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Boosting 'Best in Class'

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A national foundation has called the University of Dayton School of Engineering and its Innovation Center "best in class in project-based learning in engineering innovation education."

University of Dayton graduates O. Jack Anderson and his wife, Opal, will boost that reputation with a gift of more than $600,000 to create a new faculty position to enhance the entrepreneurial spirit among engineering students and faculty. The new fellow will lead the growing partnership between the School of Engineering and the School of Business Administration to prepare students to better design products for society. The position also will work to provide additional entrepreneurial and product design learning experiences university-wide.

The person who fills the O. Jack and Opal Anderson Faculty Fellowship in Engineering Innovation will have both backgrounds in engineering and business.

"There are so many things that are part of business success, whether you're running a business or focusing on being an engineer," said Anderson, a retired Dayton businessman who founded Computer Aided Design/Computer Aided Manufacturing (CAD/CAM) Inc. "I didn't come to the University of Dayton to be a marketing man or an accountant. I came here to be an engineer. But I found I needed to know about these issues for business success.

"I'd like to see students have a broader, more entrepreneurial view of engineering or whatever business they go into."

University of Dayton School of Engineering Dean Tony Saliba said it's important for the University to produce engineers who embrace entrepreneurship and interact effectively with business professionals in order to develop innovations that can succeed in the marketplace.

"We are thrilled to have the endowed fellowship. It will help us implement a transformative, well-rounded engineering education with a strong foundation in technical fundamentals, liberal arts and leadership training," Saliba said. "Upon that solid base, we will continue to instill an innovative and entrepreneurial mindset with a focus on customers' needs so engineering students will graduate with real-world experience."

Since 1996, School of Engineering students have worked on more than 600 projects for 120 clients. Seven teams of engineering students have finished in the top five of the School of Business Administration's Business Plan Competition in the four-year history of the competition. One team has taken home the top prize.

"Jack Anderson has long been an advocate of collaboration between engineers and entrepreneurs," said Phil Doepker, director of the Innovation Center. "Jack has challenged us to look deeper into the conceptualization process to make sure that we are developing robust engineering solutions and concepts that add value to new and existing products. If it wasn't for Jack's support, we would not be where we are today, developing new and unique products, writing business plans and researching intellectual property and patents."

Anderson earned a bachelor's degree in business in 1954 and an MBA in 1965 from the University. He represented small businesses on President Gerald Ford's education committee to provide input on what students need to be successful in industry after graduation. Anderson took some of the recommendations and developed a student apprenticeship program aimed at creating "good engineering business people." His wife, Opal, earned a bachelor's degree in general studies from the University in 1981.

"Through this fellowship, Jack wants to show how the combination of business and engineering that resulted in great success for his engineering company can serve our students well," Saliba said.

The Andersons have long supported engineering education at the University of Dayton. In 2003, they provided $60,000 in seed money to launch innovation and design projects through the School of Engineering's Design and Manufacturing Clinic, the predecessor to the Innovation Center. They also have donated computer software to the School of Engineering.
Ultimately, the University of Dayton wants to emerge as a national model for teaching, research and practice across the fields of engineering, business, innovation and entrepreneurship, Saliba said. The School of Engineering plans to accomplish this with an engineering focus that emphasizes experiential learning and collaboration with the School of Business Administration, the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Law and the Research Institute.

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