Taking the sciences to a new level: these alumnae lead the way

Mary Lake Polan ’65 P’02 ’10

"In life and politics today, important decisions are based on the sciences. If you don’t understand science, you can’t participate. You can’t serve society in the manner you should. You have to broaden your interests so you are prepared for the world you enter today."

Judith Ammerman ’60

“Our science departments need and deserve the very best space and equipment. These programs are important to the excellent liberal arts education we offer. They help students become well-rounded thinkers, and that can only enhance their experiences and successes after graduation.”

Jean C. Tempel ’65

“Computers – technology – serve the advancement of science in very useful ways. Students are amazingly creative when it comes to exploiting the connection. This type of discovery is at the heart of the liberal arts. Having these programs together in one building will make a difference.”

Frances Gillmore Pratt ’60 P’89

“I want to help Connecticut College reach its goal. I grew up and came out of my shell at college. I liked the challenge. Loved the campus. I had a chance to be myself. It just clicked.”

Judith Tindal Opatrny ’72

“New London Hall is an iconic building on campus. It’s our Centennial year and this is an appropriate moment in our history to give that icon some attention.”

Helen Fricke Mathieson ’52

“I am a conservationist by birth. But there is no point in conserving anything on this earth if you don’t understand why. The environmental sciences are the key to understanding how we should live in this world.”

Helen Fricke Mathieson ’52, a longtime supporter of the sciences, loves the students and is impressed to see how they use their education. Frances Gillmore Pratt ’60 P’89 majored in studio art and relished her years at Connecticut College, and Judith Tindal Opatrny ’72 was an American studies major.

Opatrny loved exploring the outdoors with professors Richard Goodwin and Paul Fell. Her grounding in the sciences is still part of her today — she is an advocate for preservation of habitats and migratory corridors. She appreciated the rigor of the sciences. “It contributes very much to academic excellence,” Opatrny said.

Another alumna, who is supporting the project anonymously, said she and her husband focus their philanthropy on programs that advance scientific research and medicine — especially in the areas of nutrition and heart science. “We recognize that strong programs at the college level are important,” she said.

The sciences, said Jean C. Tempel ’65, are a critical part of the liberal arts core. They teach students how to attack a problem in a disciplined way, and they can also take students in unexpected directions. The focus on detailed analysis and quantitative results can give non-scientific work a strength that it wouldn’t otherwise have, she added.

“It’s part of the joy of learning and finding new things,” Tempel said. “It’s about discovery.”

Computers are essential when it comes to making those connections, said Tempel, who in 1972 was one of the first women in the United States to get an advanced degree in computer science.

“It’s the arithmetic of this century. You have to have it as part of the game,” she said.

She is looking forward to the opening of the building in the fall of 2012. “It will be great,” Tempel said. “Good for the school, good for the faculty and good for the students.”

The new science center will open in fall 2012