More than bricks and mortar

The walls can't talk, but they can tell a story.

In the new science building at Hope College, they will tell of lives transformed. They will echo the words of historian and author Henry Brooks Adams (1838-1918): "A teacher affects eternity... he can never tell where his influence stops."

The new building will take shape in the months ahead in large measure because of the support of alumni and friends who have given or seen lives molded by the Hope science experience and its blend of strong teaching and research-based learning. The very walls will rise because they, having received, are giving that others may receive as well. Every classroom, every office, every lab table, every hallway tile will reflect it.

And while they are coming together in common purpose, every story is unique. Like thousands of others, Dick Welch '50 came back from service in World War II ready to forge ahead with a civilian life that had been put on hold.

A veteran of the U.S. Navy Medical Corps, he was interested in medicine, and had heard good things about a certain school some 60 miles north of his hometown of Bridgman, Mich. "I knew that Hope had a strong background for going to med school," he said.

Back trouble since birth ultimately prompted him to rule out a medical career, but at Hope Welch found a calling: teaching high school chemistry. He went on to 36 years as an educator, strongly influenced by mentors like Dr. J. Harvey Kleinheksel '22.

"People, like Dr. Kleinheksel, were tremendously inspiring to me," he said. "They were just as great as any people I could imagine as a teacher."

Welch was at Stevensville High School from 1950 to 1953, and at Dearborn High School from 1953 until retiring in 1986. In addition to chemistry, he taught physics biology, algebra, trigonometry and a variety of related subjects.

His students excelled. One, the first high school student to split the atom, won first place at the National Science Fair. Another went on to be named one of the nation's top 12 chemistry college graduates by Chemical and Engineering News. Many pursued doctorates in chemistry, six from the Class of '84 alone.

Welch received several awards during his career. Among other honors, he was named "Michigan's Outstanding Chemistry Teacher" by the Michigan Chemical Council and Manufacturing Chemists Association; was the only American secondary science teacher chosen to attend the Eighth Annual International Edison Birthday Celebration in Tokyo, Japan; and was one of only 10 Michigan Science Teachers chosen to write Nuclear Science in the Classroom by the State Superintendent of Education.

Along the way, based on his own positive experience, he guided some 78 of his students to Hope. In recognition of his role in their lives, they have in turn raised funds to name one of the new science building's teaching laboratories for him and also to endow a scholarship in his name.

It is one way that his influence will continue in the lives of future generations of Hope students. He, in turn, hopes that others will appreciate the influence that helped shape him.

"I thought a great deal of Dr. Kleinheksel," Welch said. "I hope the memory of him and his work will go on forever with the new facility."

Every story is unique.

Dr. Vern Boersma '44 and his wife, Lois Hinkamp '44 Boersma, pledged to the Legacies campaign toward the science building initiative because they realize the importance of a strong science undergraduate program in preparing future medical professionals and scientists. Dr. Boersma practiced pediatric medicine in Holland for 37 years, and also served as the college's physician.

"The kind of nurturing and learning I experienced at Hope under Dr. Kleinheksel, Dr. Kleig and Dr. Van Zyl, I want to continue on to future generations," he said.

Every story is unique.

Dr. Stan Busman '73 made a pledge to the science building initiative. In fact, he serves as a volunteer in asking other alumni, and friends to support the capital campaign. He is a senior research specialist for Illumination Corporation, and previously served in a similar capacity with 3M Corporation. He majored in chemistry at Hope and went on for a doctorate at the University of California-Los Angeles. "It is important to me to give back to the institution that provided me with such a strong science background," he said.

Every story is unique.

Gary and Joyce DeWitt of Holland, Mich., made a pledge for the department of nursing, which is joining the others sciences in the new center. Gary, a member of Hope's Board of Trustees, recognized the importance of state-of-the-art facilities in supporting Hope's national reputation in the sciences and other disciplines. His daughter, Rita DeWitt '90 Petersen, is a graduate of the nursing program.

A teacher's influence continues. Dick Welch '50, front left, a long-time high school chemistry instructor who benefited from the mentorship of Hope's Dr. J. Harvey Kleinheksel '22, Welch's students, in turn, have funded a new laboratory and endowed a scholarship in his name so that future students will benefit as well. Pictured with Welch at a reception in his honor are his wife Gloria (seated) and, at back, Dr. Irwin Brink '52, Barbara Lowning '62 Brink, Dr. Elaine Jekel and Dr. Eugene Jekel '52. Dr. Brink and the Jekels are retired careers on the Hope chemistry faculty.

Every story is unique.

Dr. Kleinheksel was himself a Hope graduate, an alumnus who spent his career working with Hope students, from 1928 to 1965. He played a central early role in Hope's rise to excellence in the sciences, as did his long-time fellow alumnus and colleague Dr. Gerrit Van Zyl '18, who taught at Hope from 1923 to 1964.

The two chemistry stalwarts--the former known especially for his ability as a teacher, the latter for his research acumen--were honored through the lives that students have gone on to lead, but in the new science building they are being remembered concretely as well. The building's large focal atrium will be named for them.

More broadly, the entire facility reflects the direction and tone that they helped establish generations ago, according to Dr. James Gentile, who is dean for the natural sciences and the Kenneth G. Herrick Professor of Biology at Hope. At the same time, though, it appropriately--and crucially--carries their vision forward to meet 21st century needs.

For example, the new building has been designed to foster cross-disciplinary connections. Rejecting the old model of separation by department, the new building will emphasize organization by interest, reflecting the reality that researchers from multiple disciplines are often involved in any given scientific problem.

"That's the way we're going to teach and also that's the way we're going to do our research because that's the way in which science is done," Dr. Gentile said.

The top floor will be populated by faculty who study molecular science--biologists and chemists alike.

The middle floor will focus on disciplines such as environmental science, physical chemistry, geology, ecology and field biology.

The ground floor will focus on human studies, including nursing and psychology, and anatomy and physiology. The floor will also focus on outreach, including the science museum and space for general education and community use.

Dr. Gentile also anticipates that the facility's investigations will lead to collaborations between floors as well. The facility has been designed, he said, to allow it to be adaptable to whatever the future may bring.

"Hope has sustained and built on the work of Kleinheksel and Van Zyl such that we are one of the premier undergraduate research institutions in the nation," he said. "We're not going to let go of that—that's our core, that's the center of our universe in science education. And that's a legacy that is foundational to who we are."

But other schools are building on that because they see it works," Dr. Gentile said. "Our challenge has been: how do we sustain well what we are doing and yet start to differentiate ourselves once again from the pack?"

"And the concept of inter-disciplinary studies in science, the integration of that into our curriculum without letting go of undergraduate research, is how we're going to do that," he said.

"The facility is going to be the catalyst that will take us there because it will provide the infrastructure that will allow that to happen," Dr. Gentile said. "So that's our goal: to build on a legacy but also to leverage it toward the future."

And thus those who give back are becoming a part of the next generation's story, and through it the next, affecting eternity through influence that can't be measured but which can, in the people and spaces at Hope, be seen.