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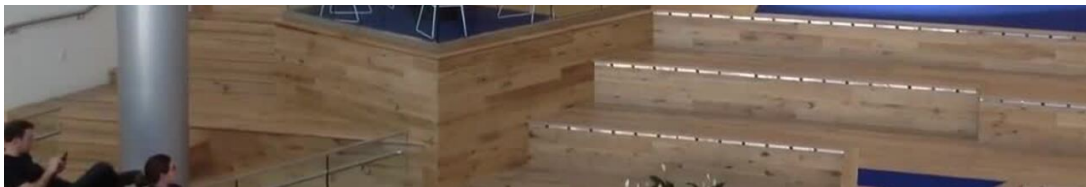
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'An incredible legacy': University leaders reflect on the impact of Bill Gatton

BY MONICA KAST

UPDATED APRIL 19, 2022 3:54 PM





UK named its new \$200 million student center for its top donor, Carol Martin "Bill" Gatton. He gave \$20 million to the project. BY LINDA BLACKFORD



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[Carol Martin "Bill" Gatton](#), an influential businessman and strong supporter of higher education in Kentucky and Tennessee, died Monday.

Gatton was 89 years old and a native of Muhlenberg County. He graduated from the University of Kentucky in 1954 and went on to own several car dealerships in Tennessee, Alabama and Texas, as well as real estate projects in Kentucky.

Gatton was the largest single donor to UK, the university said [earlier this year](#). He donated more than \$70 million to UK in his lifetime.

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His influence extended beyond UK, throughout Kentucky and Tennessee.

UK PRESIDENT HAILS GATTON'S 'HARD WORK, GENEROSITY AND SERVICE'

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Gatton was a longtime donor to the University of Kentucky, supporting scholarships and buildings on campus.

He donated \$14 million in 1995 for UK's business school, which was later named the Gatton College of Business and Economics. Later, he donated \$20 million for the expansion of the Student Center, which was named the Gatton Student Center.

In a note to the UK Alumni Association Board of Directors and Leadership Advisory Council, UK President Eli Capilouto said Gatton was "a Kentucky original" with a commitment to "hard work, generosity and service."

"As part of that commitment, Mr. Gatton always saw his alma mater as a shining beacon — the place that could do the most to serve and make better his native state," Capilouto said in the note. "And he pushed us — every day and in so many ways — to live up to that responsibility and to make real that aspiration."

Gatton's donations to UK made "an education possible for thousands and thousands of students, most of whom will never know him or how much he was committed to their success," Capilouto said.

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Earlier this year, Gatton made the largest donation given at one time towards scholarships in UK's history, \$5 million to go toward scholarships for first-generation students and Kentucky students from medically under-served areas who want to attend medical school.

In total, he donated more than \$70 million to UK. His generosity also had an impact on other donors to UK, encouraging them to donate to the university, Capilouto said.

"It is an incredible loss that we mourn, but an incredible legacy that we have been given the gift of celebrating and carrying forward," Capilouto said.





Left to right: Mike Richey, Bill Gatton and UK President Eli Capilouto at the dedication of the Gatton Student Center on Aug. 31, 2018. Provided by the University of Kentucky, Mark Cornelison *Provided by the University of Kentucky, Mark Cornelison*

‘HIS GENEROSITY WILL CONTINUE TO BENEFIT COUNTLESS STUDENTS’

Gatton made a donation to Western Kentucky University which helped fund the Carol Martin Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science. At Gatton Academy, high school students complete their final two years of high school while also taking college classes and living on campus at WKU.

The rigorous program admits about 95 Kentucky students each year, and allows the students to graduate from high school with a portion of their college degree completed, [according to WKU](#).

“The WKU family is saddened to learn of Bill Gatton’s passing,” WKU said in a statement. “His generosity will continue to benefit countless students across the Commonwealth as they make their way to the Gatton Academy on our campus. Few people possess the level of selflessness and vision that he had, and the entire WKU community has been enriched because of him.”

GATTON STRESSED IMPORTANCE OF GIVING BACK TO FUTURE STUDENTS

Gatton was the primary donor for the East Tennessee State University College of Pharmacy, which is also named after him.

At the time the school was founded, there was only one other public pharmacy college in Tennessee, [according to ETSU](#). It was located in Memphis, on the other side of the state, and difficult to access for students in East Tennessee.

The college was named the Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy in 2007, according to ETSU. Since the college was founded, nearly 900 students have graduated and are practicing pharmacy, which would not have been possible without Gatton's donation, Larry Calhoun, the founding dean of the Gatton College of Pharmacy, said in a statement.

"Mr. Gatton not only provided financial support for the college, he was always quick to accept an invitation to speak to the students," Calhoun said. "His message was always the same: 'It's important for you to give back in support of future students needing help.'"

In total, Gatton donated more than \$4 million to ETSU, Calhoun said.

"While many of Mr. Gatton's donations were well documented, we will never know of the many instances of private support he provided for organizations and individuals," Calhoun said. "Mr. Gatton will be missed. The Bill Gatton College of Pharmacy will strive to assure that every student that attends the College of Pharmacy will know who he was and the critical role he played in their opportunity to attend pharmacy school."

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MONICA KAST

   859-334-0595

Monica Kast covers higher education for the Herald-Leader and Kentucky.com. Previously, she covered higher education in Tennessee for the Knoxville News Sentinel. She is originally from Louisville, Kentucky.

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