

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Christine Clark

Nov 30, 2017



Photo by Cody Smith/Muir College Intern

Irwin Jacobs, Founding Muir College Faculty Member and Qualcomm Co-founder, Shares Stories of Success and Inspiration

Talk by legendary philanthropist commemorates Muir College's 50th Anniversary

When Irwin Jacobs left Massachusetts Institute of Technology to take a job UC San Diego, the professor of computer science and engineering knew there was something distinctive about the university.

“The thing that I noticed the most when I came here was it was very small and there were very few people—and that had very positive aspects,” Jacobs said. “For example, at MIT I was mostly involved with people who were engineering because I was engineering. But here, there were so few people that you had to be involved with many people from all backgrounds.”

The unique beginnings of UC San Diego were the focus of the talk Jacobs delivered Nov. 15 on campus to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of John Muir College, which is being celebrated throughout the academic year.

Irwin Jacobs: A philanthropist, academic, business leader and friend

Jacobs is co-founder, former chairman and CEO of Qualcomm Incorporated and a UC San Diego founding faculty member. He served as a professor in electrical and computer engineering from 1966 to 1972 and his appointment was at Muir College. Jacobs and his wife, Joan, are the university’s largest individual benefactors.

He spoke about the influence the campus has had, and continues to have, on the region, and how remarkable it has been to see the university grow from an economic standpoint. The total estimated sales for UC San Diego-related companies in San Diego County is approximately \$32.4 billion annually, and there are more than 200 active UC San Diego-related companies in the region.

“The amount of research development and education are all working together so well; it was something I had hoped for when I first came here,” added the professor turned entrepreneur..

Jacobs was joined on the stage by Professor Emeritus Stuart Brody, a faculty member in the Division of Biological Sciences for 50 years and a founding faculty member of Muir College. Both Jacobs and Brody were present at the dedication of Muir in 1967.

Brody, a personal friend of Jacobs, remarked on the philanthropist’s generosity to UC San Diego and region.

“Through all his stages of life—entrepreneurial, philanthropic, academic, et cetera—Irwin has always had a set of values and persona that transcends all of those activities in that he’s been a devoted family man and for me, at least, a gracious and thoughtful friend,” said Brody.

UC San Diego continues the nontradition

Both Jacobs and Brody reminisced about the experimental culture UC San Diego had in its early days, which still reverberates on campus today.

“This campus was very unique in some way when we first came,” said Brody, who visited the campus often while he was working toward his Ph.D. at Stanford University. “There was a spirit here; a spirit of adventure that I thought was interesting.”

Jacobs discussed how he came to the decision to retire from academic life in early ‘70s to start his first company.

“For years, I was teaching and telling students how all this theory would be useful in the real-world, so I wanted to demonstrate that. This was my rationale,” Jacobs said.

He added that anyone who wants to succeed in business should have a strong academic background.

“The key is getting a very good education and taking a lot of basic courses ... a lot of mathematics, physics, engineering ...because that’s going to last no matter how things change going forward,” Jacobs emphasized. He added, “Be open to change. It’s going to be happening. Look for possible opportunities within those changes.”

Celebrating the legacy of UC San Diego’s college system

Both professors talked about the educational philosophy of Muir College.

“The college being named after Muir encourages people to show environmental concerns and think about these issues, which did shape the college in a somewhat different fashion,” Jacobs said.

“Having John Muir as a guiding light is a very good one.”

Muir College’s general education requirements were designed to be the most flexible of all the colleges, offering students from every major maximum freedom to choose courses that meet individual goals and interests within a framework that ensures depth of knowledge across three major disciplinary areas. These requirements combine individual choice and responsibility while encouraging experiential learning programs such as education abroad.

Both Jacobs and Brody talked about the exciting developments UC San Diego has in the works in the years to come.

UC San Diego is transforming physically and intellectually—construction is underway in the Torrey Pines Living and Learning Neighborhood, an exciting new addition to the campus incorporating residential, academic and administrative space. In addition, the [Light Rail Trolley](#) station is in the works, which will serve major activity centers, such as Old Town, UC San Diego and Westfield UTC.

Additional events that are part of Muir College’s anniversary celebration include a week of events for John Muir’s birthday in April 2018, which coincides with the campus’s Earth Month activities, as well as an environmental conference featuring Muir biographer Donald Worster.

For more information about Muir's 50th Anniversary, click [here](#).

The Campaign For
UC San Diego

Continue the
nontradition

Keep up with campus news by subscribing to *This Week @ UC San Diego*