are most vulnerable to economic challenges.”

A fifth-generation family business, Stevens Worldwide Van Lines started in 1905 when Frederick H. Stevens Jr. used a single horse and cart to haul luggage and freight to and from the Michigan Central Passenger Depot in Saginaw on Niagara Street. Today, the company has 250 agents and 400 international agents in their moving and storage business and is the eighth largest van line in the country.

Morrie and Julie Stevens have been instrumental in building a support network for family businesses through SVSU. Morrie was on the founding board and Julie was the first associate director for SVSU’s Family Business Program when it was formed in 1999. Seminars, special programs, affinity groups, networking opportunities, a resource center, and interaction with family business students are available to all members of the Center. Today, Rejeana Heinrich serves as the associate director under Jill Wetmore, dean of the College of Business & Management.

More recently, the Stevens family provided the lead gift to establish an endowment fund for the Center, and Julie led the companion fundraising campaign. Alloy Construction, Amigo, Bierlein Companies, Bronner’s CHRISTmas Wonderland, Fabiano Brothers, inc., First State Bank, Frankenmuth Bavarian Inn, Glastender Inc., Mahar Tool and Rowleys Wholesale all made contributions to the effort. Based on the generous support, the endowment goal was increased from $750,000 to $1 million.

“Morrie and I are deeply moved by the naming of the Center in our honor,” Julie Stevens said. “The Stevens Center for Family Business would not be the success it is without the generous gifts recently made to the endowment fund, or the many area businesses who sponsor the Center’s programs each year. The support of SVSU since the program’s inception has been invaluable. It is a relationship that has great synergy.”

Beyond their support of the Center, Morrie and Julie Stevens have a long history of service and support for SVSU. Morrie is a past member of the SVSU Foundation board, and Julie was elected to that board in December. She previously served on SVSU’s Board of Fellows, a community advisory board. Their company supports an annual scholarship fund that assists nontraditional students in financial need majoring in the colleges of Business and Management and Science, Engineering, and Technology. In 2005, Morrie and Julie received the university’s highest honor for service, the Distinguished Service Medallion.

“The next generation is the future of family-owned businesses,” Morrie Stevens said. “Providing them with a solid education that addresses the challenges and opportunities unique to leadership in a family company will help promote their success, and the success of their businesses, and the good health of our economy.”
As a practicing attorney, Julie Keil experienced one of the heights of the legal profession. Representing a Midland real estate development company, she worked on a case argued before the U.S. Supreme Court.

“That’s something most attorneys don’t get a chance to do,” she said. “I helped put the briefs together.”

After a 30-year legal career, Keil “got burned out practicing law.” She returned to graduate school, which ultimately led her to the classroom.

Keil thought she had left her legal life behind when she joined SVSU, but that quickly changed based on others’ pursuits.

“I had no intention of doing law club or teaching a law class. It evolved out of student interest, which is why I think it works.”

And when an emerging moot court team needed an advisor last fall, Keil was a logical choice and happily accepted. SVSU entered two teams for the regional competition. Both fared well; one qualified for the national competition, virtually unprecedented for a new squad.

“The people at the national conference were shocked at how well-prepared they were and how well they did,” Keil reported. She has been forced to rethink her team goals.

“What do you do for an encore?”

In the classroom, Keil specializes in teaching international relations. In her world politics class – “a real eye opener” – she requires students to read international newspapers and write a journal of what they’ve learned about current events in other parts of the world.

“Most of our students leave high school knowing virtually nothing about world politics,” she said.

Uprisings in Egypt and elsewhere have generated particularly lively discussions.

Now in her fifth year teaching at SVSU, Keil has been “impressed overall by the quality of students,” and has enjoyed seeing former freshmen graduate and go on to law school.

“That’s one of the nice things about our university. You have that interpersonal relationship between professors and students.”

Keil is hoping the success of the moot court team will compel faculty to encourage their students to join, allowing the program to expand. Having seen the law on its highest stage, she is convinced that top moot court students can compare favorably.

“Most people don’t think that undergraduates are capable of doing a really good moot court argument, because they haven’t had the advanced law classes. They should go watch them, because they are amazing. The top teams at nationals were as good as or better than most attorneys I’ve seen arguing cases.”
The pressure and the pace of life in the Admissions office isn’t for everyone, but it suits Kellie Richard well.

“Admissions is high energy,” she said. “There is no down time. There are two speeds: stop and go as fast as you can. I’m really good with that; I never stop.”

The demands can be stressful. To cope, Richard says you “have to have a sense of humor.”

Richard’s work day begins the same way each day, downloading applications that have come in overnight. Some days there are a handful; others may bring 100 or more.

“The rest of the day, who knows what I’ll do? Every day is different.”

Richard has spent 15 of her 21 SVSU years in Admissions, along with stops in the Controller’s and International Programs offices. She recalls a party in 1999 when SVSU topped 4,000 applications for the first time. This year, she expects to process more than 7,000 applications for freshmen alone. Technological advances have helped. “It’s the only way to keep up with the volume,” she explained.

Richard volunteered to learn a new piece of software, ImageNow, that essentially replaces paper documents with electronic files. Those files are then shared with other campus departments, as appropriate. Richard and ITS employees attended a three-day conference to master the software. “Before, we were always looking for a file,” she said. “Now it’s imaged, it’s linked and it’s there.”

Richard has enjoyed meeting others as a result of her newfound expertise.

“I’ve met a lot of interesting people who work across campus that I probably wouldn’t have met if I were in any other environment.”

Throughout her career, Richard says adapting to new responsibilities has been a constant and one of the reasons she keeps coming to work.

“It’s a whole new job. It’s kept me challenged.”

Keeping up with two active children is another daily challenge. “It’s swim practice, volleyball practice, track.” Richard and her husband, Ron, juggle what are frequently simultaneous commitments for Brooke, 13, and Wyatt, 15.

“We balance it out so the kids know we’re both there for them.”

Leisure is fleeting, but Richard has seasonal pastimes. “If I find some down time, in the winter I’ll read, and in the summer I’ll float in the pool.”

But Richard’s motor doesn’t idle for long. She returns to life in the fast lane – “I’m a high energy person” – and out of the spotlight.

“I would rather be looking at the fish bowl than being in the fish bowl. I’m happy doing for others.”
Professional Profile

- Mohammad Saad Alam and Altaf Rahman, electrical & computer engineering faculty, presented a poster session at the Office of Naval Research/National Science Foundation sponsored faculty workshop on “Reforming Electric Energy Systems Curriculum,” with emphasis on renewable/storage, smart delivery, and efficient end-use, in Napa Valley, Calif., Feb. 4-5. The poster session described the details of the alternative energy minor program and the proposed graduate program in energy and materials at SVSU.

- Sara Beth Keough, assistant professor of geography, published “Promoting and Preserving Cultural Identity Through Newfoundland Radio Music Broadcasts” in Aether (Vol. VII, pages 75-96, January 2011; published by The Center for Geographic Studies, California State University, Northridge).


- Stephen Taber, associate professor of biology, has a manuscript titled “First Michigan Record and Second Report of a Big-Headed Fly (Diptera: Pipunculidae) Parasitic Upon Crane Flies (Diptera: Tipulidae)” accepted for publication by The Michigan Academician. The work is coauthored by recent SVSU biology graduate Sarah A. Stine and current SVSU biology major Oliver Keller.

Condolences

- To Richard Burns, duplicator operator in the graphics center, whose father, Darwin E. Burns, passed away Jan. 29, and brother, Joseph, passed away Feb. 9. Joseph Burns had worked in maintenance at SVSU until his passing.

- To Eric Gilbertson, president, whose mother-in-law, Lois Forrest Frost, passed away Jan. 8.

- To Ron Trepkowski, chief of police, whose brother, Thomas James Trepkowski, passed away Feb. 3.

Briefly Speaking

- Faculty and staff may present the alumni scroll to graduating members of their immediate family during the Commencement ceremony at 1:30 p.m., Saturday, May 7. Call Suzette Zimmerman at ext. 4384 to make arrangements. SVSU provides regalia free of charge to faculty, adjunct faculty and staff. Faculty and staff are reminded to place regalia orders between March 1 and 18 at www.svsu.edu/webapps/regalia. If you have your own regalia and plan to attend, please go to this site between March 1 and 18 to notify the Foundation office that you will be attending.

The Interior is published on the last Tuesday of each month for faculty and staff at SVSU. University departments sponsoring activities or events listed in the Interior will provide reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities when contacted at least three days in advance.

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