

Overture donation

By TOM ALESIA

On a July morning in 1998, W. Jerome Frautschi dramatically changed Madison's arts-and-entertainment scene.

Frautschi quietly dropped his first \$50 million donation on Downtown and hinted at building a performing arts complex.

Frautschi never demanded anything. He gave the money, then politely asked the arts community to set priorities.

At the time, Frautschi's gift arrived as stunning news. The donation was more than half of what the National Endowment for the Arts awarded that year.

Big money. Lots of zeros.

Of course, Frautschi didn't stop there. In the months that followed, Overture Center developed from a crazy idea to blueprints to construction. Costs mounted and Frautschi added another \$50 million. By the time Overture Hall opened its glass lobby doors in fall 2004, Frautschi had handed over \$205 million, one of the world's largest donations to the arts.

Ever.

Let that sink in as you sip a cup of free-trade coffee while strolling past State Street's marble marvel.

But let's backtrack to July 1998, because that moment best exemplified Frautschi's modesty and his do-good intentions. Poke and prod, you won't find any ulterior motive. He loves the arts, especially opera, though he marvels about the mainstream "Riverdance." He simply had an opportunity to give Downtown a world-class facility.

Inspired by his philanthropist father, Walter Frautschi, who helped create the Madison Civic Center, Frautschi gave away much of his fortune. After selling his portion of his family-run



Craig Schreiner

Jerry Frautschi gets a hug of appreciation from Lisa Thurrell, artistic director of Kanopy Dance, after his announcement of an additional \$50 million donation to the city for the construction of a Downtown arts center.

Madison's art scene received great news
in 1998, to the tune of \$50 million
