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The Simon Konover Company is inspiring the next generation of real estate professionals

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An ongoing commitment to fostering and expanding educational opportunities took on a new dimension this year at the University of Connecticut.

The Simon Konover family has been long-time benefactors of the University of Connecticut.

One of their many contributions is The Konover Coppa Family Endowment Fund for the School of Business Center for Real Estate and Urban Economics which supports activities, initiatives and student scholarships. This year, the connection between The Simon Konover Company (TSKC) and the UConn Center for Real Estate was more direct and inspiring for all involved.

Undergraduate students in professor John Glascock's senior real estate course worked in parallel with TSKC senior managers to identify redevelopment and expansion opportunities for the Marcus Plaza in Norwich, Conn.

Developed in the early 1970s, Marcus Plaza is a community shopping center located on West Main St. anchored by Shop Rite and TJ Maxx. The property is owned by Norwich Realty Associates, LCC, a Simon Konover-related entity. In 2012, a TSKC affiliate acquired a former restaurant building on approximately one acre of land abutting the shopping center. TSKC professionals evaluated opportunities for expanding and renovated the shopping plaza to potentially connect the two properties.

Dr. Glascock's students were presented with the same challenge. Seven groups of five or more students were asked to assess the current retail market, identify opportunities for attracting new tenants and determine the financial viability of expanding the current building footprint.

Bradford Wainman, senior vice president of Simon Konover Development Corporation and a graduate of UConn Business School himself, spearheaded the senior real estate project.

"This project allowed the students to evaluate a common real estate challenge that industry professionals are faced with everyday," said Wainman. "I was impressed with the caliber of work presented by the groups."

Students were provided the opportunity to tour the shopping center and meet with TSKC professionals. The semester-end final project included a presentation before TSKC senior management and investment recommendations for expanding and upgrading the retail property.

TSKC has moved forward with a renovation and facade improvement program at Marcus Plaza and is currently working with a few potential select tenants to enhance the shopping experience at the plaza.

"This was a unique opportunity to present students with opportunities and challenges similar to those they will face as they embark on their own exciting real estate careers," said James Wakim, president and chief operating officer of The Simon Konover Company.

The connection between UConn and TSKC dates back to 1950 when Doris Konover received her

bachelor's degree from the School of Nursing. Many of the company's senior managers earned their undergraduate and advanced degrees from the University. Simon Konover himself received an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from UConn in 1996.

Over the years, the Konover family has supported the University Libraries, the UConn Health Center, and the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center. The auditorium in the Dodd Center was dedicated in honor of Doris and Simon Konover in 1996. In 2007, Doris and Simon Konover endowed the first faculty chair of the Center for Judaic Studies and Contemporary Jewish Life at the University. The relationship between TSKC and the Center for Real Estate and Urban Economics at the University of Connecticut is perhaps the most inspiring.

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