

News Release

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Local businessman gives UMSL \$1.5 million

The University of Missouri-St. Louis announced today a \$1.5 million gift from noted Greek philanthropist Nicholas Karakas to endow a chair in Byzantine and Orthodox Studies. An international search is underway for a candidate for the position.

UMSL Chancellor Tom George made the announcement during his annual report to the community at America's Center.

"This generous gift from Mr. Karakas, will allow the university to offer a comprehensive study of the history, culture, politics and individuals of the Byzantine Empire, one of the most powerful economic and cultural forces in Europe," George said.

Karakas offered this gift, as well as a previous gift from the Karakas Family Foundation, to honor his parents Achilles and Malamati Karakas. Presented to the university in 1996, that gift endowed a chair of Greek studies and established the Greek Studies program at the university. Karakas' generous contributions to the university over the last 15 years also include Greek language scholarships and the establishment of the Nicholas and Theodora Matsakis Hellenic Cultural Center and the Sam Nakis Memorial Lecture in Greek Studies.

In addition, Karakas and his family have supported the Blanche M. Touhill Performing Arts Center, the university's music programs and The Center for the Humanities at UMSL.

"The idea of establishing the chair of Byzantine and Orthodox studies was to expose this era of world history, a span of some 1,000 years, providing an inside view of the society and culture during that period of state and church," Karakas said.

He has been an active member of numerous advisory boards at the university, serving as a member of the Chancellor's Council and as the current chair of the Greek Professorship Advisory Committee. He received the chancellor's medallion for his leadership and dedication to the principles of higher education.

Karakas has been a high-profile member of the Orthodox Church and has served as president of the Orthodox Christian Laity, a movement of Orthodox Christian laymen, women and clergy. During his three-year term, he was appointed to a two-year term on the Archdiocesan Council, the highest governing administrative body of the Orthodox church.

Karakas was chair of his family's business, Marcus Distributors, which distributed candy, tobacco and grocery products. He served as president and board member of the Missouri Association and the National Association of Tobacco Distributors. He has served on numerous boards of community organizations including the Mathews-Dickey Boys' & Girls' Club of St. Louis.

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