

Potential, Everywhere

An international student and his wife reap friendships, success, and the gift of giving

BY LAMONT JONES, JR.

Nearly a foot of December snow greets the bride-to-be as she arrives in Pittsburgh in 1962. Madhu Shah is 22. It's her first time in the States and her first time seeing the white-cloaked landscape. She is excited, especially so because, in a week, she will marry Pitt PhD student Jagdish Sheth.

Relatives are unable to come from their native India, so the young couple improvises to make the Heinz Chapel ceremony accommodate Hindu wedding practices. Friends and faculty such as Sheth's marketing professor and mentor, John Howard, stand in for family. Others help to prepare traditional Indian food for the wedding reception. Special permission is obtained to use a small, borrowed grill for a fire ritual during the exchange of vows. Even for a historically immigrant-rich region like Pittsburgh, the wedding is so unusual that it is reported in local news media.

Since that special day, the Sheths love for one another has grown and deepened along with their love of Pitt and their appreciation for the friendships that began here. That's why the couple were happy to make a generous gift to the Heinz Chapel last year to celebrate their 50 years of marriage as well as commemorate the Chapel's 75th anniversary. Through the years, they've been inspired to give nearly \$500,000 through their Sheth Foundation to the University, including generous support for the Katz Graduate School of Business, where Jagdish Sheth earned both master's and doctoral degrees. The



Sheth Foundation's mission is to develop and recognize marketing scholars and scholarship globally, as well as to advance the development of marketing thought. Additionally, in 2013, the couple committed to providing \$10,000 annually for three years to the Sheth Awards in Pitt's University Center for International Studies. The awards recognize alumni

for outstanding contributions to the international community and support faculty in international activities, public engagement, teaching or research.

"Giving back as you go along is more enjoyable when you are alive than after you are dead," Jagdish Sheth says, with characteristic good humor. "Giving gives a purpose to life, something outside your job."

The Sheths live in Atlanta, where he is the Charles H. Kellstadt Professor of Marketing at Emory University's Goizueta Business School. He credits his Pitt experiences with helping to prepare him for success.

He was born in Burma into a family where owning a business was valued over higher education. But he wanted to be an accountant, so he attended



Madhu and Jagdish Sheht in Heinz Chapel holding a photo album of their wedding ceremony there in 1962.

Loyola College in southern India and earned an undergraduate degree in taxation with minors in history and statistics.

He arrived at Pitt in 1961 to pursue an MBA, which he completed within a year, and then began his doctoral studies in the Katz School. As a young graduate student with modest resources, he was grateful for the support he received from a range of newfound friends at the University of Pittsburgh. He moved to New Jersey in 1963 to work as a researcher at Columbia University in New York, where he became curious about why consumers became loyal to brands, so he studied social psychology and behavioral science. His research took him to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1965, back to Columbia, then to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to delve into psychometrics. Along the way, he dove into family life with his wife and two children.

In 1984, Sheht (BUS '62G, '66G) joined the faculty at the University of Southern California, where he became heavily involved in the telecommunications industry. He created a center to aid the industry following the break-up of the Bell System, and he eventually relocated to Atlanta, where Bell South was

headquartered. He has been a member of the Emory faculty since 1991.

Today, Sheht says that had he remained in India, he probably would have worked in a small family business. Instead, the professional and financial rewards of academic life have enabled him to influence other lives through giving.

"I think in the United States there is no better occupation than being an educator. You are in the business of really shaping human beings. Our job is to make ordinary people extraordinary. All of us have potential, no matter who you are or where you come from."

For the Shehts, their potential, together, as a married couple began at a beautiful chapel on the Pitt campus in 1962. Two years ago, the Shehts returned to campus and to Heinz Chapel to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. Their love of Pitt continues to inspire their generosity. One of the Shehts' goals in giving to Pitt is to recognize exceptional scholars and inspire others to excel. Another, says Jagdish Sheht, is to show people that if he could rise from modest beginnings and contribute to society, then they can do so, too. Whether it's time, talent, or money, he says, "Everybody has something to give." ■

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As Chancellor Mark Nordenberg steps down from his position in August, we remember and appreciate that his tremendous work to dramatically increase the excellence and profile of the University of Pittsburgh not only affects current students, faculty and staff, but also the many alumni and friends of the University who wear their love of Pitt proudly. His numerous achievements enabled the University to enrich, expand, and enhance the Pitt student experience over the course of his nearly two decades in office, as well as helped to secure Pitt's future by inspiring others to support the University's endeavors through their generous gifts.

Examples of this generosity and acknowledgment of Chancellor Nordenberg's success are present across the University: The Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences, the John A. Swanson School of Engineering, and the John M. and Gertrude E. Petersen Events Center are among many impressive testimonials to the high standards of excellence set by Chancellor Nordenberg. Another example of the wide range of support Chancellor Nordenberg's leadership has encouraged is the Richard King Mellon Foundation gift that will accelerate the research and education efforts of the Center for Energy, which is dedicated to improving energy technology development and sustainability through the work of more than 70 world-class faculty members and their research teams.

Featured in this issue's Cornerstones segment are two individuals whose generosity to the University will also have lasting effects: Jagdish and Madhu Sheht were married at Heinz Chapel while Jagdish was a PhD student at Pitt in 1962. Their love of the University remains strong more than 50 years later, as evidenced by their commitment to the Katz Graduate School of Business, made through gifts from their foundation, which aims to develop and recognize marketing scholars and scholarship on a global level. In 2013, the Shehts extended their Pitt support to include the University Center for International Studies. The Shehts' philanthropy helps Pitt expand its reach on an international level, exemplifying Chancellor Nordenberg's vision for a sustained culture of success that will exist for decades to come.

As we reflect on Mark Nordenberg's time as the leader of this great University, it is important that we understand how his work helped transform Pitt into what it is today, while positioning it for what it will become tomorrow.

Hail to Pitt,
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