

Atkinsons give \$80 million to Cornell for Center for Sustainable Future

By Rachel Stern •rstern@gannett.com• October 28, 2010, 10:10 am

Cornell University received an \$80 million gift from alumnus David R. Atkinson and his wife, Patricia, the university acknowledged Thursday.

According to Cornell press relations, this is the largest individual gift given to Cornell's Ithaca campus.

The gift will turn the former Cornell Center for a Sustainable Future from a three-year pilot program into a permanent research center now called the David R. Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future. The center was created in 2007 with a \$3 million start-up gift from the Atkinsons.

The center's associate director for environment, Drew Harvell was excited to hear the news.

"We are just delighted," said Harvell, who is a Cornell professor of ecology and evolutionary biology. "We've worked really hard and it is just really fulfilling to know this gift will allow us to continue the mission of the center."

It is a mission that focuses on problems related to energy, the environment and economic development, she said. The center, director Frank DiSalvo said, pulls together several people from different departments across campus to work on a single problem.

In its three years of existence the center has connected 220 faculty members from 55 different departments. The money will not only make the center permanent, but will also help hire new faculty, make external partners and continue to attack anywhere from 12 to 15 projects each year.

"This is really transformative for the university," DiSalvo said. "It will enable us to have a real world impact and continue to address complex problems that are going to be characteristic of the coming century."

The center has invested in about 40 projects in its three years, DiSalvo said. For example, a team of engineers and chemists have been working with IBM scientists on new solar capture technologies. A group of biologists, engineers and geneticists are working on changing algae into biofuel.

The money will help continue projects such as these and new ones, DiSalvo said.

"This is just fantastic," he said. "When people hear about this, that Cornell is on the move in this area, they will want to come be involved."

