



and in Every Child, There is a Scientist

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In Every Child, There is a Scientist

\$ 2 million gift for science technology, engineering

Mark Gelfand is a tinkerer. As a child in Cleveland, he collected broken television sets that his neighbors had placed on the curb so he could build new devices with the parts. When his uncle, **Leonard Gelfand** (CIT '50), gave him a shortwave radio kit, he spent a month fiddling with the vacuum tubes to get it to work.

Gelfand, who went on to a successful career in industry, never forgot how those early experiences sparked his fascination with science. And he laments the lack of hands-on instruction in science, technology, engineering and math—the STEM fields—for children today. He's not alone: Government officials and leaders in education emphasize a need for greater student proficiency in these fields in order to drive future research and innovation.

To address the issue, the philanthropist founded the Gelfand Family Charitable Trust, which supports STEM education initiatives—including science fairs and afterschool science clubs—in several U.S. cities, Israel and east Africa. "I'm focused on STEM education for as many kids as possible," he explained in a 2008 interview with ControlDesign.com. "If there's a financial need focused on hands-on STEM enrichment for children, then I'm interested in helping."

Gelfand—who often notes that "in every child, there is a scientist"—is not a Case Western Reserve alumnus, but he has honored his hometown, his uncle and his mother, **Dolores Gordon Gelfand** (CLC '66, GRS '67), through a series of contributions in support of STEM outreach efforts at the university. One initiative, the Gelfand Science and Engineering Fair Program, trains undergraduates to volunteer in middle and high school classrooms, where they help students develop exciting science fair projects.

The latest example of his commitment is a \$2 million endowment gift to create the Gelfand STEM Center at Case Western Reserve. The center will foster collaboration across the university in creating STEM learning opportunities for pre-college youth. Just as important, it will provide local K-12 educators with a one-stop shop to learn about and participate in the university's STEM education initiatives.

"The new center will be a dynamic place where people can go and be stimulated and feel a sense of

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At age 16, Mark Gelfand had an electronics workshop in his family's home in Cleveland. Now, he is dedicated to sparking children's interest in science and engineering.

Photo credit: Courtesy of Gelfand Family Charitable Trust

belonging,” says Kimberly Kamborian, project director for the Gelfand Family Charitable Trust. “This is a place where someone can go and share ideas, ask questions, receive training, learn about opportunities. It’s a hub for all ages.”

Through its outreach to educators, the Gelfand STEM Center will have a powerful impact on how science is taught, Kamborian says. “The goal is not just teaching content,” she explains. “It’s students prototyping. It’s students exploring and then going back to the lab to do more. The center will build capacity in the schools to achieve just that.”

Gelfand’s generosity will build capacity at the university as well. For many years, Case Western Reserve faculty and staff, joined by undergraduate and graduate student volunteers, have led a range of activities to attract pre-college youth to the STEM fields. For example, the Women in Science and Engineering Roundtable (WISER), a program overseen by the Flora Stone Mather Center for Women, leads two afterschool science and engineering clubs for girls in grades 6-8. The Center for Science and Mathematics Education (CSME) organizes the Northeast Ohio Regional Science Olympiad, the Science is Fun! Family Day, and a year-round field research program for middle- and high-schoolers called Environmental Heroes.

Until now, however, no mechanism has existed for coordinating those efforts and seeding new ones through interdisciplinary partnerships.

“This gift will allow us to enter into an unprecedented collaboration between the College of Arts and Sciences and Case School of Engineering,” says **Jim Bader**, director of CSME, which will become part of the Gelfand STEM Center. “What we’re proposing is something we don’t see at other universities—to deal with STEM as an integrated area instead of an ‘S,’ a ‘T,’ an ‘E’ and an ‘M.’ This is really how it should be done in the education process.”

Bader and other faculty members from the college and the engineering school have begun to develop ideas for a physical space to support programs that build interest in STEM fields among students in kindergarten through 12th grade, provide resources and training opportunities to teachers, and advocate for new ways of educating students to be scientists and scientifically informed citizens.

“The most important thing we can provide is opportunity,” Bader says. “There are a lot of talented students out there, but there’s not enough opportunity for them. This gift will give a whole group of kids the chance to experience the excitement of this kind of hands-on work, and be inspired to pursue it as a career.”



Adrian Caraballo, a 7th-grader at Robinson G. Jones Elementary School, developed his science fair project with help from Sarah Lukowski (CWR '12), a Gelfand Science and Engineering Fair Fellow.
Photo credit: Sarah Lukowski



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