

## *Stephens College and Lee Expressive Arts Elementary School*

For the past 30 years, Lee Expressive Arts Elementary School and Stephens College have benefited from exchanging resources, volunteers and immersive opportunities. Music and art experiences form the core of the partnership, and for years Lee students have decorated the Stephens president's home for the holidays, taken classes at the college and had access to special galleries and exhibits. Stephens has sent groups to Lee to perform for students, like the Velvatoners, Stephens' premiere a capella and jazz ensemble, as well as African drumming and dance groups. The college also lends Windsor Auditorium and Senior Hall to Lee faculty and students for graduations, fundraisers and performances.

Lee Art Teacher Ann Mehr has spent the last 33 years at Lee and believes the Stephens partnership has benefited her students, as well as advanced the mission of Lee Expressive Arts. Years ago, the Stephens College theater department put on a production of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. A graduate student brought in a choir robe and some fabric samples from the fashion department to Mehr's class, and each student wrote a wish for the world on a scrap and glued it onto the robe. Stephens displayed it in the lobby during the performance, and Joseph wore the robe during the curtain call.

"The kids were so excited when they saw Joseph wearing their creation," Mehr said. "The robe has appeared at a couple other performances, and often people will use it for costumes...I love it so much. There's just so much energy in it."

Stephens students also benefit from the partnership. Education majors come to Lee for a month during the spring semester of their junior year and spend the entire first semester of their senior year student-teaching at Lee before returning to Stephens. Stephens alumna Maile Wortham student-taught third grade and loved the experience so much that she decided to return to Lee for her first year of teaching.

Mehr and Wortham believe the close relationship between Stephens and Lee will continue to evolve and enhance the learning and appreciation for the arts.

"The relationship is so rich with possibilities, it's hard to even conceptualize where we'll go with a partnership like this one," Mehr said. "There are so many different departments and areas that our students can thrive in, and it's so important that those seeds are planted in elementary school so our students can turn into amazing consumers of culture."