

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, December 12, 2008

CONTACT [Aubrey Streit](#), (785) 227-3311, ext. 8274

RENOVATED BALCONY IN PRESSER IS WORK OF GENEROUS ALUMNUS

LINDSBORG, Kan.—The balcony in Presser Hall re-opened on Dec. 7, showcasing a new railing, wider aisles and more spacious seating for audience members at Bethany College.

Work began in the balcony on July 15, thanks to the generosity of Bethany alumnus DeVere Blomberg, who funded the project.

“Bethany College and Lindsborg are truly blessed because of the faith, service, and gifts of DeVere,” said Woody Meredith, vice president for advancement at Bethany.



Blomberg, a retired teacher and librarian, has participated in 57 seasons of the Messiah Festival of the Arts at Bethany, singing as part of the Bethany Oratorio Society’s productions of Handel’s “Messiah” and Bach’s “St. Matthew Passion” in Presser Hall. He’s appreciated the acoustics and aesthetics of the place.

Also, he said, he’s noticed what audience members need in Presser’s balcony: space and safety.

Space was created when the entire first row of seating in the balcony was removed, allowing the remaining rows of seats to be rearranged. Each row now sits on an extended platform, providing audience members with more legroom. Aisle steps have been widened to four feet, with a rail down the middle. New carpet also was installed.

The safety rail around the balcony was remade. It now boasts 534 metal pickets – welded, polished, and powder-coated Bethany blue – with a wooden trim on top. On the east sides of the balcony, the special technique of sliding rails – sawing a wooden rail into seven different sections, then gluing and clamping these in place in a mold – was used to create curving rails. All of the renovations have been approved by the state fire marshal.

“I’m very pleased with how things worked out,” said Blomberg.

Lindsborg's Covenant Church received some of the 138 seats that were removed. Presser Hall now seats 1,742.

Chief engineer for the project was Matt Becker, assisted by Earl Ahlstedt. Bethany staff members Steve Jirak and Randy Jirak assisted, along with numerous volunteers.

Blomberg himself was involved from the planning stage to completion. "I imagine people saw me up here with a yard stick and a piece of yellow chalk, and wondered what I was doing," he told Bethany and Lindsborg community members, who gathered on Dec. 5 for a preview of the finished balcony. Audience members at Jultide, Dec. 7, were the first to enjoy the balcony during a musical performance.

This year marks the 80th anniversary of Presser Hall, which began with a groundbreaking on March 14, 1927, by Prince Wilhelm of Sweden. Presser's cornerstone was laid in 1928.

Blomberg is a member of the Bethany College class of 1951. After earning his M.Ed. from the University of Nebraska, he served in the Army and worked for more than 30 years as an elementary teacher and librarian in USD 305. A lifelong member of Falun Lutheran Church, Blomberg has been a leader in many community organizations, including the Raymer Society Board, Lindsborg Community Library Board, Lindsborg's Sister City Committee, Salina Area Retired Teachers Association and American Scandinavian Association of the Great Plains. In addition to participating in 57 Messiah Festivals at Bethany College, he was tenor secretary of the Bethany Oratorio Society for 44 years.

Bethany College, established by Swedish Lutheran immigrants in 1881, is a college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The mission of Bethany College is to educate, develop, and challenge individuals in their search for truth and excellence as they lead lives of faith, learning and service. Bethany College is on the Web at www.bethanylb.edu.

Caption: DeVere Blomberg.