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Stetson in DeLand dedicates Hulley Tower to 3 students killed in 1979



Hundreds of people filled Brockway Plaza at Hulley Tower on the Stetson University campus Feb. 7 for the dedication of the newly built tower that honors two former Stetson presidents and three students killed in an avalanche in the Austrian Alps in 1979.

DELAND — History and emotion hung heavy in the air Saturday, Feb. 7, on the Stetson University campus.

About 500 people gathered in Brockway Plaza at Hulley Tower, an iconic structure that had stood on the campus for 70 years before suffering catastrophic damage during the 2004 hurricanes.

With the tower newly rebuilt now after an alumni-led \$6.7 million grassroots campaign, the lofty structure was dedicated Saturday afternoon and the once-familiar tower bells rang across DeLand for the first time in two decades.

“The crowd today is a testament to what Hulley Tower — as a memorial, as a home of beautiful music, as a place of community — means to Stetson University and the city of DeLand,” Stetson President Christopher Roellke said overlooking a gathering that included

former Stetson president Wendy Libby, DeLand Vice Mayor Jessica Davis, university faculty, alumni and current students. “It is a place of remembrance and celebration.”

A New Orleans–style procession with horse-drawn caissons from Lankford Funeral Home returned the remains of former Stetson President Lincoln Hulley and his wife, Eloise, to the Hulley Tower mausoleum for reinterment. The student jazz band, 407Groove, belted out their music and joined members of the West Volusia Historical Society wearing period dress and accompanying the procession down Woodland Boulevard to Hulley Tower.

Stetson students and members of the DeLand community served as pallbearers, all wearing Stetson hats in a nod to the 143-year-old university’s benefactor, John B. Stetson. Hulley began serving as Stetson’s second president in 1904, and he led the school until 1934, when he died and the 116-foot tower he planned and financed was completed.

Now that tower at the campus’ front entrance has been rebuilt to its original 116-foot height, and there is a staircase inside the structure that allows visitors to climb to the top. There is also a built-in gas firepit surrounded by seating near the tower to make it more of a gathering spot.

The new tower is “an important symbol of institutional resilience,” Roellke said.

New tower memorializes three fallen Stetson students.

On Saturday, Hulley Tower also became a memorial to three Stetson students killed in 1979 in an avalanche in the Alps in Austria. The students who lost their lives — Scotty Fenlon, Dennis Long and Katy Resnik — were with a few dozen other Stetson students on a study-abroad trip when the group went skiing in Innsbruck the day after it had snowed three feet.

Family members of Fenlon, Long and Resnik were at Saturday’s tower dedication and recognized by Roellke.

Several students who were buried under the snow were rescued and survived. They’ve had full careers, married, raised kids, become grandparents and in some cases already retired. But some of them are still haunted by what happened nearly a half century ago, and several of the students on that late 1970s trip were at Saturday’s event to honor their fallen classmates.

In early 2023, Jill Jinks called fellow avalanche survivor Susan Perry Brockway and the two decided they needed to do something publicly to remember their lost classmates. That was the beginning of what culminated Saturday.

The new bells in Hulley Tower now were cast at the centuries-old Grassmayr Bell Foundry in Innsbruck, where the short lives of Fenlon, Long and Resnik came to a tragic end 47 years

ago. The new 52-bell carillon in the tower also has some of the original 11 “Eloise chimes,” a set of 11 bronze bells that were brought to campus in 1915 and signaled the start and end of the school day, and rang during DeLand parades and community celebrations.

Some of the historic chimes will remain on other parts of the campus and throughout the city as reminders of the original tower’s legacy.

“Hulley Tower is part of the heart and history of Stetson, a place that connects generations and calls our community together,” Roellke said. “When these bells ring across DeLand once again, they will carry both celebration and remembrance, honoring the Hatters we’ve lost and inspiring all who gather here for years to come.”

