

Spider collection at WCU rivals best in the nation

CULLOWHEE (AP) — Spiders and webs in the Western Carolina University library are not signs that the facility is seldom used. Rather, they are part of a rare and valuable collection.

WCU has one of the top university collections of spider literature in the United States, joining such institutions as Harvard, Cornell and the University of Florida, says John McCrone, dean of the School of Arts and Sciences.

McCrone — an arachnologist, or spider specialist — said Dr. Peter N. Witt, a Swiss-born pharmacologist, recently donated his personal collection of spider literature to the university.

Witt, who recently retired after a 15-year career as chief of research at Dorothea Dix Hospital in Raleigh, is known for his research into the effects of LSD, marijuana and other drugs on spiders' web building.

His collection, valued at more than \$2,500, contains about 150 volumes of rare spider literature published in Germany, France, Great Britain and the United States since 1738.

Among the volumes are serials, children's books and scholarly monographs, including current publications and rare, historic

books illustrated with hand-painted, color plates.

Witt also gave the university about 50 black-and-white photographs of unusually constructed webs spun in his laboratory by spiders under the influence of drugs.

The collection will be housed in Hunter Library's special collections department.

Witt said he gave his collection to Western Carolina because two friends there — Crone and Dr. Frederick Coyle — were doing research on spiders and because he wanted the collection to stay in North Carolina.

"I also wanted to get these kinds of stimulating things into a place that's not exactly in the center of academic life like the Research Triangle is," the 63-year-old scientist said in a telephone interview from his Knightdale farm, where he raises goats and produces goat cheese.

"I think (the collection) will attract graduate students and get other students interested," he said. "The goal of my life is that when I die, more people will be interested in spiders."

University officials said they hoped to add to the collection to make it even more attractive to students and visiting scholars.