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Dorothy and Bill Cohen’s $5 million gift will advance Wichita State’s Honors College, University Libraries

The Honors College at Wichita State University will be named the Dorothy and Bill Cohen Honors College to recognize a gift of $4.75 million from the longtime WSU supporters to help develop some of the university’s highest-achieving students.

An additional contribution of $250,000 will be used to create the Dorothy and Bill Cohen Fund for University Libraries.

The WSU Foundation announced the $5 million gift at a news conference today in Shocker Hall, the residence facility where the Honors College is housed and where many honors students live. The donation is one of the largest ever made to the foundation by individuals. It also meets a major university priority to enhance the ability of the Honors College to serve students.

The Honors College becomes only the second academic college at Wichita State to be named in recognition of philanthropic donors. The other is the W. Frank Barton School of Business. It is only the 15th honors college – out of 146 in the United States – to bear the name of its benefactors.

“It is truly a pleasure to work with visionary donors like Dorothy and Bill Cohen,” said Elizabeth King, WSU Foundation president and CEO. “They have the insight and the forethought to know what kind of impact their support can make on our broader society when they invest in intelligent, committed and socially aware young people.”

The Cohens, who contribute to many areas of campus, spoke at the news conference along with King; Kimberly Engber, Honors College dean; and Nathan Miller, a senior in the Honors College. WSU President John Bardo made remarks via video from Topeka, where he appeared before the Kansas Board of Regents earlier in the day to obtain approval for the naming.

The $4.75 million gift will be targeted at students, faculty and programming in this way:

- $2.25 million will endow the Dorothy and Bill Cohen Honors College Enhancement Scholarship, which will help students pay for activities and experiences aimed at developing their full potential. Those enhancements might include study abroad, undergraduate research, internships in the public sector and attending national conferences.

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- $1.5 million will endow the Dorothy and Bill Cohen Honors College Faculty Fellows, who are faculty members released from their departmental duties for a semester to design and teach classes in one of the Honors tracks of leadership, creativity or law and public policy.

- $1 million will endow the Dorothy and Bill Cohen Honors College Leadership Academy, an annual program that will be developed to support student leadership through academic coursework and community mentorship.

“T this is a defining gift,” Engber said. “It communicates a strong commitment to academic rigor and to work that matters to WSU students and faculty. It will allow students to engage with the Wichita community and the world regardless of financial need, to take unpaid internships in the public sector, to travel to represent WSU nationally and internationally, and to collaborate with faculty mentors from multiple disciplines.”

The Dorothy and Bill Cohen Fund for University Libraries will provide funds each year to help cover a wide variety of costs, including digitization, e-books, hiring graduate assistants and purchasing equipment.

"University Libraries has a strong partnership with the Honors College that has helped to increase the quality and caliber of the work Honors students perform," said Don Gilstrap, dean of University Libraries.

“This gift is a wonderful recognition of that partnership that will only continue to grow and succeed.”

The Cohens recently met with Engber and several Honors College students and faculty to learn more about the program. Dorothy Cohen said they were impressed with the caliber of students and the vision of the program leadership.

“The Honors College is providing students the opportunity to dig deeper, learn higher, experiment further and experience more,” she said. “They are teaching students to think critically, creatively and independently. We believe this opportunity will create smarter, more ambitious people who will support our society through their efforts in education, science, business and more.”

Bill Cohen said the Honors College fosters many of the same values that guided him and his associates in building IMA Financial Group into one of the largest privately held insurance agencies in the United States.

“We believed if we provided knowledge and innovation superior to our peers and service that exceeded our customers’ expectations, we would be successful,” he said. “I believe the Honors College will provide students the opportunity to gain knowledge and be innovative. With that as their basis, these students will provide a service to themselves, the university and the nation.”

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In his remarks, Bardo described the gift as transformational for the Honors College, which seeks to provide a rigorous and intellectual academic experience for high-achieving students.

“Dorothy and Bill have an acute knowledge of the complex issues facing our world,” Bardo said. “They realize the need for programs and educators who will help inspire and shape a new generation of thinkers and leaders for Kansas.”

In 2013, Wichita State revitalized its 55-year-old Honors Program into an Honors College with a permanent home in Shocker Hall. Enrollment increased to 413 students in 2014, up from 267 in 2013. This year, the program became the only degree-granting Honors College in the region and one of the few in the nation by creating an Honors Baccalaureate, an interdisciplinary degree requiring students to develop a plan of study and work closely with faculty to complete a thesis or final project.

Dorothy and Bill Cohen have supported Wichita State for more than three decades. They have endowed a scholarship in the College of Education, donated to the renovation of the Rhatigan Student Center and the president’s home, and contributed generously to athletics and fine arts. Although they are not WSU alumni, they have a great affection for the university and its students, Dorothy Cohen said.

Bill Cohen is the former chairman and CEO of IMA Financial Group, headquartered in Wichita and founded in 1974. He serves on the WSU Foundation’s National Advisory Council. Dorothy Cohen has worked for the Wichita Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, Private Jet Expeditions and Consolidated Holdings. She served in a consulting relationship with the government and public relations division of Koch Industries for nearly 20 years.

In 2007, the Cohens were recognized with the Fairmount Founders’ Award, which honors those who support access to education for all, a vision of excellence and connection to community.

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**Media note:** A photograph from the news conference can be found at [http://wichita.edu/foundationphotos](http://wichita.edu/foundationphotos).

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