

‘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