



*Jean and Gary Shekhter. Photo provided by the Shekhters.*

## Helping San Diegans Return to Work

**UC San Diego donors Jean and Gary Shekhter are leading support for a collaborative COVID-19 screening effort by key research institutions in the region**

When Gary and Jean Shekhter learned about a research alliance that could help San Diegans return to work safely through comprehensive coronavirus screenings, they were inspired to help. San Diego has been good to the couple, who came to the U.S. from the Ukraine with little more than hope for a better life. Now, they are giving back to needs related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

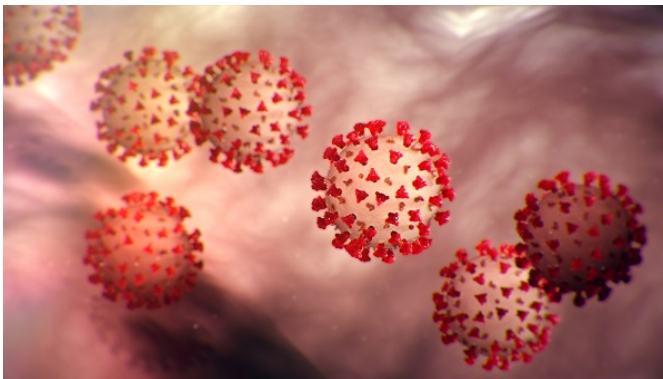
“Nearly 300,000 San Diego County residents have lost jobs because of COVID-19,” said UC San Diego Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. “Our economy is struggling, so the sooner people can get back to their jobs, the better for our region. I want to thank Gary and Jean Shekhter for their lead gift to

help San Diegans return safely to work.”

The Shekhters gave \$350,000 to the UC San Diego COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund to help fund SEARCH—San Diego Epidemiology and Research for COVID-19 Health, a collaborative research study that aims to help local businesses and employees return to work safely by screening community members for presence of the coronavirus. The SEARCH alliance is co-led by UC San Diego, Scripps Research and Rady Children’s Hospital-San Diego. Other research partners include the Sanford Consortium for Regenerative Medicine, Salk Institute for Biological Studies and Biocom. At UC San Diego, SEARCH is led by researchers Gene Yeo, Rob Knight and Louise Laurent.

UC San Diego launched a similar testing program on campus, called Return to Learn, in March. The evidence-based program aims to make monthly COVID-19 testing available to the campus community in an effort to track the novel coronavirus and better position the university to resume in-person activities in the fall 2020.

“Based on my understanding about COVID-19, the most efficient way of opening the economy is to screen more people,” said Gary Shekhter. “Screening gives us an understanding of what’s going on in the community, such as seeing a particular situation in an area ignite, then isolating and dealing with the contact area.” He added that when he met Professor Rob Knight and learned what the alliance was about—and that it needed funding—he was excited to invest in the project.



*Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). CDC illustration.*

“If we are to manage the pandemic effectively, as has already been done in other countries, we need fundamentally different approaches to screening and to understanding where the virus is in our community,” said Knight, who is originally from New Zealand. “The Shekhters’ gift will help us start to develop and deploy these approaches via the SEARCH project, and understand how SARS-CoV-2 biospecimen collection and assays can be scaled to the point where they can be used effectively for the tens

of millions of tests required for epidemiology and infection control, including integrating studies of humans and the built environment. We appreciate the Shekhters’ vision in leading the way to make this possible.”

The Shekhters were also moved by the \$350,000 matching gift challenge by The Conrad Prebys Foundation in support of the UC San Diego COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund, including the university’s efforts on behalf of the SEARCH alliance. Gifts of all sizes from many donors to this fund were also critical to meeting the Foundation’s match. Through broad community support, the university’s emergency response fund has raised more than \$1 million.

Jean Shekhter added, “I hope our gift will inspire others. We want to encourage the community to get involved in the COVID-19 crisis. Because of UC San Diego, our region has developed a tremendous base for life sciences. We feel it is very important to support this great institution.”

Gary Shekhter, originally from Odessa in the Soviet Union, started his business in 1985 from a small office in El Cajon. Today, Helix Electric has grown to have offices on both coasts, Hawaii and throughout California and Nevada and has garnered numerous performance awards. Born in Belarus, Jean Shekhter earned her degree as a music teacher and accompanist and inspired others to explore their creative energies and talents by teaching piano and playing for ballet classes in San Diego. She has served on many boards including Seacrest Village Retirement Communities, the Jewish Community Foundation, as well as the Rancho Santa Fe Women’s Foundation. She is presently on the board of the Old Globe Theater and UC San Diego Moores Cancer Center.

The couple has raised two children—Boris and Sarah—who are both graduates of Northwestern University. Boris is president of Helix Electric and Sarah earned her law degree from Hastings School of Law in San Francisco and is an attorney at the Seltzer, Kaplan firm.

Gary and Jean Shekhter quietly give back in many different ways. They are pleased to provide support to UC San Diego in an effort to help fund the necessary research resources during these unprecedented times.

[Learn more about the COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund](#) and how your philanthropy—as part of the Campaign for UC San Diego—can help develop new treatments for those affected by the disease. Together, we are continuing our nontraditional path toward revolutionary ideas, unexpected answers, lifesaving discoveries and planet-changing impact. To learn more about the Campaign for UC San Diego, a university-wide comprehensive fundraising effort concluding in 2022, visit [campaign.ucsd.edu](https://campaign.ucsd.edu).

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