

TechNews

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Innovation Center receives landmark matching donation

Utsav Gandhi
CAMPUS EDITOR

"Today is my second best day as President of the university. The first was when the Fueling Innovation campaign was made public, and today, we are announcing a landmark challenge gift towards the same goal. If someone were to ask me a few days ago, 'what if someone gave you 10 million dollars, I'd probably just ask again—really?'" said, John L. Anderson, the President of Illinois Institute of Technology.

Friday, February 28, was a breakthrough occasion for the course of history this university is charting.

President Anderson welcomed some members of the Board of Trustees, university administration, staff and faculty, student representatives from the Leadership Academy and the Student Government Association as well as many other well-wishers of the university in the Atrium of Tech Park; even as some students were religiously pursuing class projects in the Idea Shop next door.

The occasion was to announce a twelve-month, ten million-dollar challenge gift towards the university's planned Innovation Center, by alumnus Ed Kaplan (MMAE, '65). Emphasizing the fact that 1968 was the last time an academic building was constructed on the IIT main campus; the President spoke about the importance of the 100,000 square foot space that is expected to house the IIT Institute of Design, IIT's flagship IPRO program, the Idea Shop and the Leadership Academy, among other offices. Practitioners from the Chicagoland will be available to mentor stu-



dents to "learn, create and innovate," which will transform the way IIT interacts with the community.

It will encourage students to think big and work on interdisciplinary team projects for some valuable experiential learning.

Dane Christianson (MMAE, proposed graduation 2015) inventor of the X-Cube, was a fitting choice to introduce the illustrious alum making this landmark gift, Ed Kaplan.

Both are mechanical engineers, from Chicago, became entrepreneurs in their early 20s, and are graduating exactly 50 years apart.

Christianson talked about how Kaplan was behind the development of barcode technologies in 1969 ("Zebra technology") which revolutionized the way we did business. Christianson also mentioned how he got to combine his entrepreneurial bug with his love for robotics at the Idea Shop, which is now slowly outgrowing itself ("from what used to be an empty Idea Shop three years ago to everyone getting ideas now")—making the announcement of the gift all the more relevant. The "Ed Kaplan Family Institute for Innovation and Technology Entrepreneurship" was then unveiled with a custom made X-Cube handed over from Christianson

to Kaplan, whose wife, Carol was not able to be present but personally acknowledged by Christianson himself.

Kaplan spoke about his discussions with his good friends, Regent Craig Duchossois and campaign co-chair John Rowe, which impressed upon him the importance of the building they would have. Enhancing the unique skill sets of the students, it would increase their value in the competitive marketplace, making students "flock" to IIT to pursue a variety of career paths. It will stimulate design thinking and methodology across the board of educational levels at IIT, allow more IPRO classes to solve problems, encourage the development of new things and ways of thinking, firmly establishing IIT as the center for technical innovation among Chicago's "tech ecosystem."

The vision is here, the plan is here, the window of opportunity is open—so IIT must act now to move into a leadership position. He stressed on the importance of the nexus between engineering, technology and business – and how this center will place IIT on the map of technology innovation and entrepreneurship. With that, he announced that if within the next twelve months the university will be able to fundraise ten million dollars towards the Innovation Center, he would match that gift, bringing the project goal to almost 75 percent of the target.

"If you can't feel good today, you probably can never feel good," President Anderson remarked.

To read more about the Fueling Innovation Campaign, visit <https://fuelinginno-vation.iit.edu/>.

