The Sam and Rie Bloomfield Foundation has pledged a gift of $2.5 million to create the Sam Bloomfield Chair in Engineering Innovation at Wichita State University, the WSU Foundation announced at a news conference on Oct. 2.

The person selected to hold the chair will play a key role in helping WSU leaders and administration develop the Innovation University, said WSU President John Bardo.

“The Sam Bloomfield Chair in Engineering Innovation will have an astounding impact on Wichita State,” Bardo said. “Research in the areas of engineering and technology is crucial to the innovation economy and to the development and progression of WSU’s Innovation University. The person who holds this position will help establish a technology-based economy that will reach far beyond Wichita State and south-central Kansas.”

When trustees of the Bloomfield Foundation decided to make the gift, their inspiration came directly from the foundation’s namesakes, said Verlon McKay, president of the foundation’s trustees.

“We felt that the concept of an Innovation University at Wichita State was something that both Sam and Rie would be eager to support and participate in,” said McKay, who lives in Newport Beach, Calif., where the foundation is based. “Sam would want not only to be involved in the innovation emphasis of the program, but he’d also want to know that the right people are leading it. The person who holds this chair will be one of those people.”

The Bloomfield Foundation was represented at the news conference by Bill Lucas, a member of the foundation’s board of trustees and a Wichita certified public accountant and WSU alumnus. The pledge from the Bloomfield Foundation is its largest to date to Wichita State.

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The foundation has a long history of supporting Wichita State, primarily in the areas of engineering and the arts.

Royce Bowden, dean of the College of Engineering, also lauded the gift from the Bloomfield Foundation that will help WSU recruit an engineering mind of the highest caliber. This leader will foster a culture of innovation among students and faculty by helping to place the right tools and knowledge in the hands of those who impact the economic prosperity of our city, state and region, he said.

Details about how and when the position will be filled are being determined, Bowden said. The chair will be the first tied to the Innovation University. Wichita State is eligible to receive supplemental funding for the position from the state as part of the Kansas Board of Regents Faculty of Distinction program.

The Bloomfield Foundation’s longstanding relationship with Wichita State has helped to advance the university and position it for even greater achievements, said Elizabeth King, president and CEO of the WSU Foundation.

“This new pledge of support demonstrates a confidence and a trust in our vision, our leadership and our success,” King said. “Wichita State is truly grateful to have committed friends such as the Bloomfield Foundation.”

An aeronautical engineer, Sam Bloomfield was president of Swallow Airplane Company, based in Wichita, from 1934 to 1956. He was an entrepreneur and inventor who acquired 23 U.S. patents for his innovations. He and his wife, Rie, moved to California in the 1950s but maintained strong ties to Wichita, McKay said.

“I would estimate that 95 percent of the Bloomfield Foundation’s contributions go to the Wichita community, and a large portion of that to Wichita State,” said McKay, a 1961 WSU graduate. “That is why, when the trustees make funding decisions, we are so confident that Sam and Rie would want us to continue investing in Wichita and Wichita State. They had a great affection for Wichita.”

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Media note: Photographs from the news conference may be found after 2 p.m. Oct. 2 at www.wichita.edu/foundationphotos
Bloomfield Foundation pledges $2.5 million to create Chair in Engineering Innovation

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