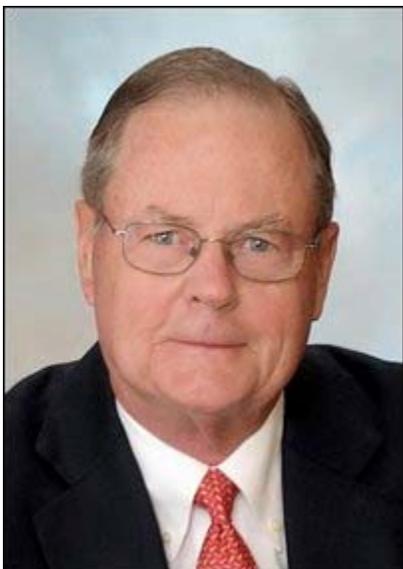


# Cornell U. gets \$80M gift for sustainability work



This undated photo released on Thursday, Oct. 28, 2010, by Cornell University and authorized by David Atkinson, shows David Atkinson. Atkinson, a Cornell alum, is giving \$80 million to the university for a far-ranging research center to create more efficient and less harmful practices in energy, agriculture, medicine and other dynamic arenas in economic development. (AP Photo/David Atkinson via Cornell University)

October 28, 2010

By BEN DOBBIN Associated Press Writer

ROCHESTER, N.Y. (AP) - Cornell University said Thursday it's getting \$80 million from one of its alums for a far-ranging research center to create more efficient and less harmful practices in energy, agriculture, medicine and other dynamic arenas in economic development.

That's the largest-ever gift from an individual to the Ivy League school in upstate New York.

David Atkinson, who grew up on a New Jersey farm and graduated from Cornell's agriculture college in 1960, went on to build a fortune on Wall Street and, at age 72, owns and manages his own investment firm.

A three-year pilot program funded largely by Atkinson at the 145-year-old campus in Ithaca has already drawn \$56 million for sustainability projects from government, private foundations and entrepreneurs.

The David R. Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future views collaboration across academic disciplines \_ from engineering to agriculture to the humanities \_ as vital to making breakthroughs in interrelated subjects.

Sustainability means "providing for everybody's needs today in a way that will allow us to provide for the needs of the future \_ your needs and your children's needs," said the center's director, Frank DiSalvo, a chemistry professor.

"It's hard to think of a discipline where they can't make a contribution," he said. "As daunting as the technical problems are in sustainability, I think even more challenging are the cultural, social, political, behavioral issues we have to tackle at the same time if we're going to get from here to there."

Through "topical lunches," workshops and an academic venture fund, the pilot project has so far engaged about 350 of the 1,600 faculty members on campus, DiSalvo said.

A fuel-from-waste and soil-replenishing project being tried in Kenya over five years "involves a soil scientist, a microbiologist, a couple of combustion engineers, an economist" and drew \$5 million from one investor and funds from the National Science Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, he said.

"What we need to do more of in this century to address problems is connect across disciplines," DiSalvo said. "There's no doubt that universities have the broad breadth of talent to pull it together."

As economic development expands around the globe, Atkinson said he realized that meeting today's needs "without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own" is swelling in importance.

"There's probably a good chance there's going to be a fair number of crises that relate to this topic," especially because of population growth, he said. "Ideally, it will be addressed preemptively so we don't have crises."

His alma mater, Atkinson maintained, is "the most highly ranked American university with a college of agriculture, agriculture has an enormous impact on the environment, and a productive, efficient agriculture sector is a key ingredient in economic development.

"In my opinion, any university addressing sustainability without a college of agriculture is operating at an enormous competitive disadvantage," he said.

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