UC SANTA BARBARA
THE Current

March 2, 2016
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Leadership Recognized

Robert W. Duggan — philanthropist, venture capitalist and UC Santa Barbara alumnus — was honored by UCSB for his work in the field of technology entrepreneurship. To recognize him for his accomplishments and vision, Duggan was presented with the Venky Narayanamurti Entrepreneurial Leadership Award.

Given annually by the UCSB College of Engineering's Technology Management Program (TMP), the award is conferred on individuals who have demonstrated success and leadership in high-technology leadership, particularly those who have been influential on the Central Coast or who have an affiliation with UCSB. Duggan is the 17th to be chosen by both the university and a committee of his peers to receive the award.

"Every one of these events is a wonderful event because we are recognizing the leaders in entrepreneurship in the community," said Rod Alferness, dean of the UCSB College of Engineering. Duggan, he added, "is an entrepreneur, a turnaround artist and fundamentally he exhibits the kind of leadership that makes a difference in this world."

Duggan has been investing in and backing new ideas since 1975. He jumped into the high-tech industry in 1989, when he became chairman of the board for the Santa Barbara-based robotic surgical company Computer Motion, a position he held until 2003, when he was named the company's CEO. In 2003 he negotiated a merger between Computer Motion and Intuitive Surgical, a Sunnyvale-based robotic-assisted surgery company, serving as director of the newly merged company until 2011.

Meanwhile, in 2009 Duggan took the reins of struggling biopharmaceutical company Pharmacyclics as its CEO and chairman of the board. During his tenure there, the company's chemotherapeutic drug Imbruvica received approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in treatment of four types of cancer. The FDA designated the drug a "breakthrough therapy" — a rare distinction — earning it accelerated approval. During his seven-year tenure at Pharmacyclics, Duggan drew no salary or stock options and even covered most of his related expenses. Pharmacyclics merged with the pharmaceutical research and development company AbbVie in 2015.

Duggan remains close to the UCSB campus, having made some of his early successful investments with fellow Venky award winners and tech entrepreneurs Yulun Wang and Reece Duca. He and wife, Trish, who also attended UCSB, have invested a few million dollars across several disciplines, including the College of Engineering and the athletics division.

"Innate and inborn in every human being are the characteristics of genius," said Duggan, a big believer in the power of education to solve problems and change the world. "You have a right to know that that genius is within you."

The Venky Narayanamurti Entrepreneurial Leadership Award is made possible through an endowment to the TMP in the College of Engineering. The endowment honors Professor Venkatesh 'Venky' Narayanamurti whose tenure as dean of the College of Engineering at UCSB was distinguished for its leadership and support for the development of a thriving local entrepreneurial economy, and dedication to the infusion of entrepreneurial spirit into all aspects of the College of Engineering and UCSB.

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.