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Salem State University renames school to honor late Cummings Properties president McKeown

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Representatives from the McKeown family, Salem State University, the city of Salem, and the Cummings organization gather for a formal ribbon cutting (photo credit: Salem State University)

Salem, MA A campus-wide event at Salem State University (SSU) celebrated the rededication of James McKeown School of Education. The ceremony follows a \$10 million gift made to SSU this summer by Cummings Foundation, the nonprofit affiliate of commercial real estate firm Cummings Properties.

“We are honored to remember our alumnus Jamie McKeown, and the school that now bears his name will achieve far more for the region’s educational ecosystem than would have been possible without the generosity of Bill and Joyce Cummings,” said SSU president John Keenan. “The McKeown School’s name represents great promise for its lasting impact.”

McKeown joined Cummings Properties as a commercial leasing agent in 1979, and was named its second ever president in 1990. His vision and persistence culminated in the company’s 1995 acquisition of the former United Shoe Machinery Co. headquarters, and its subsequent transformation into Beverly’s award-winning Cummings Center business and technology campus.

A managing trustee for Cummings Foundation as well, McKeown distinguished himself as both a business and community leader until his sudden, untimely death at age 41 in November of 1996.

“This investment in Salem State University is especially meaningful for us,” said Cummings Foundation co-founder Joyce Cummings. “Jamie was well known for his passion for education and commitment to creating opportunities for young people. I can think of no better way to memorialize such a wonderful person than by supporting the advancement of so many worthy ideals at his alma mater.”

Joining Bill and Joyce Cummings at the dedication ceremony were current Cummings president Eric Anderson and chairman and CEO Dennis Clarke, a protege of Jamie and his immediate successor as president. Also present were Jamie’s widow, Denise McKeown, and his two grown daughters, Kelly Bourque and Molly Vardaro.

A Woburn native, McKeown remained deeply rooted in the local community throughout his life. He held leadership roles with several community organizations, including Woburn Industrial Development Finance Authority, Woburn Business Association, and the former Woburn Boys & Girls Club, where he was the first former student member to serve as a director and, later, as president of the Club.

SSU’s James McKeown School of Education is the third such honor bestowed on McKeown since his passing. Woburn Boys & Girls Club was rededicated in his name in 2014, as was the James L. McKeown Elementary School in Beverly in 1997.

The \$10 million gift from Cummings Foundation will support the development and implementation of programming designed to strengthen and diversify the educator workforce.

This donation inducts SSU into Cummings’ cadre of “Affiliated Colleges,” seven esteemed institutions that, although unaffiliated with each other, have been awarded at least \$10 million each from Cummings Foundation. The Foundation has also made significant earlier gifts to SSU in support of its Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies.