From the President

The University of Hartford will always be a part of Harry Jack Gray’s legacy

When Harry Jack Gray and his wife, Helen, began supporting the University in the late 1970s, they did so with great enthusiasm, a love for and understanding of education, and a great appreciation for what the University could offer the Hartford region and the world. Over the past 30 years, they have been close friends of three University presidents: Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, Humphrey Tonkin, and myself. The Grays listened to our dreams for the University, offered their advice, and gave most generously. As a result, the University reflects not only their generosity; it reflects their vision.

With Harry at its helm, United Technologies Corporation gave the lead gift for the building that we call UTC Hall, now home to the College of Engineering, Technology, and Architecture. That is no accident, of course. UTC, under Harry’s leadership, became one of the world’s leading technology companies. Harry understood the obvious connection between that company, headquartered in Hartford, and Hartford’s university. But he also understood that America’s world leadership would increasingly rely on its being a world leader in technology, and that meant that universities like ours would increasingly need to educate young women and men in engineering and technology.

In the 1980s Harry and Helen supplied matching funding to enable the University to secure a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to create the Harry Jack Gray Endowment in the Humanities. That endowment has allowed history, English, philosophy, and the other humanities fields to animate the intellectual life of the University and enabled our faculty and faculty from local public schools to learn from some of the world’s leading humanists. Again, Harry and Helen understood that all universities depend on a vibrant liberal arts core, and they provided vital funding at just the right time to enable the University of Hartford to thrive.

Later in that decade their key gift helped build the University’s central building, the Harry Jack Gray Center, which houses the Mortensen and Allen Libraries, the Joseloff Gallery, the University Bookstore, and instructional space for the Department of Architecture, the School of Communication (and WWUH Radio and the Kent McCray Television Studio), and the visual communication and illustration departments of the Hartford Art School. It was Harry’s vision that attracted Tai Soo Kim, the highly regarded architect, to design the University’s signature building. Since it also houses the conference center, The 1877 Club, and Wilde Auditorium, Harry understood that the building that carries his name would be a building that would greet many of the University’s first-time visitors, and he wanted to be sure their first impression of the University was favorable. In that, as in everything that connected him to the University, Harry’s vision was spot on.

Harry and Helen gave many other gifts for which they wanted no public recognition. I’ll honor their request, but trust me—dozens of classrooms, laboratories, and academic programs have been created through their smaller gifts. I’ll just mention their first gift to the University under my presidency—the brick sidewalk that runs through the courtyard of the Gray Center—and the last—funding for a bridge program in mathematics for a select group of students entering Hillyer College. These gifts reflect two different aspects of Harry’s vision for the University: a distinctive physical environment and excellent and focused educational programs.

When Harry Jack Gray died on July 8 at the age of 88, the University of Hartford lost its most generous contributor, its staunchest advocate, and its keenest long-range strategist. The Hartford region lost its most successful corporate leader and its most farsighted and conscientious benefactor. I lost one of my best friends, one of my greatest supporters, and one of my most trusted advisors. His name will be forever attached to the University of Hartford; its success will always be part of his legacy.

— Walter Harrison, President

Harry Jack Gray (Hon. ’78), left, with President Harrison in a 2000 photograph