Google software engineer creates legacy at MSU

A senior software engineer at Google has made a $2 million commitment to benefit the Michigan State University College of Engineering.

The gift, established through an estate plan, is from Doug Zongker of Mountain View, Calif., who graduated from MSU in 1996 with a bachelor’s degree in computer science.

The provision in his estate will establish the first endowed chair of computer science at MSU.

“I wouldn’t be where I am today without the tools and training that I got during my years at Michigan State University,” Zongker said. “I am pleased to be in a position to be able to give back. This gift is a small way that I can help my industry and my alma mater stay in the forefront of technology advancement.”

“Named chair positions allow the university to build academic excellence with effects that are far-reaching,” said MSU President Lou Anna K. Simon. “We are grateful to Doug Zongker for playing such a key role in our ability to attract future leaders in computing to MSU, which in turn drives our ability to be innovative in ways that contribute to the economic development of Michigan and beyond.”

Endowed professorships and chair positions are the highest level of faculty distinction. The support from an endowment provides a dependable, perpetual source of funding to support the position, as well as the ability to conduct research and scholarship as new opportunities arise.

“Doug’s long-range vision helps our entire college and the computing community,” said Leo Kempel, acting dean of the College of Engineering. “His gift will provide a steady stream of income to advance MSU’s mission and help us sharpen our plan for adapting to the vast technological changes that await us in the future.”

Stephen Bates, senior director of university development and alumni relations in the MSU College of Engineering called Zongker an outstanding example of a dedicated alumnus who has provided significant support to his alma mater. “While being young for the traditional bequest donor, he shows that it is never too early to think about an estate gift,” Bates said. “This is an exceptional way for a person wanting to establish a legacy and honor their relationship with Michigan State University.”

Matt Mutka, professor and chair of the MSU Department of Computer Science and Engineering, said a gift such as Zongker’s is crucial in attracting some of the world’s most creative researchers and engaged teachers. “Endowed chairs enrich the academic environment, which helps us attract bright and curious students,” Mutka said. “They are also a key way to recognize the continuing contributions of senior-level faculty, which propels research and creates collaboration opportunities with scholars around the world.”
Doug Zongker ‘96

After graduating from MSU, Zongker earned a doctoral degree at the University of Washington in Seattle in 2003 and joined Google. He was an early engineer on the Gmail email service, and worked on its first spam-detection system, systems to manage the service’s rapidly expanding production deployment, and other internal infrastructure.

Since 2007, he has worked on the Android mobile phone operating system, specifically for remote device management and over-the-air system update.

In February 2011, he established the Doug Zongker Endowed Discretionary Fund for Computer Science and Engineering at MSU. It has funded the purchase of devices for the department’s new mobile applications development class, which began in spring 2013. Students use the devices for the course’s programming projects.

Zongker Endowment

The Zongker Endowment will be managed by MSU’s Office of Investments and Financial Management. Different from other gifts, the total amount of the endowment is invested and a portion of the income will be available for spending each year, while the remainder will be reinvested to grow the fund and safeguard against inflation. MSU’s long-term investment returns have performed ahead of peer institutions. The median college and university investment was 8 percent at 10 years, while MSU’s was 8.6 percent.

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