

UC SANTA BARBARA

# *THE* **Current**

June 4, 2007

Eileen Conrad

## **UCSB Receives \$12.5 Million Gift from Virgil Elings and Betty Elings Wells to Support Research and Innovation at the California NanoSystems Institute**

Virgil Elings and Betty Elings Wells have made a \$12.5 million gift to UC Santa Barbara to support pioneering research at the California NanoSystems Institute (CNSI).

In recognition of their recent gift, the new building that is home to the prestigious California Institute for Science and Innovation will be named in honor of Virgil Elings.

The CNSI is a multidisciplinary research partnership between UCLA and UC Santa Barbara established by the state in 2000 with the support of the state legislature and California industry.

By exploring the power and potential of manipulating structures molecule-by-molecule, the CNSI is on its way to creating revolutionary new materials, devices, and systems that will enhance virtually every aspect of our lives -- helping to drive California's economy through innovations in medical delivery and health care, powerful new information technologies, energy efficient devices, environmental

improvements, and more.

The Elings and Wells gift is the largest contribution to The Campaign for UC Santa Barbara, which seeks to raise \$500 million to ensure UCSB's excellence for future generations.

With this recent gift, a total of \$415 million has been contributed to the campaign by alumni and friends.

"UCSB is sincerely grateful to Virgil and Betty for their extraordinary generosity, we are pleased to have our building for the California NanoSystems Institute bear the Elings name," said UCSB Chancellor Henry T. Yang. "Virgil and Betty's vision for our campus began over 40 years ago, with their shared goals of scholarship and innovation in scientific and business pursuits.

As a UCSB professor of physics, Virgil Elings had the foresight to bring the best science graduates and quality research and design together.

This integration of science and industry proved to be a winning combination, as it is today at the California NanoSystems Institute."

Virgil Elings is a former UCSB professor of physics who made fundamental contributions leading to the scientific revolution at the nanoscale.

In 1987, he co-founded Digital Instruments (DI), the first company to make the power of atomic scanning probe microscopy readily available to scientists and engineers, enabling them to view and explore nanoscale features and structures never seen before -- a critical starting point in nanoscience and nanotechnology.

"Our company, Digital Instruments, was a part of the beginning of what people today call nanotechnology," said Virgil Elings.

"We also made our money in Santa Barbara, and this is one of many gifts we are making to give back to the community in which we have prospered."

During their marriage, Betty Elings Wells was a real estate investor and business partner with her former husband, Virgil Elings.

Together, they launched numerous entrepreneurial ventures, including Digital Instruments, where she was office manager and secretary of the corporation.

Wells said that she made the gift to UCSB to honor her former husband and mentor, the devoted employees at Digital Instruments -- many of whom were UCSB graduates -- , and to support the university she has been affiliated with since her arrival in Santa Barbara 40 years ago.

"Virgil has made a huge impact on the world by advancing nanoscience, and I think his name should be carried forward," said Wells.

"He is a brilliant scientist, inventor, and educator who was able to accomplish what many men dream about and few make real.

My desire to help fund education and research in Elings Hall is also an expression of gratitude to our employees at Digital Instruments, since the building will be dedicated to them as well.

It is my hope that UCSB will continue the level of exciting research that transpired within the walls of Digital Instruments."

The CNSI building, now known as Elings Hall, stands near the eastern entrance to the campus and is the hub for nanoscience research at UCSB.

The institute fosters collaborative research and builds on the substantial and collective strengths of the College of Engineering and the sciences.

It also brings together innovators from California universities, industries, and national laboratories and trains the next generation of innovators and entrepreneurs.

The Elings and Wells gift will significantly advance nanoscience research at the institute as well as in engineering and the sciences.

It will provide \$9 million in unrestricted support to develop and implement innovative research and education initiatives and create new laboratory facilities. In addition, a \$3.5 million endowment for the CNSI will generate ongoing resources to build and sustain state-of-the-art programs and to allow rapid response to new scientific and educational opportunities.

Evelyn Hu, UCSB professor of electrical and computer engineering and scientific director of the CNSI, noted that the factors leading to Digital Instruments' extraordinary success -- innovation, ingenuity, hard work, dedication, and bringing

together a core group of people who share a vision -- "map so well onto what is underway today at CNSI."

"Virgil and Betty's gift and the confidence that it implies through its support of this new enterprise at UCSB is coming exactly at the right time, allowing us to bring nanoscience research to the next level," said Hu.

"We are now well poised to launch a set of research and education programs that may define critical pathways in science and engineering for the next decade and beyond."

#### About the Donors

Virgil Elings and Betty Elings Wells are partners in their philanthropic support of the California NanoSystems Institute at UC Santa Barbara and several community projects, including Elings Park in Santa Barbara and the Elings Aquatic Center at Dos Pueblos High School.

Their \$12.5 million gift to the campus is the largest contribution to The Campaign for UC Santa Barbara.

With this recent gift, they join UCSB's Lancaster Society Leaders, which recognizes cumulative donors to the campus of \$10 million and above.

In recognition of their generosity, the building housing the California NanoSystems Institute will be named Elings Hall.

Virgil Elings, who earned his Ph.D. in physics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was a professor of physics at UCSB for more than 20 years before he co-founded Digital Instruments (DI) in 1987 with Gus Gurley, a UCSB alumnus.

Digital Instruments had a simple goal -- to make the power of scanning probe microscopy readily available to scientists and engineers, enabling them to view and explore nanoscale features and structures never seen before.

That year, they constructed the first commercially successful scanning tunneling microscope.

It was a critical starting point for nanoscience and nanotechnology.

DI received several awards for business and engineering excellence, including three Photonics Circle of Excellence awards and local, state, and national new product awards from the Society of Professional Engineers.

In 1992, DI was ranked No. 150 in the INC 500 list of the 500 fastest growing private companies in the U.S.

In 1998, the corporation merged with Veeco Instruments, a leading supplier of instrumentation for the research, semiconductor, data storage, telecommunications, and other industries.

By combining the technological strengths of each company, the newly formed company added the distinction of being the world leader in 3-D surface metrology.

Elings, who holds 42 patents, served as the company's president and chairman of the board until his retirement in 1999.

At UCSB, he has been a mentor for the Technology Management Program.

He has also been a guest speaker in the program's entrepreneur lecture series and in the Economics Department.

Elings, who resides in Santa Ynez, is a rancher and lavender farmer.

He displays his collection of vintage and rare motorcycles and European race bikes at his motorcycle museum in Solvang.

Betty Elings Wells is a successful real estate investor and property manager in the Santa Barbara area, Iowa, and Arizona.

She earned a B.A. in history with a minor in political science from the State College of Boston, while her former husband, Virgil Elings, was completing his Ph.D. in physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

After moving to Santa Barbara, Wells began her property management career in Isla Vista, building investment capital for the couple's business ventures in which she was actively involved.

For Digital Instruments, the company co-founded by Virgil Elings, she was office manager and secretary of the corporation.

At UCSB, Wells served two terms as president of the Faculty Women's Club, and continues her involvement with the organization as a generous benefactor of student scholarships awarded by the club.

Betty Wells and Virgil Elings have two children, Michael and Jeffrey, who are both engineers.

Michael graduated with a degree in electrical engineering from the University of Colorado, and Jeffrey was awarded a degree in mechanical engineering from UC San Diego.

Wells resides in Goleta.

Related Links

[California NanoSystems Institute](#)

---

## **About UC Santa Barbara**

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.