

CHAMPIONS OF ENGINEERING

Mark and Susan Bertelsen

For many years, **Mark** ('66) and **Susan Bertelsen** ('67) have supported a wide variety of programs, institutes, centers, chairs, and activities at UC Santa Barbara, both in and well beyond the College of Engineering (COE). Mark, a member of the COE Dean's Cabinet, spent fifty years as an attorney at Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, where at various times he served as chairman of the management committee, managing partner, and a member of the firm's executive committee, retiring as a senior partner in January 2022. The Bertelsens' diverse philanthropy has benefited some twenty entities at UCSB, ranging from an endowed chair and the Institute for Energy Efficiency to the Natural Reserve System and even UCSB baseball. We spoke with Mark in August about their gifts to the university and the vision that continues to motivate them.



Susan and Mark Bertelsen have long supported diverse causes at UCSB.

Convergence: *You represented Silicon Valley technology clients for your entire career. You must have seen a lot of change.*

MB: I spent my career at a law firm located in Stanford Research Park in Palo Alto, ground zero for the financial aspects of Silicon Valley. Our clients are predominantly technology companies. We did the Apple IPO in 1980, and were involved in all that went on before that following the commercialization of the integrated circuit and the microprocessor in the seventies, and the development of ever more powerful microprocessors and the software to run on them. Then, networks came along. We did the Cisco IPO in 1990. The 1990s and forward brought the advent of client server technology, the internet, and e-commerce with Netscape and browser technology; and Amazon, Pixar, and Netflix in entertainment; Google and the democratization of data; Tesla; social networks and the cloud and associated security and privacy issues — all the trends that have changed society over the past several decades.

C: *Can you talk a bit about the roots of your engagement with UCSB?*

MB: Susan and I made some small donations in the 1980s, but our first real gift went to Computer Science. They had received an \$1 million anonymous gift, and the idea was to create four chairs at about \$500,000 each for younger faculty, people who would not normally get chairs. So, our gift was combined with funds from the anonymous gift to create the chair in the name of Eugene Aas, Susan's father, who was a World War II veteran and an electrical engineer in computer science.

My deep involvement with the COE began when **Matt Tirrell** was dean and they were building the Engineering Sciences Building, to which we contributed. We weren't expecting to give at the level that Matt requested, but he came to my office, sat down, looked me in the eye, and told me that the College of Engineering was highly respected and was doing good things. He said, "You'll feel good about your investment." It was a powerful thing, so we made the commitment.

C: *You and Susan have also provided generous support to the Institute for Energy Efficiency (IEE). What motivated that?*

MB: When **Jeff Henley**, who was a classmate at UCSB and is also on the Dean's Cabinet, gave his large gift for Henley Hall, it really accelerated the project. With respect to the IEE, the idea was to address the issues associated with the effects of climate change and energy use by supporting scientific research and technological innovation that could enable more efficient use of energy and less waste. I thought, *here's a very practical idea that could yield significant returns and make people's lives and society better.*

C: *What do you see as the biggest challenges to higher education today?*

MB: Obviously, for UCSB, state support is a huge issue. There may be budget surpluses in California occasionally, but in the longer term, to be competitive you're going to have to rely more

on philanthropy and other sources of revenue, including how you monetize the intellectual property, if you will, of the institution. One of the things I've suggested for UCSB — and I understand that you can't do everything — is to start some of what I call *venture capital funds*. There are various iterations of this, but the university gets a portion of the proceeds paid out from the fund's investment.

☪ The unifying thought is that this is what a university is supposed to do: serve multiple needs of the immediate campus population and the greater community to which it's connected.☪

— Mark Bertelsen

C: *Can you talk a bit about your support for the Center for Information Technology & Society (CITS), which was established at least partially to investigate and understand "ethics and technology." What does that mean to you?*

MB: Globalization and technology, which to a certain extent have gone hand in hand, have resulted in a great benefit to a lot of people, including myself. It hasn't necessarily had that effect universally. Millions of middle-class manufacturing jobs have become service jobs. That has affected the economics of society. Given that and the velocity of change, and a political discourse that, in my view, has been weaponized and cheapened, you ask, how do we move forward and maintain the social compact? Technology is important to that. At the CITS, the mission is to "apply knowledge from diverse perspectives to understand and guide the development and use and effects of technology in contemporary society." That means, what are we doing here and how does it affect future generations, and how do they deal with things like

communication skills and education? We found out some impacts during COVID. Yes, we can do some of this remotely, and some of it works well, and some doesn't. There are things going on there that we should be more informed about, and that's what CITS is all about.

C: *What is the unifying vision or goal behind your diverse contributions?*

MB: In my view — and this goes back to the ancient Greeks — universities are not just about pure academics. It's also science, the arts, and also the body, mind, and spirit. Baseball, for example, is a program that is not rich at UCSB, yet it competes with the top programs in the country and has been to regional tournaments and the College World Series. Our players are actually students and athletes. They don't come here to do their freshman year and then go to the pros. I played freshman baseball, so I understand a little about the game. At UCSB, we have an inadequate field and therefore can't host regional tournaments. For a relatively modest investment, we could have a facility, not a Taj Mahal but one that could host regional tournaments, and we could build a softball field for the women. We could have community outreach, clinics for boys and girls, especially in the underserved communities. What's the unifying thought? It is that this is what a university is supposed to do: serve multiple needs of the immediate campus population and the greater community to which it's connected.

It's the same with supporting the UC Natural Reserve System. Again, the reserves can host important environmental research and also be assets for underserved communities. That gets us to the UC Disaster Resilience Network (DRN), which tries to harness depth and breadth of knowledge at all of the UC campuses to prepare for and recover from disasters. What we liked about that, again, was that it seems a better way to use the university resources. UC doesn't usually work as a whole; campuses do their own thing. You want to support expertise that has an objective of improving people's lives, and if it can have a public-service component to it, that's important, too.

C: *Why do you think that it is important for people, like you and Susan, who have the ability support the university, to do so?*

MB: I was seven years at the University of California: four at UCSB and three at Berkeley for law school. And even today, when you think people would understand, you hear them say, "Why should I give to UC; my tax dollars go there." And I tell people that state support makes up only about twenty percent of UCSB's budget. Even private institutions like Stanford, Harvard, and Yale are crunched from time to time, but they have these \$30 billion and \$40 billion endowments. I spent seven years at a place that wasn't free, but with scholarships and other things, I could pretty much fund my education. Great public institutions deserve support. If I look around and ask, what am I going to invest in, I'd say that investing in UC provides a return that benefits our communities and society in general.