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HEADLINE: College honors a former lawmaker;
Howard school names its library after Clark

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James Clark Jr. is a familiar name to many because of his 28 years in the state legislature and his bustling farm in central Howard County. Now that name will be part of the landscape of Howard Community College, gleaming on the side of the library building in the center of campus.

The college renamed the building yesterday – the first built on the Columbia campus more than 30 years ago – in honor of Clark, who was an early supporter of the school. He introduced legislation that gave the school its board of trustees after the county Board of Education bought the land and started construction. Clark "is a public servant who always stuck to his principles while serving his constituents," said Roger N. Caplan, chairman of the college's board of trustees.

He said Clark, 85, is a war hero, a family man and a farmer who has served the community throughout his life. But Clark doesn't like to trumpet his accomplishments, Caplan said, "so we're going to do that for him."

A lifelong Howard County resident, Clark started a term in the Maryland House of Delegates in 1959 and went on to serve as state senator from 1963 to 1986. He was president of the Senate from 1979 to 1983.

A former Air Force pilot who flew gliders behind enemy lines in World War II, Clark is known for his work on civil rights issues, Program Open Space and promoting farmland preservation.

Clark recently donated his papers to the HCC library, including letters, documents and photographs from his time in the state legislature and from a 20-year fight to pass a balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

"They were interested in my papers, and I was very glad to have a place to put them," he said.

Erin Marek, executive associate to HCC's president, worked with Clark to move his collection from file cabinets in one of his barns to the college.

"There are thousands and thousands of pieces of paper in there," she said. There were also insects, requiring the collection to be sent out for fumigation and preservation. Then it will need to be catalogued, Marek said, so it can be made available to students and the public.

HCC President Mary Ellen Duncan said the Clark papers are one step in the school's efforts to collect more historical information. Administrators hope to get papers from former county executives and are working on a timeline of important dates in the college's history, she said.

"It's going to be time-consuming to gather that information, but we're starting," Duncan said. "Hopefully it will become part of our culture to have high regard for people who contribute to the community."

In his remarks at the naming, Clark said he was overwhelmed by the praise from his friends and colleagues.

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"They generally forget you pretty quickly once you get out of office," he said. And the fact that he has been away from the Senate for 20 years "makes it even sweeter."

GRAPHIC: Photo(s), Former state Sen. James Clark Jr. (right) stands at a lectern with Roger N. Caplan, Howard Community College's board of trustees chairman, after the college named its library building after Clark.; DAVID HOBBY : SUN STAFF

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