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This college donation is truly historic. And it's not just the artifacts involved



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In a move that will help cement two local institutions' role as stewards of Florida and early American history, the Jay I. Kislak Foundation is donating thousands of priceless items, including rare books, maps, manuscripts and artifacts, to the University of Miami and Miami Dade College.

The announcement will be made Monday by real estate magnate Jay I. Kislak, his foundation and the two higher education institutions. It means that such valuable pieces as the two earliest published editions of a famous 1493 Christopher Columbus letter will have permanent homes in the Special Collections Division of UM's Otto G. Richter Library in Coral Gables and at MDC's Freedom Tower in downtown Miami.

MDC plans to create a permanent 2,600-square-foot public exhibition gallery in the Freedom Tower, adjacent to the historic New World Mural, which celebrates Ponce de Leon's 1513 discovery and naming of Florida — a fitting place for a Kislak collection replete with pre-Columbian and early American historical pieces. At UM in Coral Gables, the Kislak donation will enhance a collection pertaining to South Florida history and Caribbean and Cuban culture.

"These two institutions are part of Miami and I am here in Miami," Kislak said in an interview before the announcement. "These are now permanent homes [for the collection] and the southernmost end of the larger collection." In 2004, Kislak gave 3,000 items to the Library of Congress.

The latest Kislak gift includes more than 2,300 books, maps, manuscripts and other historic materials valued at about \$30 million. Some of the more interesting items:

- A 1486 edition of Ptolemy's *Cosmographia*, considered one of the most influential works in the history of cartography. A copy was owned by Christopher Columbus.
- A 1521 volume describing Cuba by Italian historian Peter Martyr d'Anghiera.
- A 1589 volume, "The Principal Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation," by English writer Richard Hakluyt.
- A two-volume account of the 1804-1806 Lewis and Clark Expedition, commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson.

As a result of the donation, a Kislak-MDC-UM partnership will plan exhibitions, research projects, education and public outreach to serve students, residents and scholars studying Florida, American history and the cultures of the Caribbean and Latin America. MDC and UM plan to collaborate on the collections' care and public events as well.

At 94, Kislak, chairman of the family-owned Miami Lakes-based Kislak Organization, a multi-faceted real estate company, remains active in both corporate and philanthropic endeavors. This gift follows a long tradition of philanthropy by the Kislak family. The 2004 donation to the Library of Congress, for example, was estimated to be worth more than \$150 million. Those items are now housed in the Thomas Jefferson building — what Kislak has referred to as prime real estate. Kislak chose the Library of Congress because he believed it the best place to make it accessible to scholars.

The Jay I. Kislak Foundation and the Kislak Family Foundation have funded and donated to other institutions as well: the University of Pennsylvania, which has The Kislak Center for Special Collections; the Monmouth University business education program; the University of Florida's College of Veterinary Medicine; the Florida State University College of Business; and the University of Miami's Real Estate Impact Conference.

The gift to UM and MDC, however, carries with it an extra layer of meaning because of Kislak's connection to the area. The former Navy pilot who served in World War II has called Miami home for more than 60 years.

"It's truly invaluable, the collection," UM Dean and University Librarian Charles Eckman said. "Such a wonderful array of primary source material enables the libraries to support research interests on an all new level for our students and faculty of history, anthropology, American studies, art and art history, and many others. It allows them a fresh perspective and basis to create new knowledge."

The Miami collections will enable local scholars to do research without having to head to Washington, D.C. Joking that the gift, done through the foundation, doesn't entitle him to a hefty tax deduction, he quickly pointed to the satisfaction he receives from having them nearby. "I get a good feeling that these things are available to future generations."

Kislak said he doesn't have a favorite item in the donated collection, nor does he talk about the monetary worth, but the then-Librarian of Congress James Billington, who accepted the first donation a dozen years ago, called Kislak "our princely donor," according to Fine Books & Collections magazine. Kislak CEO and President Tom Bartelmo, who as a member of the foundation played an instrumental role in establishing the latest gift agreement, said many of the items are "very, very rare and some are unique."

UM and MDC's presidents are understandably grateful.

"This gift advances Miami Dade College's legacy and stewardship of Miami and our region's history," MDC President Eduardo J. Padrón said in a statement. "I am extremely grateful to Mr. Kislak for this invaluable contribution and honored to once again collaborate with Dr. Frenk and the University of Miami. At MDC, we are committed to ensuring the donation is accessible to the South Florida community and our students for educational and cultural enrichment."

UM President Julio Frenk called the donated items "unique and exceptionally important materials" that will have "an unparalleled opportunity to engage our community in the history and culture of our hemisphere."



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