

‘The Luckiest Man in the World’

Remembering David Kearns '52—former Xerox CEO, University trustee, and champion of diversity.

By Sharon Dickman

DAVID KEARNS '52, A ROCHESTER NATIVE who led the Xerox Corp. to dramatic growth in the 1980s, chaired the University's Board of Trustees, championed workplace diversity, and applied his business acumen to invigorating public education, died in February near his home in Stuart, Fla., following a long battle with cancer. He was 80.

Kearns arrived at Xerox in 1971 from

▲ **GOAL-ORIENTED:** After graduating in 1952 and service in the Navy, Kearns, shown here in a 1989 photo, began his career with IBM. He later wrote that he left IBM to join Xerox, in part, with the goal of becoming the company's president, which he did.

IBM. By 1977, he had become president and chief operating officer, and in 1982, he became CEO, a position he held until 1990.

“In a time of great need for Xerox, David shouldered the mantle of leadership and rallied the company to overcome a fierce competitive challenge,” says Xerox CEO and University trustee Ursula Burns. “All Xerox people who followed are in his debt.”

Kearns was also widely credited with helping make Xerox a recognized corporate leader in equal employment opportunities. His encouragement and development of minority and women business leaders became a national model.

“David was an incredible mentor to me and an inspiration to so many people of color,” says **Francis Price** '74, '75S (MBA), CEO of Interact Performance Systems and

a University trustee. Price became the driving force behind the establishment of the David T. Kearns Center for Leadership and Diversity in Arts, Sciences, and Engineering in 2002.

Initially envisioned with the goal of expanding the number of students who pursue careers in science and engineering, the center later expanded its vision to include students in all disciplines.

Named a trustee in 1972, Kearns chaired the board from 1978 to 1985.

In 2008, he received the University's Frederick Douglass Medal in recognition of his lifetime commitment to diversity.

Ed Hajim '58, the current board chair, says Kearns was “a natural-born leader who faced every challenge with confidence and integrity.” President Joel Seligman called Kearns “as inspiring as any person I ever met, his attention always devoted to the dream that progress could be made.”

A member of the board into the 1990s,

Kearns took a break only to serve as deputy secretary of education in the administration of former president George H. W. Bush.

Kearns's travels and speeches built the case for improved public schools to help meet the needs of business and strengthen America's global competitiveness.

He remained an outspoken advocate for innovation, school-based autonomy, competition and choice in education, founding the nonprofit New American Schools to promote reform.

From 1993 to 1995, he was a senior university fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Known for his exuberance and energy, Kearns also took time to reflect and document his ideas as an author or coauthor of *Winning the Brain Race: A Bold Plan to Make Our Schools Competitive* with Dennis P. Doyle (1988); *Prophets in the Dark: How Xerox Reinvented Itself and Beat Back the Japanese* with David A. Nadler (1992); *Legacy of Learning: Your Stake in Standards and New Kinds of Public Schools* with James Harvey (2000); and *Crossing the Bridge: Family, Business, Education, Cancer, and the Lessons Learned* (2005).

After graduation, he became a U.S. Navy seaman, and in 1954 joined IBM, eventually becoming vice president of its data processing division. Years later, Kearns wrote in his memoirs that he left IBM, in part, because he wanted to become president of Xerox—which he did.

Kearns was married for 56 years to Shirley Cox Kearns. Together they raised six children—four daughters and two sons—and Kearns leaves behind 18 grandchildren.

In a statement, the family said:

“Among his prolific accomplishments in business, education, and public service, David found the most success and pleasure in his role as a loving husband, devoted father and grandfather, mentor, and friend.

“David demonstrated inspiring perseverance as he confronted the challenges of his ongoing health problems. One of his greatest legacies to all who came in contact with him was his interminably cheerful spirit and the grace and dignity with which he led his life.

“Despite his daily physical struggles, David was grateful for all the blessings in his life, and often referred to himself as ‘the luckiest man in the world.’” 

Sharon Dickman is University spokeswoman.



SAGE ADVICE: The spice industry has grown immensely over the past 40 years, says Furth.

Spice Guy

Peter Furth '76 sees opportunities in a growing spice industry—for his company, your palate, and some of the world's poorest countries.

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

THERE'S AN INDUSTRY THAT HAS BURGEONED in the last 40 years that has little to do with computer technology or finance, only a minor impact on health care, and is among the oldest industries in the world. It's the spice industry, and according to **Peter Furth '76**, who has spent his entire adult life in the business, it's in a golden age that's bringing benefits not only to American taste buds, but also to harvesters in poor rural regions around the globe.

Furth was still in high school when he began working summers at Louis Furth Inc., the spice import business founded by his uncle in New York City in 1941. Reflecting backward from his post today as CEO of the business—since renamed FFF Associates—Furth says the turning point was in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when one of the largest markets in the world, the United States, experienced increased immigra-

tion, more eating out, and an expanding prepared foods industry.

“People started using what today seem like everyday spices like oregano, garlic, basil, more pepper, a little bit more chili powder, and absolutely more cinnamon,” says Furth.

Italian sauces, in an ever wider and spicier variety, lined American grocery shelves and kitchen cabinets. Then, by the 1980s, Mexican food became mainstream, spreading across the country from the American Southwest, deepening Americans' taste for spicier cuisine.

According to data compiled by the Department of Agriculture, American consumption of herbs and spices, per capita, has grown from just over a pound in the mid-1960s to more than three-and-a-half pounds today.

But as demand grows in the world's largest spice market, Furth has undertaken an expansion of his own—not necessarily of

volume, but of his corporate mission.

After taking leave of the company in 1991 to become the executive vice president and CEO of the American Spice Trade Association, he returned to the family company in 1994, adding a consulting division. Today, he devotes much of his time working with government and nongovernmental organizations to facilitate the international spice trade in ways that benefit producers—many of them quite small and located in some of the world's poorest countries—as well as consumers.

Many people don't realize, Furth says, how many of our spices are harvested by small farmers around the globe. In Grenada, for example—among the major suppliers of nutmeg—nutmeg trees appear most often in small groves in family backyards. "They're not massive groves like you think

made out well. "A lot of the Albanian sage was taken to Turkey where there were some very sophisticated cleaning operations. And the Albanians were losing any ability to capture the value-added," Furth says.

In working with the organizations, Furth hopes to help Albanians, who are much poorer than their Turkish neighbors, keep as much income in Albania as possible, chiefly by developing their capacity to process spices.

"We're helping with their post-harvesting handling—which is from the time it's gathered in the mountains to the time it goes to the exporter. This includes making sure the goods are cleaned, handled, and dried properly, and kept free of contamination."

It's an especially important development

In the News

HEATHER HIGGINBOTTOM '94 NAMED TO WHITE HOUSE POST

President Barack Obama has named **Heather Higginbottom '94** the deputy director of the White House Office of Management and Budget. Higginbottom, who served as Obama's national policy advisor during his presidential campaign, was deputy director of the White House Domestic Policy Council from January 2009 until beginning her new post in January. A political science major at Rochester, Higginbottom began her career in national politics and policymaking as a legislative director to Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts.

ROB BARRETT '88E: 'AMERICA'S NEXT COOKING CELEBRITY'

Rob Barrett '88E, host of the YouTube cooking show *Cooking for Dads* and author of a cookbook by the title, won the America's Next Cooking Celebrity contest, sponsored by *Better Homes and Gardens* last October. The contest requires participants to upload a video of themselves preparing an original recipe. Barrett was one of two finalists invited for a cook-off in the magazine's test kitchen in Des Moines, Iowa. He won for his red pepper and sausage pasta.

ROBERT BRENT '48, '53M (MD), '55M (PHD) WINS NATIONAL HONOR FOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

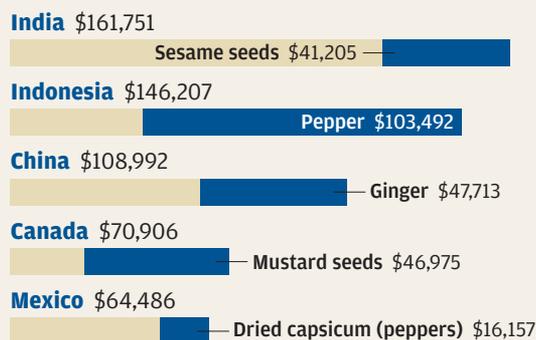
Robert Brent '48, '53M (MD), '55M (PhD), '88 (Honorary) has been selected for the National Physician of the Year Lifetime Achievement Award by Castle-Connolly, the publisher of the *America's Top Doctors* series. Brent heads the Clinical and Environmental Teratology Research Lab at the Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Wilmington, Del., and is the Distinguished Professor of Pediatrics, Radiology, and Pathology at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia. A specialist in the environmental causes of birth defects, Brent has conducted research and counseled pregnant women for more than 50 years. Castle-Connolly's physician-led research team received hundreds of nominations for the award from fellow physicians, selecting Brent as one of two winners for 2011.

The Life of Spice

Imports of spices into the United States have steadily increased in recent years. Here are the top five countries that export spices to the U.S., and the main spice that each exports.

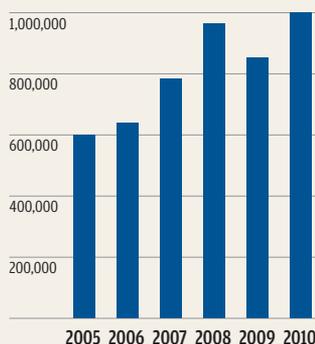
TOP FIVE EXPORTERS TO THE UNITED STATES

Values for 2010 in thousands of dollars



TOTAL SPICE IMPORTS

Values in thousands of dollars



Source: Global Agricultural Trade System, U.S. Department of Agriculture

of for tree nuts in California," says Furth. "And this is the case all over the world."

For the past 10 years, Furth has been working with the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Dutch international development organization, SNV, on joint projects in Albania, the source of 75 percent of the world's sage, as well as a main source of medicinal and other herbs.

Sage is rarely cultivated, but instead grows in the wild. The harvesters are primarily villagers. "They get up very early in the morning and they walk up the mountain, often with a donkey," says Furth. They pick the herbs which are then collected by aggregators back in the villages.

In the past, neither the gatherers, who are paid by the sack, nor the aggregators, who sell the raw, dirty sage to processors,

initiative because, says Bernd Fischer, a professor of history at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, "agriculture is one of the only sustainable aspects of the Albanian economy." Fischer, who specializes in the Balkans and advises a number of U.S. government agencies on Albanian affairs, says there are hundreds of projects like the one Furth is working on that contribute to the development of Albania's predominantly rural population.

For consumers, the benefits are no less important. Spices that aren't properly handled can contain dirt, twigs, dead insects, animal feces, salmonella or *E. coli*. Even though spices are used in small quantities and generally cooked at high temperatures, says Furth, when it comes to contamination, "you never want to take a chance." ®

Career Changer

A first-year resident in orthopaedics, Susan Gall Sims '84E launches her third major career.

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

TO THE PERENNIAL QUESTION—"WHAT DO you want to be when you grow up?"—**Susan Gall Sims '84E** knows there doesn't have to be just one answer.

She's been a radar software engineer for the F-15 fighter jet, a professional flutist with her own chamber group, and

in the fall of 1980, she was like many undergraduates at the University, harboring more than a single interest or talent. She took courses in math and science on the River Campus while working toward her bachelor of music degree in flute performance. After graduation, she moved back to Long Beach, where she earned a second bachelor's degree in electrical engineering,



now, after earning a medical degree from Northwestern University at age 48, she's a first-year resident in orthopaedics at the University's Strong Memorial Hospital.

"I can't imagine my life having gone any other way," she says on one of her rare days off, over a cup of coffee at Java's—the Gibbs Street hangout she first frequented three decades ago as a flute performance major at the Eastman School. Then it was "a greasy spoon," she notes, and half its current size.

When Sims left home in Long Beach, Calif., and moved into a dorm at Eastman

▲ **ENCORE:** "I can't imagine my life having gone any other way," says Sims, who has been an engineer, a professional flutist, and is now an orthopaedist.

and at 25, was comfortably situated in a job at Hughes Aircraft.

"It was nice to make a solid living, my colleagues were great, and the work was interesting," Sims says. "But a few years into it I started realizing, well, if I spend my whole life doing this I will be able to say that I helped guide missiles to destroy stuff and kill people."

She also missed her flute.

"I was older and wiser, and I was a little more assertive," she says. Those traits propelled her to take a leap of faith and give up her comfortable job to pursue her initial dream of a career in music. She started practicing again, auditioned successfully for the master's degree program in flute performance at Boston's New England

Conservatory, and approaching 30 years old, "sold my BMW, gave up my apartment by the beach, and moved into a dorm room."

Sims eventually secured adjunct positions at multiple universities, including the Boston and Lowell branches of the University of Massachusetts and Brandeis University. Meanwhile, she started a chamber group that specialized in contemporary music and performed with orchestras throughout New England.

Of the 15 years she spent as a musician, she says, "I made a living, I bought a house before the prices went crazy, and it was a life that I really enjoyed."

Nonetheless, she says, "I came to a point where I realized, 'I've accomplished everything I kind of set out to do. I have this group, I've played all the standard repertoire, I've played nonstandard repertoire, I've taught these great students, I've done some freelancing in orchestras in the New England area. What do I do from here?'"

She had first thought of going to medical school while still at Eastman, but dismissed the idea. "The idea of being done with my degree when I was 30-plus years old seemed so ancient."

At age 40, her perspective had changed. "When people say I'm too old for this or that, well, within reason, you're not too old for just about anything," she says. "Could I be an Olympic gymnast? No. But could I go to medical school? Yeah!"

It's unusual, but not unheard of, for people to begin medical school after working in other careers. According to data from the Association of American Medical Colleges, since 2007 about 5 percent of applicants to member schools have been over 30.

In her first year at Northwestern's Feinberg School of Medicine, Sims gravitated easily toward orthopaedics. "I just really love the musculoskeletal system," she says. "I found myself spending extra hours in the lab dissecting out the muscles, tendons, ligaments, just trying to figure it all out."

She credits her husband, Christopher, a stagehand whom she met when she was performing with the Portland Symphony Orchestra in Maine, with making her medical career possible.

"I met him when I was just starting this journey. He says I told him I wanted to go to medical school on our first date, so he feels he was well-prepared." 📍