$2 million estate gift will endow bridge research at MSU

The largest single donation ever given to Michigan State University's Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering will enhance research focused on the nation's strained transportation infrastructure.

A couple from the Greater Lansing Area has designated $2 million of their estate to fund an endowed faculty chair with an emphasis on bridge research.

The donors, who wish to remain anonymous, both earned two degrees from MSU. The husband, a retired engineer, spent much of his career working in all aspects of Michigan bridges, from construction to inspection, and rehabilitation to replacement.

“I have had a long passion and interest in bridges,” he said. “As a child, I was particularly interested in watching the bridge construction when the freeway system was being built in Detroit. As an engineer, I later examined the damage to those bridges, especially from high-load impacts.”

He said there is an important need for the country to address the issue of infrastructure, especially the transportation infrastructure.

“A trip of any length will take you over a bridge that is functionally deficient or even obsolete today,” he said. “It seems like the effort to repair them is coming up short. Our hopes are to advance design, materials, construction, maintenance, restoration and financial strategies.”

“The advanced mobility systems being designed today at Michigan State and elsewhere will require upgraded roads and bridges,” MSU President Lou Anna K. Simon added. “This generous gift will deepen our capabilities in developing...
Leo Kempel, dean of the College of Engineering, said the donation will ultimately add another endowed faculty chair to the college. “Endowed chairs attract outstanding faculty members and provide a means to recognize research accomplishments,” he said. “We are grateful for this gift that also will attract talented students who share the donor’s passion on bridges. I can’t think of a better legacy.”

The estate gift raises the number of endowed chairs in the College of Engineering to seven. It supports MSU’s Empower Extraordinary campaign, a $1.5 billion effort that publicly launched in October 2014. One of the campaign’s key goals is to establish more endowed faculty chairs throughout the university.

To date, the College of Engineering has raised more than $56 million of its $80 million Empower Extraordinary goal.