

MINNEAPOLIS

St. Thomas receives a record \$50 million gift from grateful alum

By Shannon Prather (<http://www.startribune.com/shannon-prather/188067161/>) Star Tribune staff |

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The University of St. Thomas has received a record-setting \$50 million gift for undergraduate student scholarships from a Minnesota philanthropy started by one of its most accomplished alumni, real estate developer Gerald Rauenhorst.

GHR Foundation's gift is the largest ever given to a Minnesota college or university for scholarships and the kickoff for an ambitious drive to raise \$200 million, which would double the St. Paul-based university's scholarship endowment, said St. Thomas President Julie Sullivan.

"Reducing student debt is a priority for St. Thomas," Sullivan said. "St. Thomas does not want cost to be a barrier for students interested in getting an education at our university. That is why generating support for financial aid is a top fundraising priority."

This year, 99 percent of first-year St. Thomas students rely on financial aid to cover the \$40,000 annual tuition and fees at the private Catholic university.

The \$50 million gift will be placed in an endowment and used to create classes of GHR Fellows, 15 academically gifted and ethically minded business students chosen each year for full, four-year scholarships.

Sullivan said the fellows program will help St. Thomas attract the brightest young business talent from across Minnesota and the United States.

"We expect these students to develop into outstanding leaders and we expect them to be community-engaged," she said.

A student-focused program

The fellows also will be chosen on the basis of whether they reflect the values of St. Thomas and the Rauenhorsts.

"We want to make sure they share our commitment and the foundation's commitment to being morally responsible leaders," Sullivan said.

The [GHR Foundation \(http://www.startribune.com/a-minnesota-couple-s-love-story-leads-to-a-philanthropic-legacy/455918083/\)](http://www.startribune.com/a-minnesota-couple-s-love-story-leads-to-a-philanthropic-legacy/455918083/), started in the 1960s by Rauenhorst and his wife, Henrietta, long has supported Catholic education and the couple's alma maters: St. Thomas, St. Catherine University and Marquette University in Milwaukee. St. Thomas named its business college after Rauenhorst's company, Opus, in 2006.

The first class of GHR Fellows will begin school in the fall of 2019. A committee of St. Thomas faculty members will select fellows based on merit, using grade-point average, ACT scores, essays and interviews.

GHR Fellows will have individualized career coaching, access to Twin Cities business and university leaders, and a fully paid semester studying abroad. Students will design and complete service learning projects.

"This is truly student-focused," said GHR Foundation CEO Amy Rauenhorst Goldman, the youngest child of the Rauenhorsts and a member of the St. Thomas board of trustees. "It allows St. Thomas to continue and increase its profile as a really hands-on, great place to be an undergraduate."

'No better place for me'

The hope is to attract more exceptional students like sophomore business major Madison Morehouse.

Morehouse, 19, grew up in Rosemount, the daughter of a plumber and a loan officer. A standout high school student, she's the first in her family to attend college. She visited St. Thomas several times while in high school and it was her first choice for college, but the high price tag initially made it seem out of reach.



Maddy Morehouse, right, could not have attended the University of St. Thomas without the scholarship she earned.



Amy Rauenhorst Goldman is the CEO and chairwoman of the GHR Foundation. She is standing in front of a giant photo of a child from the M'Lop Tapang, a day center in Cambodia that was helped in its effort to bring children together with families.

"I loved how I felt when I was there. When I was there, I felt important," Morehouse said. "My parents were very up front with me. I could go wherever I wanted, but that loan would be taken out."

When she got the e-mail from St. Thomas offering her \$29,000 in a renewable annual scholarship, Morehouse squealed in the middle of her high school study hall.

"I would not have been able to go to St. Thomas [without the scholarship]. That is the reality of it," Morehouse said.

Between the financial aid, a campus job teaching other business students, and college credits that she earned in high school, Morehouse will be able to graduate debt-free.

"I am so lucky and fortunate to have those academic business scholarships that enabled me to have these experiences," Morehouse said. "There is no better place for me to be right now."

A catalyst for generosity

Like Morehouse, Goldman said her father felt deep gratitude for his time at St. Thomas.

"He really credited St. Thomas for opening his eyes to the world," she said. "His experience at St. Thomas really shaped his life and really informed his future business decisions. This gift stems out of his gratitude for what St. Thomas did for him."

Gerald Rauenhorst [grew up \(http://www.startribune.com/a-minnesota-couple-s-love-story-leads-to-a-philanthropic-legacy/455918083/\)](http://www.startribune.com/a-minnesota-couple-s-love-story-leads-to-a-philanthropic-legacy/455918083/) the son of struggling tenant farmers in rural Minnesota, and Henrietta grew up on a dairy farm a few miles away. He scratched together enough money to attend St. Thomas, while Henrietta enrolled at St. Kate's.

Gerald Rauenhorst started his own contracting firm from his dining room table in the family's Richfield home. His company, the Opus Group — a network of commercial real estate development, construction and design companies — helped sculpt the Minneapolis skyline. Opus projects include the halo-topped Capella Tower in downtown Minneapolis and Mariucci Arena at the University of Minnesota.

Upon Gerald's death in 2014 and Henrietta's in 2010, much of their personal fortune was rolled into the foundation, which will soon have assets exceeding \$1 billion. The foundation has given away \$175 million in the past decade to global causes including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Catholic education ranging from preschool to college. In 2016, GHR gave St. Catherine \$18 million to advance growth and innovation in health care education.

Goldman said she hopes that GHR's latest gift will be a catalyst for other acts of generosity.

"We hope it inspires other transformational scholarship gifts," she said.