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THE NEWSPAPER OF SILICON VALLEY

Developer lavishes largest private gift on SJSU

ALUM'S \$15 MILLION HELPS
ENGINEERING SCHOOL

By Lisa M. Krieger
Mercury News

San Jose State University has received the largest private individual gift in its 150-year history — \$15 million for the College of Engineering from San Jose developer Charles W. Davidson.

The gift by Davidson, a 1957 SJSU graduate in civil engineering, will infuse new funds into the growing college, which educates a sizable chunk of the workforce for Silicon Valley companies. The new money will boost efforts by the college to strengthen and support the ambitions of students as they join the global economy.

"San Jose State is educating our future," Davidson told an exuberant standing-room-only crowd at a campus ceremony Thursday morning. "It is the engine that is driving Silicon Valley. If we're going to compete, we need to stay cutting edge."



San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed applauds Charles W. Davidson, right, the prominent San Jose real estate magnate who donated \$15 million to San Jose State. JOANNE HO YOUNG LEE — MERCURY NEWS

The 76-year-old Davidson received a standing ovation. Students in bluejeans and sweatshirts, many watching from the balcony above, cheered and whistled their appreciation.

His gift will establish a new program for freshmen engineers that will inspire them, strengthen their academic foundation and instill a tough work ethic, said Belle Weis, dean of the College of Engineering.

It will also create a "global education" program, funding engineering students' travel to China, India and Latin America so they can get real-world experience and a chance to make business contacts for their future careers.

It also will help create classes in new energy-efficient technologies and boost outreach to future engineers in the region's high schools.

SJSU's College of Engineering graduates 1,000 students every year and is widely recognized as the largest contributor of talent to Silicon Valley companies such as Applied Materials, Cisco Systems, Intel and Hewlett-Packard.

It was ranked 14th in the nation among engineering schools offering bachelor's and master's degrees by U.S. News and World Report. Civil and mechanical engineering programs are its most popular.

SJSU is widely credited with serving as an elevator to the American middle class for the motivated children of the valley's immigrant families.

Prestigious private institutions are used to getting big donations from their driven alumni. In the past year, Stanford was promised \$105 million by Nike founder Philip H. Knight and \$75 million by Yahoo co-founder Jerry Yang and his wife.

But money less commonly pours into the coffers of lesser-known universities.

Conceding that he could have donated his fortune to many worthy places, Davidson said he decided that "this is where it does the most good. I loved the university. And it's got to have money to educate the way it should.

"It is our seed grain," he said. "We need it." Davidson credited his engineering degree with his success in home construction and development of the emerging Silicon Valley.

Born on a ranch in Oklahoma, Davidson attended East Oklahoma College and what later became Oklahoma State. He then served for three years in the U.S. Air Force.

As a young man, he moved west to work as an engineer for the state Highway Department and as a switchman for the Southern Pacific Railroad. He made good money and was tempted not to return to school.

"But I needed my degree and a license," he said. He settled down in Willow Glen, where he still lives.

"San Jose State was free — far cheaper than Stanford or Santa Clara University," he said.

He worked nights at San Jose's railroad yard while taking daytime classes at SJSU — a strategy he recommends because "it makes you more efficient."

"The campus was different then. "There were no student fees. The engineering department was all lily white," he said. "There was one Chinese student, from San Francisco. There were no women.

"But my professors were as good as you could ever hope to come across," he said.

By age 29, he was running his own consulting engineering company in San Jose. Eventually he developed a number of local home-building businesses, which include DKB Homes, L&D Construction, DKD Property Management and Charles W. Davidson Co. Consulting Civil Engineers.

Davidson said that he had planned to make a gift to the university for some time, but the details were finalized over the past year.

SJSU will request that the school's engineering department be renamed the Charles W. Davidson College of Engineering at the California State University board of trustees' meeting this month.

"It's a time in my life to give back," said Davidson. "When I was born, the tech world had started. It's turned high-tech — and will be super-high-tech."



Davidson
1957 grad is a prominent local home builder.

CHARLES W. "CHUCK" DAVIDSON

Born: Nov. 23, 1930, in Oklahoma.

Career: Originally opened an engineering consulting company in San Jose in 1960. Then, in 1961, he got into home-building as a sideline. President of the Charles W. Davidson Co., he also founded four other companies: DKB Homes, Davidson Homes, DKD Property Management and L&D Construction.

Education: B.S., civil engineering, San Jose State University.

Family: Wife, Anita (B.A., education, 1951), and four grown children: Cheryl, Sandra, Stephen and Bill.

MAJOR SJSU DONATIONS

Other major gifts to San Jose State University:

\$10 million from the George Lucas Educational Foundation to the College of Business.

\$5.5 million from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation for the School of Nursing.

\$2 million from the Koret Foundation for the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library.

\$1 million from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation for the King Library.

\$1 million from the Valley Foundation for the School of Nursing.

\$1 million from the Koret Foundation for the Athletic Training Center.

Source: San Jose State University Office of Communications