Florida Atlantic University President Mary Jane Saunders presented an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters to Arthur Jaffe at FAU’s spring commencement ceremonies. This honor went to Jaffe, the founder and curator of the Arthur and Mata Jaffe Center for Book Arts, housed at FAU’s Wimberly Library, on the eve of his 90th birthday and as he prepares to retire. He and his late wife, Mata, made an initial donation of 2,800 artists’ books to the library in 1998. Over the years, it has developed into a bustling cultural center that houses 12,000 rare books, many of them one-of-a-kind. The center is also a venue for concerts, film screenings, exhibitions, workshops and classes -- all of which are open to the public.

"Arthur Jaffe is a living treasure at Florida Atlantic University," said FAU President MJ Saunders. "His lifelong interest in books as works of art has made him one of the world’s leading experts in this fascinating field. FAU is so fortunate to not only have the honor of housing this priceless collection of books, but also to have had the great pleasure of his personal participation in the life of the university for many years. He will always be a valued member of the FAU family."

Jaffe came to the Wimberly Library on FAU’s Boca Raton campus as a volunteer in 1994 and worked there for five years prior to donating the books. Behind him were distinguished careers as a World War II Army captain in charge of a unique combat military intelligence unit from 1942 to 1946, a partner in a department store chain for 30 years, and a leader in many local and national community organizations. With the expansion of the library in 2007, the Jaffe collection became the core of the new 4,500 square-foot center, largely funded by a substantial gift that Mata Jaffe earmarked for that purpose before her death in 2001. Jaffe also served as the Arlo S. Hyams Professor, an endowed position at FAU Libraries, until December 2010.

"If I was able to do some good things, it was because others were helping me and because I was willing to accept their help," said Jaffe. "Success is only made possible through cooperation. It is never something that is achieved by one person alone."

The center’s patrons range from elementary school children to retirees. Jaffe is at the center nearly every weekday and on some weekends. His daily schedule might include buying and showing books, poppin’ in on bookmarking classes or film screenings, talking with visiting artists, or sitting for hours with artists or prospective donors.

William Miller, dean of Libraries at FAU, said he never envisioned the Jaffe collection becoming as large, prominent and important as it is now. "This is a tribute to Arthur’s continued dedication in coming here every day, continuing to build the collection, proselytizing and teaching, and to the staff that he has assembled, who are equally dedicated to the teaching and outreach activities they conduct, in addition to building the collection," said Miller.

The Jaffe Center will continue to educate book arts enthusiasts. Plans are on track to open a papermaking studio this summer, to bolster the center’s metal and wood shops, allowing for more classes, and to welcome the first book artist in the "HeLEN F. Saltzberg Artist in Residence Program." The center’s staff views Jaffe’s status not as "retirement," but as a transition.

The library plans to celebrate Jaffe’s birthday/retirement all summer and will kick it off with an extensive exhibition titled "Time Flies When You’re Having Fun," which will open on Sunday, May 8, and run through Wednesday, August 10. The exhibition, free and open to the public, will feature a timeline of Jaffe’s life and accolades, including a reference to the Chevalier Legion of Honor award, a high honor that the French government will bestow on Jaffe on Tuesday, May 17, for his contributions to the liberation of France during World War II.

The "Time Flies" Open House at the Jaffe Center will be held on Saturday, May 21, from 1 to 4 p.m. Festivities will include letterpress demonstrations, a Poem Depot with the Miami Poetry Collective, chats with Jaffe and an unveiling of "Student Body Art," a photo exhibition.

The Jaffe Center will host workshops all summer as part of the celebration. The first one, titled "Explore, Invent, Inspire: Playful Ways of Approaching Artists’ Books," will be on display Saturday, May 14, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Workshops are open to the public. Registration is required.