

## **The Advocate**

### **GE's \$2.5 donation helps UConn bring e-lab to light**

By Richard Lee

The largest corporate donation in school history brought smiles to the University of Connecticut's Stamford campus yesterday as it celebrated the arrival of the \$2.5-million GE Capital e-Lab.

The computer facility is the first part of an \$11 million donation from GE Capital and its affiliates. The e-Lab furthers the relationship between UConn and Stamford-based GE Capital and will serve as a high-tech business center where students, faculty and General Electric Corp. executives will work together on GE Capital projects.

More than 100 people gathered on the third floor of UConn-Stamford as Gov. John G. Rowland thanked GE Capital officials for their financial support and eagerness to work with UConn staff in developing the project.

The 18,000-square-foot lab includes the 10,000-square-foot computer lab at the School of Business' Connecticut Information Technology Institute. Though the project took many months to develop, the space was adapted in about four months.

"GE, you bring good things to light, and you bring good things to UConn. This is extraordinary," said Rowland, telling the audience that the connection between GE and UConn is an indication of the growing cooperation between the university and companies throughout the state.

To ensure the facility is periodically upgraded to keep pace with technological advances, the company will annually donate \$1 million through 2004, said Denis J. Nayden, chairman and chief executive officer of GE Capital Corp.

"New, young talent will be creating and innovating here," said Nayden, a UConn graduate with a bachelor's degree in English and master's degree in finance. "Students, faculty and GE associates will be working on e-business projects. It's going to be a clear, clear benefit that UConn can use as a real spotlight on e-technology and e-business. It will be a great way to recruit students and faculty."

Over the next five years, the Fairfield-based GE Fund will contribute \$1.5 million to be split between UConn's schools of business and engineering to develop and launch ways of working and learning across long distances, and to pilot new technology-based curricula in collaboration with the Neag School of Education.

The donation also will be used to provide technology training for faculty and to reach out to minority students.

An additional \$1.5 million is expected to be donated by GE employees and retirees through the GE Fund's matching gifts program.

During the next three years, staff from GE Industrial Systems in Plainville will conduct joint research with UConn faculty in materials, energy consumption and transfer and circuit breaker technology, a project that will bring another \$1.5 million to the university.

"Now the snowball is rolling down the hill," said UConn President Philip Austin, reminding the audience of projects that began on the university's campuses as part of the UConn 2000 program.

With the assistance of GE and other corporations, as well as the state Legislature's commitment, UConn is becoming one of the most respected research institutions in the nation, Austin said.

"Over 450 of UConn alumni are employed at GE. Organizations, like individuals, are known for the company they keep," Austin said. "And we are indeed honored that the world's most admired company is making this generous and broad-based investment in the University of Connecticut."

Rowland touted the university's academic improvements, saying it no longer is a "safety" choice for students aspiring to attend an elite private school.

"We've stopped the brain drain," Rowland said. "These kids are so smart that they need the tools. The new economy is already old. We've got to be ready for what's on the blackboard."

The GE Capital e-Lab will go a long way in providing the employees needed by information technology companies in the state, Rowland said, adding, "They're going to be our kids and grandchildren."

Nayden had difficulty controlling his excitement about the project as he stood behind the podium.

"This is really cool - so cool I want to get you all out of here so we can go to work," said Nayden, adding that future projects could include Internet "data mining" to see how people reach GE Capital's Web sites and electronic billing services. "The real excitement is what great ideas will be generated here and benefit a GE Capital project."

Students and staff will work on three to four research projects per year.

Paulo B. Goes, associate director of the Connecticut Information Technology Institute, said though the new laboratory is designated for GE Capital projects, he hopes it will lead to similar relationships with other companies.

"We had the space, so it was a perfect marriage," Goes said.