

New Hub Makes Farm a Showcase

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– Paul Meldrum, General Manager of the Macdonald Campus Farm

A lot of kids today have never seen a cow, or a farm, and don't know where food comes from. But thanks to a gift from Alton McEwen, BScAgr'66, and his brother Murray, BScAgr'52, DSc'93, kids – and adults – in the Montreal region will soon be able to fill those gaps in their knowledge.

The McEwen brothers are helping create the Alton and Murray McEwen Visitor Hub as part of the new Macdonald Farm Community Engagement Centre. Last year, the Centre as a whole received a vital boost from a generous gift by J. William Ritchie, BScAgr'51, which established the Lorna and William Ritchie Educational Hall.

When opened, the Hub will occupy the farm's stone dairy barn, built in 1907 to replace the original dairy barn, which was lost to a fire in the first year of the college's operation. "Sir William Macdonald, who established Macdonald College, vowed he would never have another barn burn, and so had this one built out of stone, steel and concrete," says Paul Meldrum, General Manager of the Macdonald Campus Farm.

The facility was used as a dairy barn until 1985, when interior walls were erected to create classrooms and storage for research equipment. Eventually the classes moved elsewhere, and the facility became a storage space.

"This project is incredibly valuable and will enable us to showcase what we have here on the Macdonald campus,

from our researchers concerned with food production to our animals and agricultural equipment," says Meldrum. "We've developed modules meeting requirements identified by the Ministry of Education, so schools can incorporate trips to the campus into their curriculum."

The Macdonald campus has been welcoming touring school groups for many years, but without any formal orientation facility or program. "I remember school kids used to come when I was a student at Macdonald," says Alton McEwen of his years on campus in the 1960s. More recently, the Faculty has been operating educational tours since 2008. This program has grown in popularity to the point where the campus has now welcomed close to 6,000 students, making it evident that the Faculty needed a centre dedicated to this kind of outreach.

Nadia Wendowsky, Associate Director, Development, says "We estimate that once the facility is open year-round we will see about 20,000."

As well as being a superb showcase for what FAES can do, the facility will also be a powerful recruitment tool. "It's huge for us," says Meldrum. "We will have the space to bring in big groups of people who will get to know what Mac has to offer, how food is produced, and how research here helps to protect the environment and promote animal welfare. There is really no limit to what we can achieve with this facility!" 🐔