An Invitation to Support the
CHARLYE O. FARRIS SOCIAL JUSTICE RESOURCE CENTER

Presented by

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THE VISION

In establishing the Charlye O. Farris Social Justice Resource Center (Farris Center), MSU Texas will create a hub for education, advocacy, and training in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).

Named in honor of Charlye O. Farris, the first Black female attorney admitted to practice law in the State of Texas and a pillar of the Wichita Falls community, the Farris Center will offer programming, workshops and resources designed to engage community members and leaders in deepening their understanding and awareness of equity and racial and social justice issues.

With open doors and space for reflection, dialogue and collaboration, the Farris Center will welcome all members of our community and empower them to engage in meaningful conversations and action on a range of social justice topics. Our goal is to build a more just, welcoming and inclusive community across MSU Texas and surrounding Wichita Falls.

"Charlye was a person of unbelievable character. In her extraordinary career she gave a voice to people whom others refused to hear. Remarkably, the challenges she faced in her lifetime didn’t diminish her desire to help others. It would mean a great deal to her to promote more diversity on campus and in Wichita Falls and open doors that weren’t opened for her. We couldn’t find a more deserving person to honor with this naming."

Barry Macha
General Counsel, MSU Texas
Former District Attorney, Wichita Falls

Charlye Farris (seated second from left) with her family at the banquet celebrating the Margaret Brent Award. Charlye received this prestigious national award from the American Bar Association Commission on Women in 2003.
Meeting the Moment: Turning Intention into Action

MSU students, faculty and staff value a safe and supportive community both on and off campus. Such a community requires individuals, organizations and businesses to support diversity, equity and inclusion. In recent campus climate surveys, MSU students, particularly students of color, cite a lack of inclusivity in the Wichita Falls community as a need for improvement.

The Farris Center aligns with and enhances the student-focused MOSAIC Cross Cultural Center. MOSAIC engages historically minoritized and marginalized student populations in culturally-responsive programming and increases student engagement and action on critical social and diversity, equity and inclusion issues throughout the MSU community.

As we approach our centennial, the transformational impact of these two centers, one for outreach to the community and one for the support of the MSU campus, will strengthen the mission of MSU Texas for the future.

Working with leaders from Zavala, NAACP, OPAL Center, the Wichita Falls Chamber of Commerce Diversity Committee and the Nonprofit Center, among others, we seek to amplify the missions of these organizations, make meaningful connections and build bridges between students, faculty and the leaders in our community.

With the Farris Center, MSU Texas will meet this moment of need and opportunity to champion DEI in our community and provide critical skills for intercultural competency for community employers and leaders.

“Because of who she was, people were drawn to Charlye. She had an uncanny ability to get people with different opinions in the same room and start conversations. I think she would be greatly in favor of the center and the difference it can make in bringing people from the community and MSU together. I hope her presence will be felt there.”

Arthur Bea Williams
Former Justice of the Peace and Acting Mayor
Wichita Falls

Members of the MSU Texas Black Student Union (BSU) collected school supplies as part of their Project Pack a Bag service project to serve students in Zambia, Africa at the MAFUTA Primary School and other rural schools.
Charlye Ola Farris was born in Wichita Falls in 1929 to James and Roberta Farris. Her keen intellect and work ethic accelerated her primary and secondary education, and she graduated as valedictorian of Booker T. Washington High School at 15 years of age.

At the time, Charlye was unable to attend Hardin College (now Midwestern State University) because of her race. Instead, she enrolled at Prairie View A&M University, where she received her bachelor’s degree (1948) in political science.

Charlye was encouraged by her parents, both educators, to pursue teaching, and she did—for one year. Her interest in the law eclipsed any other career path and in 1953 she graduated from Howard University Law School in Washington, D.C.

A brief visit home after law school became permanent after she passed the Texas Bar exam. Charlye became the first Black woman to be licensed to practice law in the State of Texas and the first Black lawyer to practice actively in Wichita County. Her election in 1954 as County Judge Pro-Tem drew national attention as it was the first time that a Black person had served as a judge in the South since Reconstruction.

Throughout her career, Charlye Farris remained undeterred in her pursuit of justice for her clients from all walks of life and always considered the human side of her cases and clients. She fought on behalf of underrepresented and marginalized groups with her exceptional skill and determination. Although she practiced law primarily in Wichita Falls, she earned national acclaim and many honors, including the prestigious Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award given annually by the American Bar Association Commission on Women in the Profession.

“With the Farris Center MSU Texas is leading the way and opening the door for essential conversations to take place. With so much going on in our nation, to have a safe space on campus for such conversations will be welcome. To name the Center for Charlye Farris, a pillar of our own community, is perfectly fitting.”

Diann Taylor (’74, ’90)
MSU Texas Alumni Association
In addition to being valedictorian of her class, Charlye was also crowned Homecoming Queen at Booker T. Washington High School.

“Charlye Farris was a pioneering spirit and example for all of us. As the daughter of educators she valued her own education and advocated for others to achieve their potential through education. She would be so pleased to see the Farris Center become a reality, especially as it will advance the work she consistently championed throughout her life.”

Guy A. “Tony” Fidelie, Jr.
MSU Board of Regents

An advocate for education, Charlye mentored young lawyers and opened doors for others to enter the profession. She was appointed by Governor Rick Perry to the Board of Regents at Midwestern State University and served from 2006 to 2010; poignantly, she would not have been permitted to attend MSU 60 years earlier. During her time as a Regent she contributed her advice and time to advance MSU with sincere dedication.

Today’s racial tensions remind us that symbols matter, that words have the power to transform, and that individuals can influence positive and lasting societal change. Charlye Farris’ legacy as a lawyer, judge and advocate for education make her an extraordinary example of excellence, persistence and commitment.

Now is the time to inscribe her name—and capture her history—through the prominent naming of the social justice center. Charlye Ola Farris will be honored with a dedicated and perpetual naming on the campus of MSU Texas.
Leveraging Expertise and Community Partnerships

Under the leadership of Student Affairs, the Farris Center will provide training and development opportunities—practical implementation of theory and expertise—for community leaders and business partners focused on improving diversity, equity and inclusion in their organizations.

Through internal partnerships with academic departments, we will draw upon the expertise of our faculty. Resources unique to MSU Texas, like the Wichita Falls Museum of Art, will allow us to explore racial and social justice themes through visual art.

As the Farris Center grows, we will leverage resources from our Career Management Center, Alumni Relations and continuing education to partner with organizations and create culturally relevant activities in and around Wichita Falls.

Opening Doors: A Safe Space for Courageous Conversations

With open doors, we will provide a safe space for empowering connections to take place. Events that have unfolded nationally repeatedly underscore the urgent need for all organizations to address concerns of diversity, equity and inclusion. At the Farris Center, every voice will be heard and all are welcome.

Our programs will encourage people to seek the knowledge to grow in understanding of social justice in their own lives and how it connects to the wider community.

The Charlye O. Farris Social Justice Resource Center will be located in Bea Wood Hall Room 103, a convenient location for community groups and guests. Conference and office areas will be available for community organizations to hold remote and in-person meetings, seminars and other activities.

Innovative and Inclusive Programming

The Farris Center will be open to the greater Wichita Falls community. We will provide trainings for allies and advocates to impart the skills and tools that will support systemic change that improves the climate of our workplaces, organizations and community as a whole.

Training and programs will be offered in-person and virtually, while the Farris Center website will be a 24-7 online resource. As the Farris Center becomes established, we will explore additional opportunities to engage participants from the MSU Texas Flower Mound campus, both virtually and in-person.

As a leading public liberal arts university, MSU Texas is committed to providing students with rigorous undergraduate and graduate education in the liberal arts, sciences and the professions. The MSU Texas student body is increasingly diverse, with students representing 44 states and 54 foreign countries. More than 40% of the student body is comprised of students of color.
A select group of initial topics and trainings are listed below:

**Proposed Training & Workshops**
- Introduction to Social Justice
- Allyship and Advocacy Training
- Introduction to Intercultural Competency
- Intercultural Development Inventory
- Intercultural Development Plan Coaching
- Community Organizing
- Conflict and Mediation Training
- Anti-Racism in Action Workshop

**Sample Community Outreach & Dialogue Topics**
- Affinity Groups
- Better World Book Club
- Community Climate Survey
- Legislative Education and Advocacy
- Creative Community Network – social justice and the arts
- Scholarship Dinner
- Social Justice Essay Contest
- Lecture Series

**Online Education & Resources**
- Biography and oral history of Charlye Farris' life and career
- Local Wichita Falls history
- Calendar – diversity dates/observances; programming
- Recommended films, websites, publications

**Community Benefit and Impact**

Beyond amplifying the understanding of diversity, equity and inclusion, we anticipate a ripple effect of positive economic and social impact across MSU Texas and our Wichita Falls community through the work of the Farris Center.

As the fourth largest employer in Wichita County, MSU Texas currently employs 1,276 people. Data show that a more welcoming and inclusive environment, on and off campus, has a positive impact on student, staff and faculty recruitment and retention efforts.

Among the strategies for economic development presented by the Wichita Falls Chamber of Commerce, the new Talent Partnership is focusing on increasing internship opportunities and recruiting workers from under-represented populations to meet the labor force needs.

The Chamber also established a Diversity Business Council to promote entrepreneurship among under-represented populations and stronger diversity, equity and inclusion efforts among employers. Such efforts may have limited success without practical training and development opportunities for supervisors and decision-makers leading our local businesses and nonprofits. Currently, no service exists in the Texoma region for such training to develop, hone, execute and apply DEI skills. With the creation of the Farris Center, MSU Texas will change this reality.

We will evaluate the impact of Farris Center programming and events on an ongoing and annual basis, using quantitative and qualitative data to inform decision-making.

“The Farris Center is a win-win for MSU and Wichita Falls. What a groundbreaking opportunity to create access to education and resources that can open minds and hearts. Charlye Farris’ integrity and dedication will inspire a new generation of young people to open doors for others like she did.”

Keisha Ellis
MSU Alumni Spirit Award Recipient 2016
HOW SHALL WE COME TOGETHER?
CHARLYE O. FARRIS SOCIAL JUSTICE RESOURCE CENTER ENDOWMENT

Education is the ultimate investment in the future—of individuals, families, communities, states, nations and our future world. With the creation of the Farris Center, MSU Texas will honor the legacy of Charlye Farris and continue to grow and evolve our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion through open doors to the Wichita Falls community.

Visionary projects, however, demand equally bold investments. With philanthropic gifts, MSU Texas will establish the Charlye O. Farris Social Justice Resource Center Endowment as a permanent, self-sustaining source of funding for the Farris Center.

To create this endowment to honor the life and legacy of Charlye O. Farris, we invite your leadership support to help us achieve $1.5 million needed to fulfill the vision for the Farris Center.

The time is now to make a bold investment in a university dedicated to educating the leaders of today and tomorrow. Your support for all aspects of this project has impact beyond measure and will ensure that the legacy of Charlye Farris, and all who are inspired by her, will continue for future generations.

MSU Texas gratefully acknowledges our Farris Center Advisory Committee for its guidance:

Barry Macha
Arthur Bea Williams
Guy A. “Tony” Fidelie, Jr.
Shayla Owens
Diann Taylor
Keisha Ellis
Cammie Dean

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