

Cornell Gets \$80 Million for Sustainability Research

By Esmé E. Deprez - Oct 28, 2010

Cornell University received \$80 million from alumnus David R. Atkinson and his wife, Patricia, to create a research center for global sustainability at the school's main campus, in Ithaca, New York.

The money, the largest individual gift to the campus, will make permanent a three-year pilot program that unites researchers and professors to tackle issues related to global energy, environmental and economic development, the university said today in a statement.

Atkinson, 72, graduated from Cornell with a bachelor's of science degree in agriculture in 1960. He founded Atkinson & Co., an investment company in Princeton, New Jersey, after retiring in 1992 as general partner of Philadelphia-based Miller, Anderson & Sherrerd. Researchers in the pilot program are examining how to replace antibiotics with viruses that infect bacteria and how to convert algae into biofuel, and analyzing the role of government in Middle East water rights.

"My wife and I have made a commitment to make the center a permanent, integral part of Cornell," Atkinson, who earlier provided \$3 million to the pilot program, said in a telephone interview.

"Sustainability issues will be of increased concern with the passage of time, and Cornell is the best university to tackle these issues."

The program will be renamed the David R. Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future. The gift aids Cornell's effort to raise \$4 billion in a campaign that has garnered \$3 billion since 2006.

IBM Alliance

For the pilot effort, Cornell faculty members have worked in partnership with International Business Machines Corp. the U.S. Department of Energy, the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the nonprofit organization CARE, said Frank DiSalvo, the program's director and a Cornell professor of chemistry.

Cornell's investments rose 13 percent in the year ended June 30, beating the returns at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, the two richest U.S. universities. Cornell's long-term investments were valued at \$4.4 billion on June 30, the university said in September.

About 20,000 graduate, undergraduate and professional students attend Cornell. The Ivy League university was founded in 1865 and has a medical campus in New York City.

Cornell counts among its alumni Sanford "Sandy" Weill, former chairman of Citigroup Inc. in New York, and Abby Joseph Cohen, senior investment strategist at Goldman Sachs Group Inc. in New York.

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