

UNE names building after outgoing president

By ALAN BENNETT
 Staff Writer
 BIDDEFORD — The University of New England is in the process of constructing a new student commons and has announced it will name the building in honor of outgoing university President Danielle Ripich.

The three-floor, 60,000-square-foot building, which will soon be the newest on the university's Biddeford campus, shall be called the Danielle N. Ripich Commons in recognition of the president who for about 11 years has led the university into a period of unprecedented growth.



An artist's rendering of the Danielle N. Ripich Commons at the University of New England's Biddeford campus which, once completed later this year, will serve as the campus' complete student hub.

"I am so deeply honored... It's going to be such a magnificent structure."
 — Danielle Ripich
 OUTGOING PRESIDENT, UNE

Once completed, it will feature study areas, relaxation spaces, a fire pit, outdoor patios and a shopping venue to serve the needs of all students. The building's third floor will also house the campus' main dining venue — featuring views of the Saco River, plus a pub-style eatery with outdoor seating on the ground below.

The second floor of the commons will be connected to the main floor of the campus' library, the Jack S. Ketchum Library, by a glass bridge to make transitions between the campus' academic core to the commons easier.

The second floor will

also house the university's academic support services, including study abroad services, global affairs offices and academic success programming. The goal, Bola said, is to bring those services to the students, rather than have students seek them out on their own.

"We wanted to try to create an innovative student support system for the 21st Century," Bola said.

Ripich announced in May that she would retire after 11 years at the helm of the private university, which is Maine's largest. Upon her retirement, effective July 1, James Herbert will assume office as incoming president, university officials announced in February.

Herbert — who holds both master's and doctorate degrees in clinical psychology from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro — has for the past 15 years held various positions at Drexel University in Philadelphia, where he currently serves as executive vice provost and dean of the Graduate College.

Ripich said she is "touched" by the building's dedication to her, which was announced during a tribute dinner in her honor during a board of trustees meeting on March 10.

"I am so deeply honored by the naming of the commons," Ripich said in a release. "It's going to be such a magnificent structure that is sure to bring a great deal of convenience and pleasure to the entire Biddeford (student) body."

The building's construction falls in line with many of Ripich's values and several of the university's eco-friendly initiatives. The commons will boast several high-efficiency features including solar panels, bird-safe glass, a living "green wall" to grow food, and high-tech mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems.

"The building really depicts the student-centric way that President Ripich approached everything she did during her 11 years at the University of New England," Bola said.

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Abandoned cat finds home

By LIZ GOTTHELF
 Staff Writer
 SACO — A young cat abandoned outside a pet store has found a forever home.

Staff at the Pet Life at the Saco Valley Shopping Center found an abandoned cat the morning of Feb. 5. Staff say the cat was in a folded over cardboard box inside a hooded litter box, and had duct tape around its mouth.

The cat was given medical care, a cast was put on a broken leg and he was taken to the Animal Welfare Society in Kennebunk.

Saco Police Sergeant Scott Ouellette and his wife heard about the cat. Though the animal lovers, who already had three dogs and three cats, weren't planning on adding any more animals to their household, the story tugged at their hearts. Ouellette said he and his wife don't have children, and their animals are like their kids.

The couple brought the cat into their home a few weeks ago, and named him Opie, after the character on the television show "Sons of Anarchy."

Ouellette said Opie is in good health. It was thought at first that he might have to get a leg amputated, but the

leg healed. Opie walks with a bit of a limp and has small scars on his nose and ear from the duct tape, but is in good health, said Ouellette. He's adjusted well to his new home and gets along with the other animals in the household. "He's fitting right in and making himself at home," said Ouellette. "He's a great addition to our family."

Ouellette said the cat is estimated to be between six months and one year old. Despite the trauma he's been through, he's a nice, loving animal.

"He's really a friendly cat. He's very playful," said Ouellette. He said his wife wasn't feeling well one day, and Opie snuggled right up to her as she was resting.

The case of Opie's abandonment and mistreatment is under investigation and no one has been charged. "I've been doing this job for 15 years, I know not every case is solvable," said Ouellette. However, he said, "I'd like to see that person get their day in court. He's just a good cat, I don't know why anyone would want to do that to him."

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CNN: 'Grahamtastic's' Fantastic

Local founder nationally recognized

By TAMMY WELLS
 Senior Staff Writer
 SPRINGVALE — Leslie Morissette has been named a hero for her work helping sick kids, but she said the designation more properly belongs to her son, Graham, for whom Grahamtastic Connection is named.

Graham Morissette died 20 years ago of leukemia at age 8. A year or so afterward, his mother, Leslie, founded the nonprofit Grahamtastic

Connection that provides laptop computers, iPads, and now, robots to sick kids so they can keep up with friends and school work. The robots actually go to school, while the students participate from home, or from the hospital.

Morissette was named a CNN Hero of the Week on March 16. Since that time, when the program gained widespread national attention, two things have happened: There have been increased requests from parents for robots and computers, and there have been more monetary donations to the program.

"I trust it will all even out," said Morissette Tuesday. She estimated there have been at least 25 requests for robots, and many for iPads since the program on her and the organization aired.

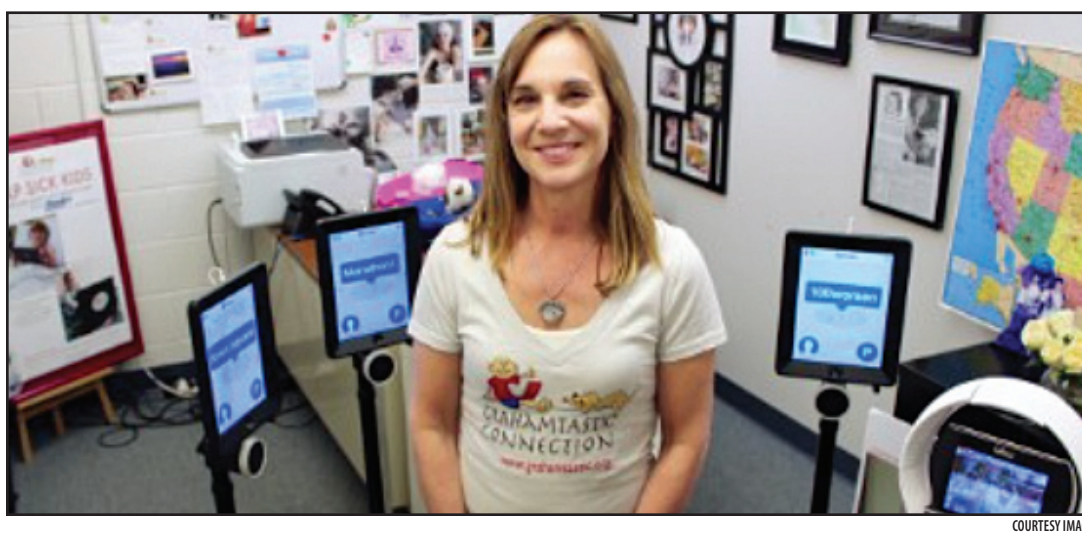
In the mid-1990s, when Graham was ill, the internet was still relatively new. He had internet access at home, and while he was sick he was able

to keep up with school work and stay in touch with friends and relatives. But when he was in hospital — and he was, a lot — laptops were not as readily available.

But they are now, because of Grahamtastic Connection.

Morissette was nominated as a CNN hero by Lawrence O'Bryan, who works for WCSH 6 and is a Grahamtastic Connection volunteer. She said he nominated her "on a whim" last year, and then the vetting began, with CNN folks checking out the program — and Morissette — through interviews with social workers, nurses, members of the Grahamtastic Connection board, and others with whom she has come in contact over the years.

The program partners with Sanford Regional Technical Center for laptop, iPad and robot repairs and set ups. The students perform the work free and have done so for many years. They currently work under the direction of



Leslie Morissette, founder of Grahamtastic Connection, was named a CNN Hero on March 16.

instructor Bruce Wooding.

The first robot came into play in 2012, sponsored by Ira Rosenberg of Prime Motor Group. Now there are 14 being utilized by sick kids, one placed in the past few days at a school in York County, and there's another one, nicknamed "Snowball" at Carl J. Lamb School in Springvale.

A 2015 Journal Tribune story by staff writer Liz Gotthelf outlined how the robots operate.

Gotthelf wrote that the long, elegantly-styled robot

sports a video screen on the top, which allowed the student to video conference with her class. Her teacher and classmates could see her on the robot's screen, and she was able to control the robot through her keyboard at home, moving it around to change her view of the classroom. Over the years, Grahamtastic Connection has provided technology to 1,500 sick children.

Last year, Grahamtastic Connection hosted a robot race as a fundraiser, and plans

another this summer.

About her designation as a hero, Morissette said, "My son is the hero in all this. I accept this honor for my son. I am so happy the world gets to see him and know him."

Morissette also thanked those who support Grahamtastic Connection.

"This is a community award, said Morissette. "The community has been phenomenal in supporting our work."

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