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CONTACT:
Emily Stack Davis
517-803-3745
PR@hillsdale.edu
Follow @HillsdalePR

Hillsdale College Dedicates Cervini Circle

The outdoor firepit will provide a year-round space for students and faculty to gather.

HILLSDALE, Mich. — Hillsdale College held a dedication and ribbon cutting on May 8 for the Cervini Circle, an outdoor firepit between Kendall Hall and Moss Hall. The firepit will provide a year-round space for students and faculty to gather for conversations, events, outdoor classes, and more.

"Much of the most valuable learning happens outside formal instruction, through conversations and the sharing of personal perspectives," said Diane Philipp, vice president for student affairs. "The idea for this space and its design grew out of a deep understanding that these conversations and friendship and shared intellectual life outside the classroom are essential to a strong liberal arts education."

A significant grant from the William S. and Ann Atherton Foundation funded the project. Bill Atherton, who died in February, was a former trustee of the College, and his daughter Jessica Faubert is a current College trustee. The Athertons wished to name the firepit in recognition of John Cervini, executive vice president for institutional advancement, who has served the College for over 50 years.

"This gift comes from somebody who knows and loves the College — a whole family of them — and it's for somebody who has served the College now for 52 years, and so faithfully, so hard, so well," said Hillsdale College President Larry P. Arnn. "Of the 650 private colleges in America operating now, 423 of them are in threat of going broke. And we are not going broke. And that has so much to do with John. It has to do with the love that drives him."

The Cervini Circle, located near Kendall Hall, features a stone firepit that can be used year-round surrounded by a semi-circular stone bench open to the west. It was designed to provide more gathering space on the front quad during the ongoing north quad construction.

“I wish that my dad could be here with us today. I’m thankful that before his passing he knew that we were working on this beautiful space to be dedicated to his good friend John,” Faubert said. “We envision this space to serve as a hub where students, staff, friends, and guests can come together to relax, read, talk, pray, connect, and celebrate, and especially to remember and give thanks to the man of great character who dedicated his life’s work to making this college become what it is today.”

John Cervini ’74 is Executive Vice President for Institutional Advancement at Hillsdale College, where he received a bachelor’s degree in business administration and minored in biology. He also played varsity football, was named Outstanding Scholar and Athlete in Michigan, started and coached the club lacrosse team, and belonged to Omicron Delta Kappa and Epsilon Delta Alpha. He was the first Hillsdale College football player selected by the College Football Hall of Fame as an academic and athletic All-American. Shortly after graduation, he began working for the College as Director of Alumni Affairs, serving in that capacity for ten years, and was also Director of the Annual Fund from 1979 to 1983. From 1975 to 1985, he served as an assistant football coach. In 1984, he became Vice President of Marketing for the central region, and in 1985 he was promoted to Vice President for Development, now known as Institutional Advancement. In his 52-year career at Hillsdale, he has overseen five successful capital campaigns. In 2024, John and his wife Susan were awarded the honorary degree Doctor of Public Service by the College. John and Susan have two daughters, Alexandra, who is married to Christian Mull ’12, and Katelyn ’11.

For photos from the ceremony, click here. For photos of Hillsdale College, click here. For a high-resolution copy of the Hillsdale College clocktower logo, click here.

About Hillsdale College
Hillsdale College is an independent, nonsectarian, Christian liberal arts college located in southern Michigan. Founded in 1844, the College has built a national reputation through its classical liberal arts core curriculum and its principled refusal to accept federal or state taxpayer subsidies, even indirectly in the form of student grants or loans. It also conducts an outreach effort promoting civil and religious liberty, including a free monthly speech digest, Imprimis, with a circulation of more than 7.5 million. For more information, visit hillsdale.edu.

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