New Developments

Davis Marksbury ’80 –
Seeing blue and making a difference . . .

Engineering grad makes a major gift to UK to construct a new high-tech building on campus

Davis Marksbury
Davis Marksbury was born in Lexington, grew up on a farm in central Kentucky, attended Harrison County High School and graduated magna cum laude with a degree in civil engineering from the University of Kentucky. With a business partner, he went on to launch three major successful companies to address complex technological challenges in the document publishing industry. The last one he started in the basement of his Lexington home in 1998, and when it was acquired by Hewlett-Packard in 2008, it had annual revenue of about $90 million and offices in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Norway, the Czech Republic, Germany and Australia, with distributors in Japan, China and Mexico.

After selling that company, Davis and his wife, Beverly, created the Marksbury Family Foundation and provided the University with a $6 million gift to help construct a $18.6 million building to house high-technology research. To be known as the Davis Marksbury Building, the new facility is a project driven by private gifts and will be the second building of the College of Engineering’s “digital village” complex located near the corner of Maxwell and Rose Streets, just a few steps away from the King Alumni House. When it is complete, the UK digital village will be comprised of four buildings all dedicated to high-tech research. The Davis Marksbury Building will house research on visualization, computer science and electrical and computer engineering.

An additional $2 million gift for the building was provided by James F. Hardymon ’56 ’58 EN, former chairman of the UK Board of Trustees and the primary donor for the construction of the Hardymon Building, which was the first phase of the UK digital village. The Hardymon Building houses research in advanced computer and communications networking and other high-tech research.

James F. McDonald ’62 ’64 EN, president and chief executive officer of Scientific Atlanta, gave $328,000 to the building project.

All totaled, more than $8.3 million in private funding has been given toward the construction of the facility which is expected to be completed in 2011. This amount has been matched by the state’s Research Challenge Trust Fund.

“This is an historic moment for the University of Kentucky,” observes UK President Lee T. Todd, Jr. “Not only will the Davis Marksbury Building provide UK with world-class research and teaching space, it is the first capital building project to be constructed with private support and matching funds from the state’s ‘Bucks for Brains’ matching program.

“When we released our Top-20 Business Plan,” Dr. Todd continues, “we made it clear that we would fund 40 percent of the plan ourselves. Today, thanks to Davis and Beverly Marksbury and these other great friends of the university, we are pleased to show the Commonwealth that we are intent on keeping that promise.

“It is quite appropriate that such innovative financing should be used to build the second phase of the College of Engineering’s digital village,” President Todd adds. “When complete, the digital village will be UK’s high-tech hub, a center of innovation, creativity and discovery that will be crucial to helping Kentucky create a thriving, knowledge-based economy.”

An extraordinary career

Marksbury says he has always been an entrepreneur with a strong work ethic, having been influenced by several family role models. His grandfather was a tenant farmer. His great uncle pioneered the real estate market in Florida prior to the Great Depression. And his father was a manager at IBM-Lexington by day and a farmer the rest of the time.

He also learned to recognize opportunity from these family members.

When Marksbury was just five or six years old, he would gather ripe vegetables from the family’s garden and sell them door-to-door. And when he chose to enroll at the University of Kentucky, he was intrigued by information put forward in a new student orientation session.

“My dad told me to major in business,” he remembers. “He thought I would do well there. But when a slide show for incoming freshmen indicated that UK graduates with degrees in engineering were commanding the highest starting salaries, I decided to go that route, even though I wasn’t really sure what ‘engineering’ was.

“I soon found out that engineering was hard,” he reflects. “I studied a lot. And of course, I took classes from Dr. Vince Drnevich because he was said to be the toughest professor. I liked the fast pace of his classes.

“I took one class in computer science — we were still using punch cards then! I also took a class in finance for engineers and that was one of the best courses I have ever had. I learned a lot in that class. As it turned out, engineering was the perfect choice because it gave me the critical thinking skills so important in business.”

After graduating magna cum laude with a bachelor of science degree in civil engineering in 1980, Marksbury began his
In the 1990s, as businesses struggled with the concept of customer relationship management on the Internet, Marksbury and Kloiber, benefitting from the perspective provided by the PDR companies’ success, had their idea — develop products that would enable large enterprises to practice effective customer relationship management through multiple channels and all customer touch points, not just the Internet. Their new company, Exstream, founded in 1998 in the basement of the Marksbury home in Lexington, began a period of phenomenal growth after their Dialogue software was made available to customers beginning in January 2000.

Dialogue was and continues to be a tremendous success. It fueled a period of growth in which the company went from no annual revenue in 1998 and 1999 to more than $90 million by 2008. Today, Exstream provides software solutions for more than 400 large enterprises around the world to streamline document creation processes and produce higher quality communication. Customers are found in a wide variety of industries. Exstream, headquartered in Lexington at Coldstream Research Campus, now has about 300 employees, many of them graduates of the University of Kentucky. Exstream was ranked among the world’s leading technology companies when it was acquired by Hewlett-Packard in 2008.

Marksbury’s entrepreneurial success is widely recognized and honored. He was a regional winner of the 2003 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award and has twice been a finalist for Inc. magazine’s Entrepreneur of the Year Award. Along with Todd, he is also a member of the Kentucky Entrepreneur Hall of Fame.

A visionary gift

After selling Exstream, Marksbury and his wife, Beverly, created the Marksbury Family Foundation to provide support for education and economic development. He explains, “We had spent 25 years building our three companies here in Kentucky, and after selling the third one, we decided it was time for us to make some philanthropic gifts.

“As a part of building Exstream, we had recruited many employees from UK Engineering,” he continues. “The University of Kentucky had been good to me and I thought I should give something back. I spoke with Dean Tom Lester of the College of Engineering and with President Todd and it seemed that the best possibility was a new engineering building. As I talked further with Dr. Todd, it became clear to me that he and I share the same goals for education and economic development in our home state of Kentucky.

“If you want to make a difference . . . and you have the opportunity to make a difference . . . what better place could there be than at the University of Kentucky? We have the best and brightest right here. I want to be a part of success. I want to help create success.

“I like having a big, audacious goal such as becoming a Top-20 university . . . and I want to help UK get there. I also want to help those who want to help themselves through innovation, determination and hard work. And I want to do that in a way that can make a difference.”

Mike Richey, UK vice president for Development, notes, “We are extremely grateful for this lead gift from Davis and Beverly Marksbury, and for these significant gifts from James Hardymon and James McDonald. In today’s economy, we need alumni and others who have benefitted from the University of Kentucky and its programs to provide funding to help us advance into exciting...
new areas. Private gifts from the university’s alumni and friends can make a world of difference and have major impact on our students and our Commonwealth.”

Mike Richey continues, “This gift from the Marksbury Family Foundation is truly visionary. For decades to come, it will help other students from Kentucky and elsewhere follow in Mr. Marksbury’s footsteps in the UK College of Engineering. Just imagine what these new generations of engineering students will accomplish in our state, the nation and the world! We need more gifts like this one to help fund big ideas that are transformational to our university and to Kentucky.”

**A remarkable building**

In describing the new Davis Marksbury Building, Dean Lester comments, “This newest academic facility will provide current and future UK engineering and computer science students with classrooms, laboratories and research facilities that will equal or surpass anything offered by any other university in the nation.”

The three-story, 45,014-gross-square-foot building will house the UK Center for Visualization and Virtual Environments, the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering and the Department of Computer Science. All are part of the UK College of Engineering.

The building also will be UK’s first to receive certification under the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system developed by the U.S. Green Building Council.

Dean Lester observes further, “Given the College of Engineering’s role as a leader in advancing environmental-related research in efficient energy production, air and water purification and other ‘green’ engineering endeavors, it is extremely appropriate that the first LEED-certified building on UK’s campus be dedicated to engineering and computer science.”

The building’s roof will include photovoltaic collectors to convert sunlight into electrical power to help serve the building and provide research opportunities.

The building will also comply with requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act regarding accessibility for physically-challenged persons.

The first floor will house an administrative suite, a presentation/multipurpose room that seats up to 100, a visualization lounge and media suite and a computer lab. The second and third floors will house hard and soft laboratories for computer program development and research as well as faculty offices. The third floor also will house air-handling equipment for the building.

The basement of the facility will consist primarily of a mechanical and electrical equipment room but also will include a central computer server room. An emergency generator also will be situated in the basement.

The funding will cover the costs of design, construction, furnishing and landscaping the Davis Marksbury Building. The cost of maintenance and operation will be absorbed by the university.

Dean Lester notes, “The vision and generosity of Davis and Beverly Marksbury help position the University of Kentucky and the College of Engineering at the forefront of research facilities and opportunities necessary to attract and retain Top-20 caliber faculty and students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines.”

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