

June 26, 2024

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: Dr. Radenka Maric 

RE: Naming Recommendation for the Cynthia Wyeth Peterson Memorial Observatory and the Cynthia Wyeth Peterson Memorial Planetarium

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board of Trustees name the East Road Observatory as the Cynthia Wyeth Peterson Memorial Observatory and the Planetarium as the Cynthia Wyeth Peterson Memorial Planetarium.

BACKGROUND:

Professor Cynthia Peterson (1933-2020) joined the UConn Physics department in 1968 as the sole female faculty member, and she remained the only woman faculty member for nearly 30 years. During her 49 years at UConn, she became known for her passion in astrophysics, notably leading the construction of a state-of-the-art observatory on UConn's campus. She revolutionized interactive astronomy education at UConn, incorporating practical methods into the curriculum through the Gant and East Road observatories and the UConn planetarium. Beyond her teaching of over 9,000 undergraduates and extensive outreach efforts, Professor Peterson emphasized mentorship and the importance of undergraduate research; in particular, advocating for women in science and working to enhance scientific literacy in the local community.

The opening of the observatory in January 1980, funded by an NSF grant awarded to Professor Peterson, expanded the University's astronomy capabilities. The facility was recently refurbished and reopened in 2023. Renaming the observatory recognizes Professor Peterson's contributions to the university and the field of astronomy and reflects the historical and academic significance of her work. The Planetarium, which Professor Peterson staffed, will reopen in 2024.

Professor Peterson's legacy exemplifies passion, perseverance, and dedication to science and education. She was a mentor, a leader for women in science, and an inspiration to all who knew her. Her contributions to UConn, physics, astronomy, and the broader community have left an indelible mark that will be memorialized and appreciated for generations to come.

The Facilities Naming Committee approved the recommendation on May 13, 2024, which I endorsed and referred to the Institutional Advancement Committee, which approved the recommendation on June 18, 2024.