CS Alumnus Thomas Siebel Makes $100 Million Gift to UI

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By: Christine Des Garennes

Three-time University of Illinois graduate Thomas Siebel has pledged to give a record $100 million to the university to fund science and engineering initiatives on campus.

The gift is the largest amount of money the UI has ever received from a single donor.

Exactly how the $100 million will be used has not been determined yet. But the fund, called the Thomas M. Siebel Fund for Excellence in Science and Engineering, will focus on research on issues such as alternative energy, bioengineering and stem cell research. Money will go to graduate fellowships, endowed and chaired professorships, symposia and collaborative projects between the UI and other universities, businesses or government agencies. The money could also go toward a new building to house all these new programs.

"We're enormously grateful for the gift," said Chancellor Richard Herman Friday. Siebel's gift sets "a high watermark," he said.

University officials announced the $100 million donation at a black-tie dinner launching the university's Brilliant Futures campaign. The UI plans to raise $2.25 billion through the end of 2011.

To make a contribution to the computer science department:
http://www.cs.uiuc.edu/alumni/giving.php.

President B. Joseph White called Thomas and Stacey Siebel "among the most generous philanthropists now in all of higher education."

"Tom set a new standard as others have in the past, like Arnold and Mabel Beckman, like David Grainger, in terms of significant giving. Nothing could be more helpful for us than to have a significant gift of this magnitude," White said.

Siebel is no stranger to the UI. Not only is he a graduate - he received a history degree, an MBA, a master's degree in computer science and an honorary doctorate from the UI - he serves as an adviser to the College of Engineering, is a director of the UI Foundation and has already donated tens of millions of dollars to the university.

In 1999 he donated $32 million to the university for the Thomas M. Siebel Center for Computer Science, a teaching and research facility on the north end of campus. His company, Siebel Systems, donated $2.6 million in 2000 for the Siebel Scholars Fellowship Program in the Department of Computer Science. He and his wife, through their Thomas and Stacey Siebel Foundation, gave $2 million to establish the Thomas M. Siebel Chair in Computer Science. And he donated $2 million in 2006 to create the Thomas M. Siebel Chair in the History of Science in the Department of History.

Before Siebel's $100 million donation, the single largest gift to the UI from an individual was in 1985. That's when Arnold Beckman, founder of the scientific equipment company Beckman Instruments, donated $40 million for the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology.

Herman called Siebel's $100 million donation "a gift of passion." Siebel not only gives money to the university, he is involved with the university, he pushes the university, Herman said.

"His thinking is expansive. He realizes that the problems one wants to approach such as energy transcend one discipline. He's one who's focused on a gift that is transformative just as he himself transformed an industry," he added.

Siebel joined Oracle in 1984 as a systems engineer. Eventually he went into sales and by 1989 he was general manager of the company's direct marketing. In 1990 he left Oracle for the software company Gain Technology and in 1993 he started he own company, Siebel Systems. In the fall of 2005, Oracle announced it would purchase Siebel Systems for $5.85 billion.

He is currently chair of First Virtual Group of Palo Alto, Calif., a holding company with interests in real estate, agribusiness, global investment management and philanthropy.

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