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Game On

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Video game industry pioneer Eugene Jarvis has a deep connection with the Eugene P. Jarvis College of Computing and Digital Media, where he served as the first Game Designer in Residence.

GAME ON

Video game industry icon Eugene Jarvis and DePaul alumna and Trustee Sasha Gerritson take the College of Computing and Digital Media to the next level with a landmark gift

By Craig Keller

Photo by DePaul University/Jeff Carrion



Collaboration among students, faculty and industry experts on real-world projects has long been a formula for innovation and acquiring career-ready skills at DePaul University's College of Computing and Digital Media (CDM).

It has powered Project Bluelight films directed by faculty and staffed by student crews, software prototypes developed for major companies by students and industry mentors at the college's iD Lab, student research on cybersecurity challenges for national defense contractors, and projects by data-science teams solving public-health problems.

Now, thanks to an extraordinary act of generosity, this engine for academic and career advancement is being supercharged with rocket boosters.

Eugene P. Jarvis, a trailblazer in the video game industry, and his wife, DePaul Trustee **Sasha L. Gerritson (MUS'99)**, are taking CDM to the next level with a landmark gift, the largest in the university's history. It launches the Jarvis Student Center for Innovation and Collaboration, a multidisciplinary, student-focused space for professional learning and industry partnerships fueled by emerging technologies and projects dedicated to societal needs and innovation. The gift also creates endowed scholarships and a research collaboration with DePaul's Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness.

In recognition of the couple's generosity and dedicated leadership, the college has been renamed the Eugene P. Jarvis College of Computing and Digital Media. DePaul

celebrated the new center, the college's renaming and the couple's gift with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and celebratory events on May 20.

"Eugene and Sasha's legacy gift ensures CDM will continue to empower generations of student leaders and innovators for years to come, helping build a brighter collective future," says former DePaul President A. Gabriel Esteban. "On behalf of our students and the entire DePaul family, I thank them for this transformative act of generosity that will have a profound impact on our students, as well as the Chicago community and industries nationwide."

A Shared Legacy of Progress and Partnership

With approximately 5,500 undergraduate and graduate students, CDM offers nationally ranked, cutting-edge programs in computer science, cybersecurity, data science, game design, graphic design, film, animation and more. The college, which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2021, includes the School of Computing, School of Design and School of Cinematic Arts and has a diverse student body that brings fresh perspectives to the industries students enter and transform.

"Sasha and I are thrilled to help one of DePaul's most exciting, vital colleges expand its innovative, collaborative, hands-on programs," says Jarvis.

The gift builds on the college's evolution (see "The Evolution of CDM" below) as well as the couple's own remarkable history of support and immersive leadership at DePaul.

In 2008, Jarvis was named the first Game Designer in Residence at CDM, where he provided guidance at the outset of the gaming program and worked side-by-side with student game developers. Jarvis is an icon in the video game industry. Starting in the 1970s at Atari and Williams, he programmed some of their earliest microprocessor-powered pinball and video arcade games. Jarvis' best-known creations include Defender, Robotron: 2084, Smash TV and Cruis'n. He continues his passion for arcade games at the Raw Thrills design and development studio, which has included DePaul alumni on its staff and marked its 20th anniversary in 2021.

"It's been exciting to help grow DePaul's pioneering video game design program for the last 15 years, and see it expand and flourish into one of the world's foremost game design programs," says Jarvis. "At the same time, the College of Computing and Digital Media has vastly expanded its creative palette, embracing the School of Design and School of Cinematic Arts. Guided by former Dean David Miller and current college leadership, including Interim Dean Lucia Dettori and the accomplished faculty, CDM is laser-focused on the emerging creative industries and technologies of tomorrow, giving students the edge they need to innovate and thrive as future creators and professionals."

Gerritson chaired *Now We Must: The Campaign for DePaul's Students*, a fundraising effort that raised nearly \$125 million from the DePaul community to support students' most urgent needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The couple previously made a gift to create the Sasha and Eugene Jarvis Opera Hall, a state-of-the-art opera performance space at DePaul's School of Music, and has given

to DePaul's Opera Theatre Endowment, Fund for the Institute of Global Homelessness and Holtschneider Chair in Vincentian Studies.

"Eugene's and Sasha's active involvement in the lives of our students goes far beyond their extraordinary philanthropy," says **Gerald Beeson (BUS '94)**, chair of DePaul's Board of Trustees. "Our students have also had the incredible benefit of sharing in their expertise, artistry and creativity as a powerful motivation for their success along similar career paths."

A Space for Creativity and Community

Located at the DePaul Center on the university's Loop Campus, the Jarvis Student Center for Innovation and Collaboration will connect students with industry professionals, creators and experts-in-residence. It will be a locus of interdisciplinary activity that inspires both faculty- and student-led curricular and extracurricular innovation and strengthens the academia-to-industry pipeline.

"The Jarvis Student Center for Innovation and Collaboration is an evolving and multifunctional place for building a community among students and bringing in experts for their benefit," says Dettori. "We want to encourage spontaneous collaboration among students as well as projects led by faculty and industry. The game studio is an example that combines all these elements."

Game development draws contributors from all three of CDM's schools, and the DePaul Originals Game Studio (DOGS) moved into the new space as its first initiative. DOGS simulates a professional video game studio, with students from all of the CDM schools collaborating on the development of a single game across academic quarters until it's polished enough for public release. Building an academia-to-industry pipeline is key. DOGS

Photo by Stephanie Nikolas (CDM '20)

1950s

First computer science courses are offered in the College of Commerce as part of the Accountancy Program.

1971

DePaul announces a universitywide commitment to the advancement of computer science education; computer science courses become a requirement for all College of Commerce majors.

1978

A master's degree program in computer science is introduced in the Department of Mathematics.

1981

The Department of Computer Science is established in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Helmut Epp is the founding chairman of the new department.

The Evolution of CDM

By Brittan Nannenga

1960s

Computer programming courses expand into the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and are offered in the Department of Mathematics.

1977

Academic Computer Services Department is created and opens labs at both the Loop and Lincoln Park campuses to support the use of two computer systems: the IBM 370 and Hewlett-Packard "Mini" computer. University Senate approves a proposal for a Bachelor of Science degree in computer science in the Department of Mathematics.

1991

A doctoral program in computer science is introduced.



DePaul alumna **Shibani Maran (CDM MS '21)** dons a virtual-reality headset at a CDM event connecting students and industry professionals.

alumni are already working in industry studios such as NetherRealm and Iron Galaxy. Epic Games, developer of Unreal Engine—a software platform ubiquitous in the video game industry—recently accepted DePaul into its highly regarded global academic partner program.

"Each of the studio's students works on particular pieces with an eye toward this bigger idea," says Allen Turner, a School of Design senior professional lecturer who runs the studio with School of Computing instructor Will Meyers as creative director and engineering director, respectively. Turner emphasizes training through teamwork. "Whether graduate or undergraduate, what matters is the quality of their work and how well they understand it. As people stand out, we want them to mentor other people to help them move forward. That helps us to build a community."

DOGS also connects with high school teachers and students in the Chicago Public Schools system through outreach efforts involving game-development mentorship.

Furthering the connection to the local community, CDM's PUSH Studio will also move into the Jarvis Student Center for Innovation and Collaboration, working with social-impact organizations and businesses. The interdisciplinary studio—modeled after the college's iD Lab, where students create software prototypes for large companies that provide guidance and career opportunities—uses human-centered design methods to solve real-world problems. Students and faculty partner with industry professionals to drive new solutions using artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality and voice user interfaces.

"It's a mutually beneficial relationship," says Dettori. "Students get grants and mentorship from business and nonprofit clients in Chicago and the experience of working in that environment, and clients get access to creative, exciting talents developed here at CDM."

1995

The School of Computer Science, Telecommunications and Information Systems (CTI) is established. Helmut Epp transitions to dean; David Miller is appointed as associate dean.

2008

CTI is renamed as the College of Computing and Digital Media (CDM) and organized into two schools: the School of Computing and the School of Cinema and Interactive Media.

2021

CDM celebrates two milestones: 50 years of DePaul's commitment to the advancement of computer science education, and 40 years of a dedicated computer science unit at DePaul. Dean Miller announces he will be stepping down at the end of the 2021–22 academic year. Lucia Dettori is named interim dean.

2007

David Miller is named as dean of CTI after serving as interim dean since 2005.

2015

CDM expands its programs into three schools: the School of Computing, the School of Design and the School of Cinematic Arts.

2022

The college is renamed the Eugene P. Jarvis College of Computing and Digital Media in recognition of a landmark gift from Eugene P. Jarvis and his wife, Sasha Gerritson. The gift creates the Jarvis Student Center for Innovation and Collaboration, an interdisciplinary center linking students and faculty from CDM's three schools and industry experts.



"CDM is laser-focused on the emerging creative industries and technologies of tomorrow, giving students the edge they need to innovate and thrive as future creators and professionals."

Jarvis (pictured) and his wife, DePaul alumna and Trustee Sasha Gerritson, are building on their remarkable history of support and leadership at DePaul.

Connecting DePaul's Mission

The gift also endows the Eugene P. Jarvis CDM Scholars Program, which will provide recognition and significantly expand financial assistance to outstanding students at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

"Making higher education accessible to the next generation—a core objective of DePaul's Vincentian mission—has never been more important to us," says Sasha Gerritson. "We want to enable DePaul students to dream big and put their creativity and skills to use in a way that benefits society."

Another area of innovation from the gift is a new collaboration between DePaul's Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH) and CDM. The institute leads a global movement to end street homelessness by bridging the gap among research, policy and practice. CDM students, mentored by faculty, will aid IGH and its partners in cities worldwide with data collection and analysis and communications initiatives. Program participants will help IGH better understand and combat homelessness through a comprehensive tool kit of

specializations that includes big data analytics, statistical modeling and user-experience design.

"Two important pillars of successfully addressing homelessness include gathering, analyzing and applying data to decision-making and continuous communication about what's working and what's not working," says IGH Director Lydia Stazen. "IGH is thrilled to collaborate with CDM on projects related to data and communication to bolster our work to support communities around the world in addressing homelessness."

Limitless Possibilities

"The sky is the limit thanks to Eugene's and Sasha's generosity, partnership and support," says Dettori. "This gift validates and empowers our unique pedagogy, connecting students, industry and community, and challenges us to expand those avenues in new, exciting ways. We look forward to the journey together."