

\$175 million gift for college grants

By ANDY HALL | Lee Newspapers

The largest gift to low-income students in Wisconsin history will provide \$175 million for grants to graduates of public schools to attend the state's public colleges and universities and will boost the state's Wisconsin Covenant program, officials revealed Monday night.

The donation from John Morgridge, former chairman of Cisco Systems, and his wife, Tashia, a retired elementary special education teacher, will give about 2,000 grants of \$1,000 to \$5,000 for the 2008-09 school year, and more than 3,000 grants annually after that.

Eligibility likely will be concentrated among students whose families earn less than about \$50,000 a year, according to UW-Madison Chancellor John Wiley, who called the Morgridges' gift "positively magnificent. "

"My reaction was, 'This is going to be a wonderful Christmas,'" Gov. Jim Doyle said of his feelings when John Morgridge notified him of the donation last week.

The grants, which do not need to be repaid, will be awarded through the UW System and the Wisconsin Technical College System. Students will be eligible to receive aid for up to 10 semesters.

"Wisconsin's public high schools do an outstanding job of preparing students for higher education. We are committed to helping ensure that higher education is accessible and affordable," Tashia Morgridge said in a news release announcing the endowment.

The Morgridges, who long have donated to educational causes, are establishing the Fund for Wisconsin Scholars with the \$175 million contribution. The gift will create a permanent endowment to provide grants to low-income, recent graduates of public schools.

"This is just the start," said John Morgridge. "We believe that the fund will grow substantially as others are inspired to join us in this effort."

The Morgridges will serve on the board of directors of the Fund for Wisconsin Scholars, the new private charity. The group's executive director will be Mary Gulbrandsen, who recently retired as chief of staff to Madison schools superintendent Art Rainwater. Also on the board are financial analyst Ted Kellner and David Ward, president of the American Council on Education in Washington, D.C., and former UW-Madison chancellor.

Affordability gap

Organizers said the fund will attack a growing affordability gap in Wisconsin.

In 2005-06, for example, the average cost for attending a UW System school was \$13,642, while the average need-based grant aid was \$4,151 -- creating a nearly \$9,500 gap, up from \$6,200 in 2000-01.

Doyle said the infusion of money will complement the state's Wisconsin Covenant program, which promises a spot in one of the state's universities or technical colleges to eighth-graders who sign a pledge and earn a B average in high school, take college preparatory courses, stay out of trouble and perform community service.

More than 17,000 Wisconsin students signed up before the program's first deadline in September. In November, the Great Lakes Higher Education Guaranty Corp. donated \$40 million to help the program.

Even with the Morgridges' gift, Doyle and others said it'll remain essential for the state to remain focused on increasing the resources for low-income students. The covenant program has a goal of generating \$200 million through private fundraising. The state has increased financial aid by \$40 million over a two-year period.

Tim Jacobsen, head of financial aid for the Madison Area Technical College, said it sounds as if the endowment will be "tremendous for our students."

More than 4,000 students -- roughly half the full-time equivalent student population -- receive financial aid of some kind at MATC.

"This would be a terrific way for our students to fill that gap in covering costs," Jacobsen said.

Unique gift?

Doyle, Wiley and Chancellor David Wilson, who oversees the 13 freshman and sophomore UW Colleges and UW Extension, said they know of no other state that has received such a large gift to benefit low-income students.

Wilson said when he learned of it Monday night, he "literally jumped on top of a table" because it opens doors to thousands of students whose families have doubted their ability to afford college. He urged every one of those students, including young working adults considering a return to school, to call a college and find out what's possible.

Susan Fischer, director of financial aid for UW-Madison, said she was "rather stunned" by the amount of money and said she hopes it becomes a springboard to encourage others to help make up what will continue to be a gap between students' ability to pay, and the cost of attending school.

Mark Bradley, president of the UW Board of Regents, called the gift "just a real intelligent act of charity, to target it to the people who need it most and will give the most benefit to society."

How to apply

Students will apply for these grants through the same channels by which they already apply for financial aid. They will fill out the standard Free Application for Federal Student Aid to request financial aid, including Fund for Wisconsin Scholars grants, from an eligible college.

The grants will be awarded to students as part of a financial aid package provided by each institution's

financial aid office. These grants will be in addition to the state and federal grants many students already receive. The grants will be awarded through the University of Wisconsin System's two- and four-year colleges and the Wisconsin Technical College System schools. More information, including a series of questions and answers, is available at www.ffws.org. A live Webcast of a news conference in Green Bay on the endowment is scheduled for 10 a.m. today.

About the Morgridges

John and Tashia Morgridge are both 1955 University of Wisconsin graduates.

John Morgridge graduated from the School of Business. He has served as president, CEO, chairman of the board and chairman emeritus of Cisco Systems and is credited with building the company in San Jose, Calif., into the leading global supplier of computer networking products.

He was ranked the 220th richest person in the world this year by Forbes Magazine, which estimated his wealth at about \$2.1 billion.

Tashia Morgridge graduated from the School of Education. She has maintained close ties with the school, serving on its Board of Visitors and sponsoring scholarships for students preparing to be teachers. A retired special-education teacher, she has been a volunteer teacher for the learning disabled.

The Morgridges' philanthropy

The \$175 million gift is the latest in a series of major donations by John and Tashia Morgridge. Other gifts include:

- **2007:** A group of alumni, including the Morgridges, called Wisconsin Naming Partnership donate \$85 million to the University of Wisconsin School of Business to preserve the school's name for the next 20 years. It is the largest single gift ever given to UW-Madison. Other members of the partnership are Paul Collins, Wade Fetzer, Pete Frechette, Jon Hammes, Ted Kellner, Paul Leff, Sheldon Lubar, Albert Nicholas, John Oros, H. Signe Ostby and two anonymous donors.
- **2006:** The Morgridges give \$50 million to help build an interdisciplinary biomedical research complex.
- **2004:** The Morgridges donate \$31 million for the renovation of the Education Building on Bascom Hill.
- **2002:** John Morgridge gives \$7.3 million of computer network equipment and \$3.5 million, which will pay for the creation of the Wisconsin Advanced Internet Laboratory, for a total gift of \$10.8 million.

State Journal reporters Brittany Schoepp and George Hesselberg contributed to this story.