



## StarTribune

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### U's largest gift has big goal: Cure cancer

• The Masons' \$65 million gift to the university's cancer center is their way of making a difference that will last forever.  
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The Masons have a single-minded purpose behind the largest philanthropic gift ever given to the University of Minnesota.

"We want to find a cure for cancer," said Eric Neetenbeek, president of **Minnesota Masonic Charities**, which announced Thursday that over the next 15 years it will give the University of Minnesota \$65 million for cancer research. "We want to have an impact that is literally forever," he said.

Previously, the largest private donation to a Minnesota college or university was \$60 million given to the University of St. Thomas last year by Lee and Penny Anderson.

Whether or not university researchers find the cure for cancer, the Masons' money could at least change the cancer center forever, according to glowing university officials who described the gift as transformative.

The amount pales in comparison to the \$17 million per year the cancer center already receives from both the federal government and other sources. But the Masons' gift is the kind of money that can betget even more money, university officials said.

**Masons continue:** Officially, it's now the Masonic Cancer Center. **AS ▶**

"It changes a thousand times our ability to recruit and retain faculty," said Dr. Frank Cerra, the university's senior vice president for health sciences. In the intensely competitive world of medical research, that's critical to a university's success, because the biggest names come with the biggest federal research grants, he said. "That's another source of money to find the cure," Cerra added.

At the same time, research funding from the National Institutes of Health is shrinking; increasingly, only sure bets will be funded, Cerra said. The Masons' gift can be used to fund novel research ideas and new approaches that the government won't touch. It can be the seed money to get projects to the point where the NIH will fund them, he said, or to complete projects only partially funded by the government.

For example, there are scientists at the university studying molecules in broccoli, cauliflower and green tea that are known to inhibit cancers, said Dr. Doug Yee, the cancer center's director.

"You could never eat enough broccoli to achieve that effect," he said. The researchers received some federal funding to investigate those molecules, but not enough to complete the project.

Yee said he would also like to research why people of different ethnic backgrounds have different susceptibility to cancers, but not enough has been done on the subject to trigger federal money. The Masons' gift could help both projects, he said.

The university's Academic Health Center had a pretty good week overall. In addition to cinching the deal with the Masons, it won approval at the legislature for \$233 million in the bonding bill to build four biosciences buildings.

#### Fifty years of support

The Masons' latest gift brings the amount they have donated to the university during the past 53 years to about \$100 million — enough to buy the name. As of Thursday, the cancer center will be known as the Masonic Cancer Center at the University of Minnesota.

Cerra said he began discussing the donation with Masonic leadership about a year ago.

Since funding the Masonic Hospital at the university in 1958, the Masons have made major donations for cancer care, research and education of medical students each decade. The Masons have existed in Minnesota for 155 years. Today there are about 17,000 members.

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University of Minnesota President Robert Rowland, foreground, helped announce the \$65 million gift to cancer research and care, the U's largest gift ever.



Douglas Yee is the director of the Masonic Cancer Center at the University of Minnesota. The \$65 million gift from Minnesota Masonic Charities will support cancer research and care at the university.

# MINNESOTA DAILY

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RESEARCH

## Spotlight shines on funding cancer research

### CANCER CENTER RECEIVES LARGEST-EVER DONATION FOR THE UNIVERSITY

BY COURTNEY SINNER AND ANNA EWART  
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The University announced Thursday that it received \$65 million from Minnesota Masonic Charities to fund cancer research.

The gift, the largest in University history and to any public university in Minnesota, will be distributed over the next 15 years.

The University of Minnesota Cancer Center will also be renamed the Masonic Cancer Center.

University President Bob Bruininks said the University will be able to maintain and improve its global status as a leader in cancer research because of the gift.

The University has a 53-year tradition

with Minnesota Masonic Charities. With this donation, the group's support for the University will top \$100 million.

Dr. Douglas Yee, director of the Masonic Cancer Center, said the gift will be used to enhance existing projects, supplement grant money cuts and start new research initiatives.

"We've had an upward trajectory for the past 10 years," Yee said. "This makes sure we can fill in the gaps and continue to develop new initiatives."

The donation has been in the works for the past couple of years, Minnesota Masonic Charities President and CEO Eric Neetenbeek said.

"The University wanted to expand

▶ See GIFT Page 3

The donation will push the University closer to its goal of being a top-three research institution.

## Gift

▶ from Page 1

their research programs and needed some help to begin that endeavor," Neetenbeek said.

Frank Cerra, senior vice president for the Academic Health Center, handled negotiations with the organization. He said the detailed negotiations involved everything from how the money will be distributed to the exact wording of the center's new name.

"If you're not on the same page, it ain't gonna happen," Cerra said.

Martin Dworkin, former director of the Combined M.D./Ph.D. Training Program for the University, said donations like this are becoming more important as state funding dwindles.

It also keeps the University competitive.

"This catapults our cancer center into the top ranks," Dworkin said.

Terry Bock, associate vice president for the Academic Health Center, said the \$65 million gift will push the University closer to its goal of being a top-three research institution.

"This will move our medical school into the top 20," he said. "You can't be a top-three research school without your medical school being in the top 20."

Earlier this week, the University received \$292 million for a biomedical research program from a Minnesota state bonding bill.

"It's a good day, it's been a good week — research buildings and cash," Bock said, in reference to bonding bill funds.

