



From the moment they landed on the Eastern Michigan University campus in the summer of 2016, Dr. James Smith and Dr. Connie Ruhl-Smith became active and enthusiastic WEMU listeners and donors.

Self-proclaimed “NPR junkies,” EMU’s first couple were delighted to find a high profile, NPR affiliate on campus. It wasn’t long before they became involved in station events and station fundraising, making their first of many financial gifts to the station during the fall pledge drive.

During one of his first visits to WEMU’s studios, located atop a former women’s dormitory, built in 1934 as a WPA project, President Smith declared “We need to find you a new facility,” a remark he repeated on nearly every visit thereafter.

It’s something he’s never forgotten to pursue.

Dr. Smith and Dr. Ruhl-Smith have campaigned endlessly for a new home for WEMU, talking with facilities coordinators and donors about possibilities. All the while, they were talking up the station internally and externally and steadily increasing their own annual giving.

“The best damn radio station in the country,” proclaims President Smith at multiple public events, never failing to give credit to WEMU’s programmers, broadcasters, and donors who have consistently kept the station among the top five radio stations in its market and led to WEMU’s three consecutive Station of the Year awards from the Michigan Association of Broadcasters.

And he means it. And while President Smith has been the public face of administrative support, Dr. Ruhl-Smith has worked behind the scenes, using her years of skills as a fundraiser to work with University donors, convincing them to include WEMU in their annual and planned giving.

And in December 2024, these efforts succeeded when the Eastern Michigan University Board of Regents approved \$2.7 million to construct a new, modern broadcast facility in Halle Library for WEMU, to be finished at the end of WEMU’s 60th year, 2025.

It’s not uncommon for a University licensee to profess support for their public media outlet. It’s extremely uncommon for the top administrators to become the champions WEMU has in Dr. Smith and Dr. Ruhl-Smith. From the beginning, they have invested their time, their money, and their pride in WEMU and achieved outstanding results, that are more than worthy of the Public Media Impact Award.

They deserve full consideration for this incredible relationship and achievement.

Molly Motherwell  
Executive Director/General Manager