

In October 2008, the ribbon was cut to officially open the Matheson Learning Commons. With eight group study rooms, two classrooms for workshops, a career resource centre and a drop-in learning

centre, the Learning Commons became the new hub for Brock students.

There are 113 new public computers there. There are 30 laptops on loan. Large tables and cushioned benches accompany a new coffee bar that draws a line of students each morning.

The last word

Of the \$2 million in donations to the Learning Commons project, half came from the Brock University Students' Union Strategic Expansion Fund. Arthur Peltomaa (BA '74) was also a substantial donor.

With naming privileges, he could have requested it be called the Arthur Peltomaa Learning Commons. Instead, the Toronto-based lawyer gave the honour to his favourite Brock professor, Bill Matheson.

With a 30-year Brock career that included a stint as Brock's first Vice-President, Academic, Matheson saw the first floor of the James A. Gibson Library named after him. For both of them, the moment was unforgettable.

When I first heard of Art Peltomaa's generous gift to the University and that the Learning Commons would bear my name, I was astonished; especially since I was not even aware of the plan to open a Learning Commons.

Then of course, I felt very humble. It is not everyday that one's name is attached to such a fine facility. I never forgot Art Peltomaa as a student and as a friend, but we had been out of touch with one another for some time. I was very pleased to hear of his success as a lawyer.

Art was the kind of student one never forgets. He was a wonderful student; one who, in a way, a teacher fears because one has the uncomfortable feeling that he may know more than the teacher. I should add that I was not the only one who was surprised at this announcement because many people on hearing the news assumed that I had died. Naming a facility after someone who is still living is an unusual step, one that I applaud.

I came to Brock in 1969, when the University was five years old. The department was then known as the Department of Politics and Dr. Bill Hull, its founding Chair, was still in office and it was he who offered me a job, for which I will be ever grateful. His personal example and leadership laid the foundations of a successful and vibrant Department. Brock's first President, Dr. James A. Gibson, welcomed me to Brock and was a great

help to me as I worked on my PhD thesis. I recall one conversation with him when he remarked that as a new University without a track record, Brock was inevitably having difficulty attracting students. He added that the way to deal with this problem was to acquire a reputation for quality teaching. I took those words to heart, maybe too much. Every year when I served as an administrator (Dean and then Vice President), I taught, usually large classes involving hundreds of students. I believe that my teaching experience helped me as an administrator, forcing me to keep in touch

with students who, after all, are the heart of the University.

My approach to teaching was to work with whatever students the admissions office and the school system produced; to always be available and to encourage them so that they would have the best possible university experience. I taught thousands of students over the years and I frequently meet up with them. It is always a pleasure to learn that they are doing well and that they remember me and Brock

University.

Recently there has been criticism of Universities for emphasizing research over teaching. I am sure that is not the case with Brock University. Good undergraduate teaching is essential to the mission of universities and is expected by those who pay the bills, that is, students and governments. The Learning Commons will greatly contribute to both the undergraduate and student experience, and that is why I am so pleased that it bears my name. — William Matheson

I attended Brock in the early 1970s, which was an exciting time in its history. The faculty was young, enthusiastic and committed. The students thirsted for all that Brock (and the Mansion House) had to offer.

A couple of years ago, I heard that Brock was proposing to build a Learning Commons on the main floor of the James A. Gibson Library and was seeking financial support for this project from its alumni. I was immediately drawn to the concept of a Learning Commons as a central location where students could study, meet and interact and where counselling and other important support services could be provided under one roof. This seemed to me to be an obvious way to help maintain some of the sense of intimacy, personal connection and community that was so much the "soul" of the Brock that I had attended.

I decided that I wanted to help Brock make the Learning Commons a reality. Brock had enabled me to thrive in a challenging and stimulating learning environment, thereby setting the stage for my eventual attendance at law school and entry to the legal profession. A gift to help with the creation of the Learning Commons felt like the right thing for me to do.

I also wanted the Learning Commons to reflect in a tangible and lasting way my time and experiences at Brock. That is why I asked the University to name the Learning Commons in honour of Professor William A. Matheson, who served Brock for more than thirty years as a highly regarded professor, administrator and leader. More than that, Bill

Matheson had been to me and to many others a friend, mentor and source of encouragement and support. Although his Introduction to Politics course was always packed to the rafters, he took the time to get to know his students individually. He kept his office door wide open to those who needed help or who wanted to engage in lively debate. To me, Bill Matheson epitomized all that was and is good about Brock as an outstanding academic institution where the focus and priority is on the teaching of students.

That is why I believe that there could have been no better name for this exciting facility than the Matheson Learning Commons.— Arthur Peltomaa '74



Attending the official opening of the Matheson Learning Commons were, from left, Teja Peltomaa, Sarita Peltomaa, Arthur Peltomaa, Bill Matheson, President Jack Lightstone and Jody Thomas, then-president of the Brock University Students' Union.

