The Beginnings by Dr. Edward G. Lawry

Shortly after I began teaching at OSU, I tried to foster extra-curricular philosophical discussions which, I believed, were part of a robust educational environment. I had a paper entitled, “What Is Philosophy?” that I volunteered to present to a small group of students. These were students I taught that seemed to be forming a group to carry on extra-curricular discussions. We decided to get a room in the Student Union and have a discussion meeting. But when I called the Union and identified myself as a faculty member wanting to reserve a room, I was told that I would have to rent the room unless it was for an official student group. I went back to the students and asked if they would be interested in getting official recognition as a philosophy club and the Friends of the Forms was born. The name alludes to Plato’s Sophist and seemed to emerge naturally. This name, not being familiar to those outside philosophy, has had its comic moments. The accounting office, assuming a typo, kept sending our financial statements headed "The Friends of the Farms." When one of our former University Presidents responded to our invitation to speak to the group he replied that he didn’t know there were whole organizations in favor of paperwork (Friends of the Forms). Once the group was formed, we began to plan more events. The desire for intellectual exchange was too intense to limit ourselves to just the small group of faculty we had in the department, so we decided to expand to other departments and hold bi-weekly events. One graduate student was interested in Process Philosophy, and since I had been a student of Charles Hartshorne in my graduate school years, I asked Charles if he would give a couple of talks. We couldn’t pay him anything, but we scraped together enough money to pay his plane fare and I hosted him in my home. The events were hugely successful. At the same moment, we discovered that student organizations could apply for funds to conduct their activities, so we began to do that and sponsor a Philosopher-in-Residence once each year. The bi-weekly talks and the philosopher-in-residence program stuck, and they remain the staple of the Friends of the Forms to this day.