

HUMBER MAGAZINE

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BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

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On January 24, 2023, students, faculty, staff, industry partners and community members gathered in Humber's Barrett Centre for Technology Innovation (Barrett CTI) as history was made.

MAKING HISTORY FOR THE FUTURE

By Phil Sach | Illustration by Taylor Callery

Donning Humber navy and gold scarves, Bob Barrett, president and CEO of Polytainers Inc., along with his wife Francine Rouleau-Barrett, co-founders of The Barrett Family Foundation, took to the stage to announce a monumental \$30 million commitment to technology innovation and access to STEM-related post-secondary education.

The largest gift ever to an Ontario college, this donation expands upon their already immense impact on Humber by establishing 100 new scholarships for engineering and technology students and additional funding for skills training, work-integrated learning, and experiential opportunities. It also invests in the Barrett CTI itself, supporting programs, people and resources for the cutting-edge space while contributing to the widespread digital transformation of Humber's campuses.



The impact even goes beyond the college with the establishment of the Barrett Centre Collaboratory designed to spark interest in STEM education among grade 6–12 students, and by offering a diverse range of industry-driven development opportunities and micro-credentials.

“The Barrett family has built something transformational at Humber,” says Neal Mohammed, director of the Barrett CTI. “They’ve created a hub for innovation, collaboration and new technologies where students gain job-ready skills, industries enhance their operations, and set the stage for innovative solutions that address tomorrow’s most complex challenges.”

Growing Together

The Barretts began their history with Humber over 20 years ago, providing students with work placements through their industry-leading packaging manufacturer, Polytainers. Bob Barrett grew to become a strong supporter of Humber’s unique brand of polytechnic education and a passionate contributor to the local economy where he built his business.

Driven by a powerful sense of duty and a relentless dedication to the success of Humber’s students, Bob Barrett brought this partnership to new heights in 2013 with the creation of The Barrett Family Foundation. Since then, the Barrett family have donated millions to help young people pursue education, gain relevant workplace skills, and find meaningful careers.



Over the past ten years, the Barretts created more than 960 scholarships, awards and bursaries, contributed to skills mentorship and competition training, and even promoted STEM education on a global scale donating \$2 million to support outreach for girls in Kenya and Ethiopia. In 2018, they made a donation, adding to a previous gift, and contributed \$10 million that would see the creation of the Barrett CTI. Their support also meant that the Barrett CTI could become a living lab for mechatronics, automation and advanced manufacturing where students learn alongside leading companies and faculty with expertise in robotics, 3D printing and collaborative digital technologies—including those used at Polytainers.

The Foundation’s total giving to Humber now stands at more than \$42 million—the most ever

contributed to a Canadian college by a single donor. The 2023 donation brings Unlimited, Humber’s first comprehensive fundraising campaign, to over \$85 million, surpassing its original \$50 million goal.

Empowering Student Success

Student support is a hallmark of the Barretts’ philanthropy. “My father instilled in me a sense of ingenuity, entrepreneurship and giving back, and now we are building upon these lifelong teachings for the future,” remarks Bob Barrett. “We are supporting areas vital to the prosperity of young people and our workforce’s productivity, sustainability and adaptability—a vision we know Humber shares.”

The Foundation has granted gifted learners unfettered access to everything needed to achieve their ambitions, regardless of circumstance. One such student is Thomas Ylipelkola, an Electromechanical Engineering Technology alum and recipient of a Barrett Family Foundation scholarship.

“Humber prepares students to build good careers, and this scholarship allowed me to take the first steps towards my own,” shares Ylipelkola. “My love of engineering came about while studying economics at another institution. After transitioning to Humber, I had to carry a great deal of existing student debt with me. The Barretts removed this financial strain and allowed me to fully focus on my education.”

The scholarship propelled Ylipelkola from the classroom into an internship with Polytainers, where he could test

the skills he developed during his program and level them up using the very same pneumatic, mechatronics and robotics machinery he trained with at Humber. Upon graduating in 2020, he officially joined Polytainers as an automation technician—a defining part of his career. “I am growing and learning each day while building a skilled profession I can be proud of and confident in,” says Ylipelkola.

Partnerships with Purpose

Industry partners like Polytainers are integral to the Humber experience, providing hands-on training that complements the classroom and serving as the catalyst for real-world solutions that position Canada ahead of a growing “innovation gap.” When these partners work together, the possibilities for what they can enable for the future are endless—and through the Barrett family’s philanthropy, they have been instrumental in fostering collaboration in countless ways.

The Advanced Manufacturing Skills Consortium is one such example. Comprised of nine industry leaders, the Consortium contributes to technology, talent and opportunities at the Barrett CTI, including collaborative projects, programs, applied research and events. Today, the Consortium includes Cisco Canada, DMG MORI Canada, Festo Didactic, Javelin Technologies,

KUKA Robotics Canada, Magna International, Rockwell Automation, SEW-EURODRIVE and SICK Canada.

Another important way collaboration is being advanced for a greater purpose is the annual Barrett Partner Day, held for the first time in 2022. The pioneering event brings together all the organizations supported by the Barretts to create a forum for dialogue, foster synergies and find opportunities to leverage expertise and resources. By connecting Humber to other charities that the family supports, such as United Way, World Vision, Rideau Hall Foundation, and Trees for Life, the Barretts are creating an innovative and connected ecosystem where like-minded organizations can come together to break ground on ideas that have the potential for transformative solutions, particularly ones that can create positive impact in the community.

The Road Ahead

The Barrett family’s prominent place in Humber’s history is undeniable. But for Bob Barrett, giving back is about much more. “We believe in Humber,” he says. “We believe in the educators and administrators who make it special, the students working hard to realize their goals, and the future we can build together. Humber has the vision, power, energy and, more importantly, dreams to make an extraordinary impact in education.” ●



From left: Dr. Ann Marie Vaughan and Barrett Family Foundation members, Bob Barrett, Francine Rouleau-Barrett, Rebecca Barrett, Kim Barrett McKenna, Mark Cullen and Alister Mathieson.