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Tykesons give the UO \$10 million for building

The contribution will help erect a new home for Arts and Sciences and the Career Center

By Diane Dietz
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Eugene resident Don Tykeson has said his idea of fun is giving away money.

He must have had a heck of a time this week when he and his wife, Willie, gave the University of Oregon \$10 million for a new building to house the College of Arts and Sciences administration, the Career Center and assorted classrooms.

“I feel like I was put on this good Earth to try to make it better,” Tykeson said in a 2008 interview.

“Health care has to be at the top of the list. If you have good health, then you need an education, and with education you can fulfill the dreams of your life. And if you have an education, you have the opportunity to enjoy the arts.”

The planned 50,000-square-foot Tykeson building is expected to cost about \$34 million. The university will ask the Legislature for \$17 million worth of state bond backing, and other individual donors will come through with the remaining \$7 million, said Andrew Marcus, interim dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

“We are very optimistic that we will have that in hand,” he said.

Tykeson on Friday didn't respond to a call from The Register-Guard seeking comment.

Tykeson, 87, made his money riding the wave of television from crackly sets in the 1950s to the Internet streaming hardware of today.

His early company, Liberty Communications, grew at a rate of 30 percent a year for 20 years, Tykeson has said. His last company, Bend Broadband, enjoyed double-digit growth for a decade.

Earlier this year, when the Tykeson family sold the company, it was bringing in \$70 million in revenue annually, according to news reports.

For the past 18 years, Tykeson has concentrated on philanthropy. He gives to health, education and the arts. He funds anti-tax groups that are at work at every level of public policy. He also has sharply criticized the Oregon Legislature for disinvesting in higher education.

Tykeson and his wife give to the UO Lundquist College of Business, his alma mater. But he's also touted the UO College of Education in a guest editorial in *The Register-Guard*.

Well-rounded

Tykeson grew up on a family farm near Newberg. He attended a one-room schoolhouse, and he put himself through college by working on a fishing boat.

"My mother was a teacher, and her passion for improving the lot of children in the classroom has carried over throughout my life," he wrote in the guest editorial.

In the late 1940s, at the UO, he raced through his business classes during his freshman and sophomore year. Then, "I concluded I'm going to get a well-rounded education."

He spent the next two years studying philosophy and history.

"He took a lot of classes across the liberal arts and had an amazing learning experience through all that," Marcus said. "He feels deeply as we do that liberal arts provide the foundation that's necessary for student lifelong success."

In a prepared statement, Tykeson said: "You're on this planet to enjoy, contribute, make a difference, lead a fulfilling life and have fun along the way, and I think a liberal arts education helps equip you very well for that."

The new building will be designed to offer liberal arts next to career services, so students will get acquainted with the connection.

Managers want employees who can "think logically, act independently, question critically, communicate clearly. Those are at the core liberal arts training," Marcus said.

A student might say "Oh, I can see where following through on my geology degree is going to lead to a multitude of trajectories I could follow in life," he said.

The Tykesons give money both through their Tykeson Family Charitable Trust and directly from the family checkbooks.

Each year, the trust gives mostly small — \$500 to \$1,000 — contributions to politically conservative organizations, such as the American Enterprise Institute, Cascade Policy Institute, Cato Institute and Americans for Prosperity, according to reports the trust files with the IRS. The exception was in 2011, when the trust gave \$100,000 to the nonprofit DonorsTrust, which seeks to counter government overspending and regulatory overreach.

The Tykesons' individual political contributions trend conservative, too, with money for George W. Bush, and more recently, for Texas Gov. Rick Perry, Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas and U.S. Senate candidate Monica Wehby, who is challenging Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon.

But health is high on the list, IRS documents for the most recent four year period shows.

Tykeson has lived with multiple sclerosis since he was 30, and he gives toward research for a cure. He gave \$126,000 over 2009-2012 to the Eisenhower Medical Center in Rancho Mirage, Calif. Oregon Health & Science University got \$195,500 from him in the same period, and PeaceHealth/Sacred Heart received \$354,590. The Tykeson trust gave Cottage Grove-based South Lane Mental Health \$200,000 in that period.

Learning always

But it's education that reaches the deepest part of the Tykeson pockets. The trust wrote \$807,960 in checks to Lane Community College over the four-year period.

Oregon State University is seeing increasing Tykeson donations — amounting to \$195,500 in four years. Most recently, the Tykesons gave \$1 million to help expand the OSU Cascades Campus in Bend into a four-year university. They also gave \$250,000 to establish the first endowed faculty position there.

Tykeson and his daughter, Amy, who was CEO of the family company, are both UO business graduates, but Don Tykeson's sister and a son-in-law both attended OSU.

"I'm an Oregon alum and a supporter of the Ducks," Tykeson said in an OSU prepared statement. "But I'm interested in our state and our country and things that are much larger than that."

But Tykeson's heart belongs with the Ducks. The 1951 uber-alumnus does everything from recruiting students, to defending the university in print, to serving on boards and advisory groups, to cheering on the UO football team to paying for what's important to him.

For several years, he gave \$25,000 a year to help send MBA students on their annual trip to China and countries in Southeast Asia.

But he also founded the Center for Teaching Writing — to elevate the craft — in the English Composition Program.

The Tykesons invest in people, too.

The Tykeson trust annually awards up to five scholarships of up to \$10,000 each through the Oregon Student Access Commission. The family supports a senior instructor and a professor within the Lundquist college.

Before Scott Coltrane became the UO interim provost and then president, he was the “Tykeson Dean of Arts and Sciences” — courtesy of the Tykeson Deanship Endowment Fund. The endowment boosted Coltrane’s \$237,000 annual salary by \$15,000 each year.

Tykeson served on the UO Foundation Board so long he was titled a “trustee emeritus.” The Tykeson trust makes sizable donations to the foundation each year — including for an Autzen skybox — with a total of \$525,000 in a four-year period.

Tykeson accolades

Over the decades, Don and Willie Tykeson have been showered with community honors for their charitable board work and substantial donations.

1997: Don and Willie, UO Presidential Medal

2001: Don, UO Pioneer Award

2006: Don, Eugene Area Chamber First Citizen

2009: Don, Tom McCall Award, Oregon Association of Broadcasters

2010: Don, UO Distinguished Service Award

2012: United Way of Lane County’s Alton F. Baker Award

2013: Nat Giustina Philanthropy Award, PeaceHealth