Ming Hsieh Makes Record Donation To USC

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USC engineering alumnus Ming Hsieh, who was born and raised in northern China and went on to found a Southern California high-technology juggernaut, has donated $35 million to the University of Southern California Viterbi School of Engineering.

In recognition of his generosity, USC will name its electrical engineering department the USC Ming Hsieh Department of Electrical Engineering. The gift is the largest ever to name an engineering department nationwide and the largest ever to name a department at USC.

"Ming's name adds luster to a department that is already highly distinguished. He is a great Trojan who cares deeply about educating future engineers, and we are grateful that he is investing not only in his alma mater but ultimately in this nation," said USC President Steven B. Sample, who as an electrical engineer is also a tenured faculty member in the department.

Yannis C. Yortsos, dean of the Viterbi School said: "One hundred years ago, USC offered its first engineering courses in electrical engineering. It is only fitting that Ming Hsieh, an electrical engineering alumnus, is launching the second century of USC engineering with a magnificent gift."

Hsieh received his B.S. in 1983 and his M.S. in 1984 in electrical engineering both from USC. In 1987 he founded AMAX Technology and in 1990 co-founded the South Pasadena-based Cogent Inc. He is currently president, CEO and chairman of the board of Cogent.

Cogent is a billion dollar company that supplies automated fingerprint and other identification systems to governments, law enforcement agencies and corporations around the world. All 47 law enforcement agencies in Los Angeles County, for example, use a Cogent system. Cogent's 20.7 million-share Initial Public Offering was one of the most successful IPOs of 2004.

"I grew up in a very poor family. My childhood was spent studying hard at school during the day and working on the family farm at night," he said.

When in high school Ming Hsieh was given some old transistors and other electronics and began building primitive radios and television sets. With encouragement from an uncle, P.Y. Hsieh, who earned an M.S. in mechanical engineering from USC in 1952, and an inheritance from his grandfather in Taiwan, Hsieh emigrated from China to the US to attend USC.

"I will always be grateful for the engineering education I received from USC and I want to help others do the same thing."

With 54 tenured or tenure-track faculty, the USC Ming Hsieh Department of Electrical Engineering is the Viterbi School's largest department. It is distinguished by 11 members of the National Academy of Engineering, three members of the National Academy of Sciences, three members of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and four winners of the prestigious Claude Shannon Award. The department has been recognized for much fundamental research that laid the groundwork for the revolution in digital communications.

Ming Hsieh is the latest in a remarkable list of entrepreneur-philanthropists, all engineering alumni, who have made major naming gifts during the Viterbi School's
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- on-going $300 million fundraising initiative. The list includes:
  - Qualcomm co-founder Andrew J. Viterbi and his wife Erna who named the school in 2004;
  - Silicon Valley venture capitalist Mark Stevens and his wife Mary who created the USC Stevens Institute in 2004;
  - Real estate developer Daniel J. Epstein who named the Epstein Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering in 2002;
  - Energy Corporation CEO John Mork and his family who named the Mork Family Department of Chemical Engineering and Materials Science in 2005; and
  - Ken Klein, CEO and president of Wind River Systems, who established the Klein Institute for Undergraduate Engineering Life, also in 2005.

“I am grateful to the Viterbi School’s loyal alumni,” said Yortsos. “Their support is the most important key to raise the school’s endowment and to help our continuing ascent to national and global prominence, in an environment that grows more competitive each day.”

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