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**RAMAPO COLLEGE BREAKS GROUND ON NEW SPIRITUAL CENTER**

*Funded with private monies, space for reflection, discussion*

(Mahwah) - Community religious leaders, College officials and supporters of Ramapo College's new spiritual center gathered today to break ground on the project.

The Salameno Spiritual Center, which sits upon the shore of Kameron Pond on the College campus, is slated for completion in summer of 2009. It will be a gathering place for students and members of the College community to practice their faith, discuss ethical issues and reflect.

The Center is named in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Salameno, of Allendale, New Jersey, who provided a lead gift of \$500,000 for the Center. The establishment of the Salameno Challenge Grant served as an incentive to attract donors to the project.

"We are pleased to have been instrumental in assisting Ramapo and President Mercer in bringing to fruition their vision for the College," said Theresa Salameno. "The Spiritual Center will provide a designated site for students to worship and ample space for contemplative meditation. It is our hope that students and other members of the diverse Ramapo community will use this Center to meet and to better understand and appreciate each other in the context of a multicultural society."

The concept for the Center was first proposed in 2001 by Dr. Anthony T. Padovano, a founder of the College and professor of literature and philosophy and approved in 2005 by the Ramapo College Board of Trustees. The Center is modeled upon the United Nations Meditation Room, which is open to all cultures for contemplation.

"We will, at Ramapo, now have a venue for the pursuit of the spiritual dimension through discussion, debate and contemplation and for that, on behalf of

Ramapo College, I express sincere and profound gratitude,” said Dr. Peter Mercer, Ramapo’s president.

In response to the Salameno’s challenge grant, several lead donors stepped forward and provided forward momentum to the \$1.2 million project. They include: Theresa and Dr. Anthony Padovano, of Morris Plains, New Jersey; Pamela and Peter McBride of Franklin Lakes, New Jersey; and, Gail and Anthony Marino of Cedar Grove, New Jersey. The challenge grant was completed with 14 additional major gifts.

The Salameno Spiritual Center is being constructed on a half acre on the south side of the College’s Kameron Pond, a secluded and scenic area of campus.

“On behalf of my fellow trustees, I would like to thank the Salameno, Padovano, McBride and Marino families for their generous contributions,” said The Reverend Dr. Vernon C. Walton, chairman of Ramapo’s Board of Trustees. “The Salameno Spiritual Center will support our students as they worship and discuss the important moral and ethical issues facing our society today.”

Comprising the center are woodland gardens, four single-story structures, two outdoor gathering places and a deck with views across the water. The main building, the Padovano Peace Pavilion, is constructed in the form of a tent, an ancient and evocative symbol for religious encounter and hospitality. The McBride and Marino Meditation Rooms are named for the McBride and Marino families. It is anticipated that a number of Ramapo College student organizations will use the facility, including Hillel, Catholics at Ramapo United, the Muslim Students Association, the Campus Crusade for Christ and the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship.

“We are grateful for the generosity, support and enthusiasm the Salamenos have exhibited for this project, which will benefit the Ramapo College community for years to come,” said Cathy Davey, vice president for Institutional Advancement and executive director of the Ramapo College Foundation. “It is heartening and gratifying that such a significant project was funded by only 20 major gifts.”

For more information about the project, call the Marketing and Communications Department at: 201.684.7602.

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