

## **Press Release: UT Board Approves Naming of the Frieson Cultural Center**

June 25, 2015

The UT Board of Trustees approved a proposal today to rename a popular student programming and support building for UT Knoxville alumni Ron and Don Frieson.

The building previously known as the Black Cultural Center at Melrose Avenue on the Knoxville campus is now named the Frieson (pronounced frizən) Cultural Center. Ron and Don Frieson are African-American identical twins and Memphis natives who attended UT in the late 1970s.

Trustees unanimously approved the proposal at the full board meeting held today on UT's agricultural campus. The renaming recognizes the Friesons' \$1 million gift and their leadership and commitment to diversity.

"A cultural center is very symbolic for making sure from a multicultural perspective that kids from all walks of life have an opportunity to come here and be successful," said Ron Frieson, chief public policy officer for Children's Healthcare of Atlanta.

Ron earned his bachelor's degree in finance from UT in 1981 and an MBA from Georgia State University. Don earned a bachelor's degree in business operations management from UT in 1990. He then completed an executive education program at Dartmouth College.

"The Friesons' generous gift and the renaming of the cultural center will help raise the visibility of diversity at UT and improve the familial atmosphere and feeling of home at the building," said Chancellor Jimmy G. Cheek.

Established in 1976, the Black Cultural Center was originally located in a university-owned private residence located at 812 Volunteer Boulevard.

Don Frieson, executive vice president for operations for Sam's Club, said the Black Cultural Center made a lasting impression on him and his brother.

"When you walked in it, it was like walking into home. There was a porch that kids would hang out on - it was literally a house transformed into a support facility," he said.

A new 13,700-square foot Black Cultural Center was built in 2002. It's located in the center of campus, near Hodges Library, and houses the Office of Multicultural Student Life. Throughout the year, the center features numerous speakers, conferences, and events that advance diversity and inclusion. The center has a computer room, a multipurpose room, and study and gathering spaces for students and the campus community to learn, share ideas, and discuss experiences.

The gift will help the Office of Multicultural Student Life provide additional academic support, diversity workshops, peer mentoring, and leadership development opportunities based from the Frieson Cultural Center.

“The Frieson brothers have created a lasting legacy on our campus, from the long-standing Charlie Lemmons Endowment—named for their grandfather—and now their support of a facility that is a home away from home or many African Americans and students of color,” said Rickey Hall, UT’s vice chancellor for diversity.

The Lemmon endowment supports various Multicultural Student Life programs, most notably bringing outstanding speakers for the Legends Lecture Series and the keynote address at the annual Black Issues Conference.

While the facility is named for the brothers, they note that the gift was made in honor of their entire family, especially their grandfather, parents and children. Ron Frieson said he hopes this gift will inspire other alumni to give back.

For more information about the Frieson Cultural Center, visit **[multicultural.utk.edu/friesonculturalcenter](https://multicultural.utk.edu/friesonculturalcenter)**.