

Richard Stockton College dedicates William J. Hughes memorabilia

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GALLOWAY TOWNSHIP — Most people hold a yard sale when they clean out their attics.

Nancy Hughes wanted to clean out her attic, so she and her husband, former Ambassador and U.S. Rep. William J. Hughes, took 11 crates of political papers to the center that bears his name at Richard Stockton College. Now his decades of government service are on display.

“I never had any doubts about where it was all going to go,” Hughes said, despite having told the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy’s former director Sharon Schulman that he was also considering Rutgers.

The collection was dedicated Wednesday at a ceremony for about 100 friends and colleagues at the college. Hughes, 79, said he still has some items in his Ocean City home but that some significant items are at the center, located in the renovated L-wing at the college.

The Hughes Center’s entrance wall features presidential pens used to sign bills sponsored by Hughes. The Democrat is especially proud of the bill that banned ocean dumping because he said that was the issue that got him involved in national politics in the 1970s. Other significant bills were the Brady Bill on gun control and the bill that made the Maurice River and its tributaries part of the national Wild and Scenic Rivers system.

Among the plaques is a small one commemorating the groundbreaking in 1978 of what was then called the National Aviation Facilities Experiment Center, or NAFEC, and is now the William J. Hughes Technical Center in Egg Harbor Township.

“I found a lot of things I had forgotten about,” Hughes said, joking about the “mutton chop” sideburns he displays in a photo with former President Gerald Ford. “It brings back a lot of memories.”

The collection also includes a copy of a January 1991 letter Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein wrote to President George H.W. Bush that became controversial because Bush did not want to release it. Hughes had told him he should make it public, and Bush did. He sent a copy of the letter to Hughes with a note saying “I appreciated your advice.” The letter and note, along with a photo of Hughes and Bush, are framed and displayed on an easel.

Hughes served in Congress for two decades under five presidents, then in 1995 was named ambassador to Panama by President Bill Clinton. During his three-year posting, he assisted in the return of the Panama Canal to Panamanian control.

The letters and documents in the Hughes collection will also be digitized and available for public viewing and for research. Speakers at the event said Hughes is a role model to anyone considering public service.

“Hopefully this will lead young people to want to serve in government,” said Edward Salmon, chairman of the Hughes Center Steering Committee.

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