Five Trustees Pledge More Than $6 Million to Case Western Reserve University

At the February Board of Trustees dinner, Chair Charles “Bud” Koch announced a total of more than $6 million in new leadership gifts from five Case Western Reserve University trustees. While individual donors have chosen to remain anonymous, the impact of their collective philanthropy on student, faculty and programmatic support will be evident on campus for generations to come.

“Like so many of our alumni and friends, our trustees are inspired every day by the outstanding students and faculty at Case Western Reserve,” Koch says. “These trustees’ generosity is a shining example to others of the value of supporting an institution that improves lives through excellence in education and research.”

The gifts build upon the fundraising success at Case Western Reserve that has been growing since Barbara R. Snyder’s investiture as president in 2007. In fiscal year 2008–09, the university raised $108 million in new gifts and pledges, the second-highest total in its history. These gifts also follow major trustee announcements in the past several years, including $3 million from outgoing board Chair Frank N. Linsalata (CIT ’63) and his wife, Jocelyne; $5 million from incoming board Chair Koch and his wife, Katie; $7.5 million from Trustee Chuck Fowler (MKT ’88) and his wife, Norma; and nearly $6 million from Trustee Larry M. Sears (CIT ’69) and his wife, Sally Zlotnick Sears (FSM ’72, LYS ’74).

“I often say that our trustees know us best,” Snyder says. “When these leaders invest in Case Western Reserve, they send a powerful message to the broader community about the progress we’re making. I am very grateful for their support.”

Case Western Reserve University has received a $1 million gift from Barry A. Romich (CIT ’67) to create the Prentke Romich Laboratory at the Case School of Engineering.

“I want today’s undergraduates to have a place to go to build things,” says Romich, who got his own start in hands-on engineering by “tinkering” in the student shop of Bingham Hall in the ’60s. His work was the beginning of what is now a leading international manufacturer of assistive technology to address the communication needs of people with severe speech disabilities. In 1966, while a student at the Case Institute of Technology, Romich co-founded the Prentke Romich Company with Edwin Prentke (CIT ’36), whom he memorializes through this gift. Among the new firm’s early projects was a device to limit the acceleration of powered wheelchairs and the first communication device for stroke victims.

“It was a blessing to know Ed. He had the business experience, and I had the recent formal technical training,” Romich recalls. “We both had the ability to put ourselves into the place of the individuals we were serving.

Headquartered in Wooster, Ohio, the company completed the process of ownership transition to an employee stock ownership plan in 2008. Romich has since used the Romich Foundation as a vehicle to support responsible charitable distribution of his previously owned stock. In addition to his desire to pay tribute to Prentke, Romich was inspired by the leadership gift of Case Western Reserve Trustee Larry M. Sears (CIT ’69) and Sally Zlotnick Sears (FSM ’72, LYS ’74), whose nearly $6 million gift to the Case School of Engineering in 2006 enabled the creation of the Sears Undergraduate Design Laboratory.

Romich also wanted to give something back to the university and to show his support for the leadership of President Barbara R. Snyder. “I’m so pleased that such a place as Case Western Reserve exists,” Romich says. “I hope this space inspires talented young students to go on to do great things.”

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