

# JIM WYANT'S IMPACTFUL PHILANTHROPIC STRATEGY TO ADVANCE HIGHER EDUCATION

Kaye Rowan, Executive Director of Development

James C. Wyant College of Optical Sciences, Univ. of Arizona, 1630 E. University Blvd., Tucson, AZ 85721

## ABSTRACT

From humble roots, James C. Wyant has one of those “rags-to-riches” stories that people love to hear. His early years illustrates a young boy who took over the family’s chicken farm in rural Ohio when his father suddenly passed away, forcing Jim onto a platform where his natural talents for business brilliance took immediate action. Today, as a distinguished researcher, educator and entrepreneur, Jim knows that in addition to several key people and their influences, a solid education is what also helped prepare him for an incredible journey of fulfillment. Consequently, it seems only natural that Jim and his family are now making notable philanthropic investments in higher education at several U.S. institutions – and often in the name of those who inspired him.

While there are several motivational stories about philanthropists who are making a difference in this world, Jim truly stands in a court of his own. In this presentation, you will learn what motivates James C. Wyant to make these generous and ingenious decisions to support academia.

**Keywords:** Wyant Tribute, Development, Fundraising, Wyant College Renaming

## 1. WHY JIM WYANT MAKES NOTABLE PHILNATHROPIC INVESTMENTS



Let’s be honest... not a lot of kids grow up saying, “When I grow up, I want to be a fundraiser!” I sure didn’t. Maybe because my only experience of the trade, at that point in life, was selling ugly wrapping paper to my relatives or washing cars for cheerleading uniforms. It didn’t seem like a promising career to me.

While I pursued a career in news media, a later in life detour brought me into this incredibly personally and professionally rewarding career path - yes – as a fundraiser – and better yet, a role at the University of Arizona.

Seriously, I have a great job! I have the unbelievable privilege to meet and collaborate with passionate, mission-driven people who want to make the world a safer, healthier, more prosperous place.

So for this former news person, I still get to learn a person’s story- what **motivates** them, how they made their best investments and choices in life and how they **envision to make a difference in this world** – and with that information **help them decide on meaningful opportunities** for their philanthropic interests.

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**Sitting down Jim Wyant over the past 10 years** has confirmed with me that many of his core values and life experiences are what motivated his philanthropic investments –especially at the University of Arizona Wyant College of Optical Sciences. Here’s what I learned about Jim Wyant:

## **2. HIS CAREER PASSION FOR SCIENCES AND TEACHING WERE DEEP ROOTED**

James Clair Wyant was born in the farming community of Lyons, Ohio and was the only child born to Clair William and Idah May Wyant.

At age 5, Jim lost his father to a tragic farming accident. Yet, Jim will quickly tell you that it was his father’s interest in physics that prompted Jim’s early curiosity for the sciences- and for teaching. You see, his father –who, by the way, received the highest score in an Ohio state physics exam as a high school senior – left behind science books that Jim would spend hours reading.



Then, with a burning desire to share his new-founded knowledge, young Jim would seek out quiet places on the farm to offer lectures to imaginary classes. Rumor has it that for years there were some **incredibly smart farm animals** roaming the hillsides of Lyons – likely those who took good notes from Jim’s lectures.

## **3. HE IS INTUITIVE – HIS BUSINESS TALENTS ALSO TOOK EARLY ROOTS**

Watching the Olympics the other night, I saw an ad with the brilliant slogan “*Start Your Impossible Now*” with clips of children discovering their athletic talents. They weren’t waiting for “later.” Jim Wyant didn’t either when it came to acting on his business interests.

At age 13, when most kids were considering a newspaper route, Jim was in charge of the family farm. Their produce was corn and soybeans.

Yet Jim’s **natural business instincts** were already taking root when he decided that chickens (more than 28,000 a year) and bales of hay would increase their profits. He hired his classmates to work with him in the summer and eventually Jim’s income would far out-scale that of his own teachers.

## **4. HE IS PROGRESSIVE- A PERSON INTRODUCING NEW METHODS, IDEAS AND PRODUCTS**

Inspired by the impact that optics can have, Jim repeatedly took risks to co-establish and invest in successful optics startups. His first optics company was **founded in his research lab** as a professor at the University of Arizona in 1982.

Acting on a desire to take his discoveries to market, he joined forces with a former student, a post-doc and a research associate, to establish WYKO Corp. in Tucson. The idea for the company came about after he co-invented a computerized interferometer for high-precision measurements of the roughness and shape of surfaces.

Then in 2002, again with another team of brilliant minds, he co-founded 4-D Technology Corporation, a Tucson company that developed and manufactured metrology instruments.

Many other successful optics-based companies were also very eager to be on the receiving end of Jim's business advice, asking him to serve on their boards of directors. To which Jim accepted many of these offers.

## 5. HE FIRMLY BELIEVES THAT EDUCATION STRENGTHENS THE MIND

It's clear that Jim finds the value of education immeasurable.

Jim earned a bachelor's of science degree in Physics from *Case Institute of Technology University* (1965); and a Masters (1967) and doctorate (1969) in optical engineering from the *University of Rochester's Institute of Optics*. (1)

With these degrees in hand, his career in optical engineering began at **Itek Corp.**, based in Massachusetts – and worked on a



team that was managed by **Robert R. Shannon** – whom Jim says helped him get that job and then also had a hand in bringing Jim to the University of Arizona.

**In 1974**, he joined the University of Arizona as an **assistant professor** of optical sciences, becoming a full professor by 1979.

**At the point that WYKO** started to ramp up its operations by 1984, holding strong to his love for teaching, Jim moved to a part-time teaching role. At this point, Jim was living out his childhood dreams to be a teacher and a business owner – **but little did he know then that he would be doing both at the same time.**

When WYKO was acquired by Veeco Instruments Inc, in 1997, he returned to **full-time teaching** at the UA and **two years later was named director of OSC.**

### **College of Optical Sciences Founding Dean**

In 2005, the **Optical Sciences Center transitioned to a College** and Jim was named its **founding dean.**

Throughout Jim's terms as Director and Dean:

1. He oversaw **tremendous growth in the College's research contracts** –
2. the **student enrollment nearly tripled** in size –
3. and the college's Meinel Optical Sciences building **added 47,000 square feet of state-of-the-art teaching and research space.**
4. Even throughout his teaching career he advised **25 MS students and 34 PhD students.**



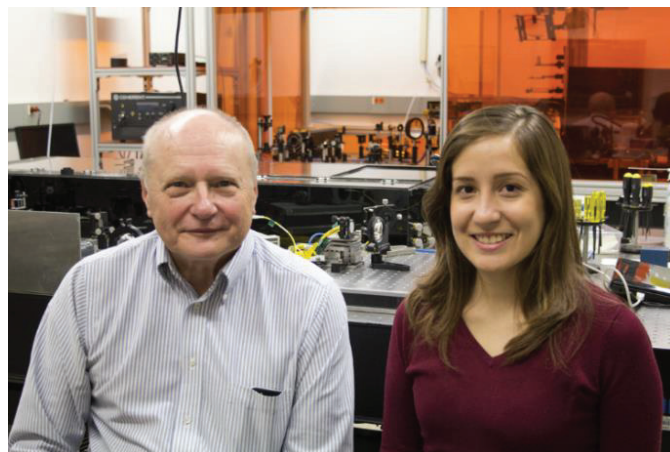


## Wyant Retires

When Jim retired as dean in 2011, colleagues from across campus and throughout the optics industry, former students, friends and staff, all came together to express their gratitude for his leadership and the impact he had on their lives – both personally and professionally.



And you can be certain that professor emeritus Jim Wyant is still a very visible presence and force at the college.



## 6. JIM IS RESPECTED AND HIS WORK IS VALUED

**Most heroes are not extroverts.** They don't strut and speechify – rather they are the kind of people who face an opportunity and rise to the occasion. They believe in their abilities and act on them...and then without asking for attention, others will take notice.

**To me, Jim's one of those kind of heroes.** Throughout his lifetime, he has received many well deserved recognitions (2) ...

1. A **member of the National Academy of Engineering** and the **National Academy of Inventors**,
2. he served as **president of SPIE and OSA** –
3. His **technical work** also received numerous recognitions.
4. And he was also **knighted as Sir James of Arizona**.... The Holoknight – a charter founded by a pioneer researcher in the field with the intent to bring together and honor the top researchers in this field.

## 7. JIM IS DEVOTED

In this room, today, there will be **many stories about Jim's friendship, mentorship, and partnership.** While you can be certain that Jim values you all, **his greatest devotion lies with his family.**

When I asked Jim who was his greatest influence in life, without hesitation, he said his parents. And there are other family members that Jim holds with equal admiration.

While living in Boston, Jim met a beautiful artist named of **Louise**, who became his wife in 1971. Still mere newlyweds, they moved to the dusty desert town of Tucson, where Jim accepted an assistant professor position at the University of Arizona.



Their son, **Clair**, rounded out the family upon his arrival in 1980.

**In 2004, he and Clair faced a devastating loss** when Louise passed away from cancer. Bravely Jim moved forward submerging himself in work.

Then, quite unexpectedly and several years later, his path crossed with this intriguing engineering- and math-minded woman who also has an incredible talent for writing. Today, Jim and **Tammy**, as partners share many laughs, a love for travel and adventure – and for ham radio.



## 8. SIT FOR AN HOUR IN CONVERSATION WITH JIM AND YOU CAN IMMEDIATELY SENSE GRATITUDE.

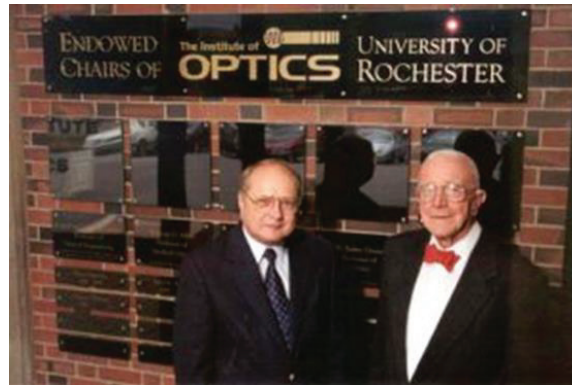
You might also determine that for him, the undertaking of a full life includes his sincere appreciation to have received an education and for the opportunity to offer it to others. Here's a few places where Jim and his family made a difference to the educational experiences of others:

### Emanuel College

**The Louise Doherty Wyant Endowed Professorship** established by Emanuel College Alumna Louise Wyant and her husband Jim. The professorship funds the Wyant Lecture Series, featuring speakers in the humanities, history and arts. (3)

### University of Rochester- School of Engineering and Applied Sciences

Jim honored his PhD advisor by establishing the **Parker M. Givens Professorship in Optics** at the University of Rochester in 2001 and also funded the **James Wyant Professorship of Optics** at the University in 2013. (4)



### Case Western Reserve University

**Jim was a student-athlete, not by choice**, rather by his coach's insistence. None-the-less the at-first reluctant Jim Wyant showed up to cross-country practice his freshman year and then finished his college career as captain of his cross-county team.



To Jim, **participating in athletics while also pursuing a degree in physics at Case had a lifelong impact on him.** It was for this reason that he made very distinctive gifts to Case that were designed to help enable other students to realize the same opportunity. In appreciation to his Coach, Jim made a gift to name the **Coach Bill Sudeck**

**Track.** Later, he funded the construction of the **Wyant Athletic and Wellness Center** and made a very sizable impact on the College Of Engineering's **ThinkBox** of which includes the Wyant Collaboration floor. (5)



## The University of Arizona

Jim's philanthropic commitments to the University of Arizona took on a different level than those that he offered to other educational institutions. His legacy as a professor, researcher and administrator was formed at the UA - and it was Tucson where he also found his greatest business success. We also saw a lot of Jim's merits shine through with his philanthropic plans for UA – his business savviness, his passion for academics and his loyalty

There were a lot of meetings between Tom Koch and Jim that laid the foundation for philanthropic ideas – and then there were more meetings that then included me. Some ideas never got off the table, but those that did also meant - **because we were working with Jim** – that there **would be a lot of moving parts that needed to work together for the good of the College**, its future, its students and faculty.

One of these moving parts **was collaboration** because teamwork was incredibly important to Jim as a business person and academic leader. He was confident that there were others who were equally committed to supporting future generations of students so that they could go on to brilliant careers and carry forward the promise to advance the technologies of optical sciences.

### **Student Success - Scholarship**

In 2013, Jim committed to a \$10 million gift that would support graduate student scholarships in optical sciences – specifically scholarships for first-year PhD students.

The benefactor was an already established scholarship program called FoTO (Friends of Tucson Optics). This particular program required that each FoTO endowment to have a \$500,000 balance – which then generated a minimum \$20,000 annual award for a first-year PhD student- plus their tuition and fees would also be waived.

With this financial support, an incoming grad student would now have a better financial footing as they navigated their required course work while also determining their research interests. At the point of Jim's gift, there were already three such endowments at the College and we needed at least 27 more to sufficiently support our first-year PhD students. So Jim made a very unique and generous four-to-one matching gift offer. For every gift of \$100,000 from a donor (or donor group), Jim would add \$400,000 from his \$10 million gift to that new scholarship endowment – and the scholarship would then be named by the donor.

The response to this campaign was amazing, especially considering the profile of our donors: We had:

1. **Alumni** who wanted students to have the same opportunities given to them;
2. Several of the **College's faculty** set up scholarships to attract the best and brightest students;
3. we even had **faculty from Stanford and Rochester** with the same vision;
4. we had **two alumni who wanted to thank their advisor** and **large alumni groups** expressing the same gratitude to their professors;
5. a **group of our faculty** who pulled funds together to thank their former dean;
6. a **technical foundation** that honored a faculty for his contributions;
7. **family foundations** that affirmed their belief in supporting students success;
8. a **successful business leader** who is committed to advancing the field of optics;
9. a **professional society** committed to advance the talent base and research in optics/photonics;
10. we even had a **PhD student** (at that time) who funded a scholarship;
11. Then, **our very first graduate** closed out the campaign by demonstrating his belief in the College's future.



Within 18 months, over 250 donors contributed to 27 new FoTO scholarships. So for all those in this room (and reading this), *thank you – your investment and vision worked.*

### **Faculty Support- Endowed Chairs**

**Several years after the success of the FoTO Scholarship campaign**, meetings with Tom and Jim – and then myself – resumed now focusing on Jim's desire to also support faculty. And ultimately by having a focus on both students and now faculty, also meant an incredible opportunity for the College to grow.

In **2018**, Jim and his family pledged **\$20 million to create new endowed chair positions at the College**. This commitment was the largest gift for endowed faculty chair positions in the UA's history – and the second historic donation from Jim. The first being his scholarship donation.

And you can bet again that collaboration was factored into this gift. His offer, for **every gift of \$500,000, he will match with \$1.5 million to set up a new endowed chair named by its donor. This matching offer now equates to 13 possible new endowed chairs.**

As of August 2021, nine endowed chair commitments have already been secured (seven have been publicly announced) and fruitful discussions are intently underway with other prospects.

### **Naming of the James C. Wyant College of Optical Sciences**

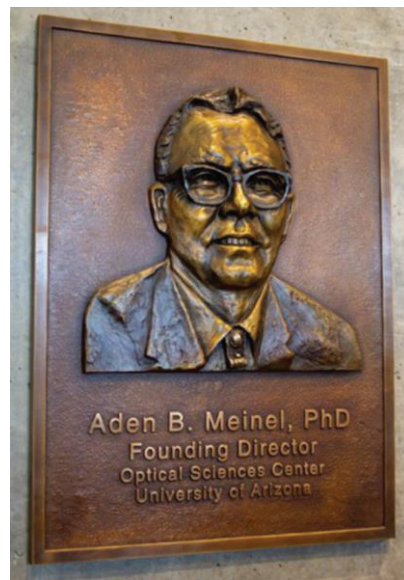
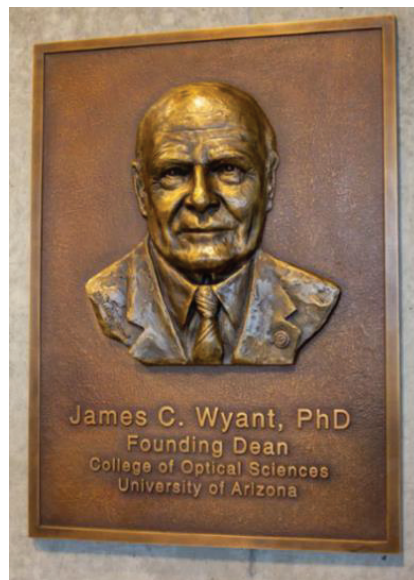
Over a six-year period, Jim and his family donated more than \$30 million to support optical sciences faculty and students at the University of Arizona. Then in 2019, the University decided to offer Jim a very special and rare gift.





Citing his role as founding dean of the College of Optical Sciences; for his dedication to inspire through teaching; for pioneering innovations in optics and photonics; and for his deeply generous philanthropy to enable education in optics, the University of Arizona honored Jim by naming OSC the “**James C. Wyant College of Optical Sciences.**”

When nearly 200 people gathered that April, 2019 to celebrate this dedication, in true Jim Wyant style, he asked us not to make the celebration all about him – but to also recognize the person who made all of this possible, the College’s founding director, Dr. Aden Meinel.



## 9. IN SUMMARY AND GRATITUDE

While I apologize to my relatives who bought my ugly wrapping paper, I am incredibly grateful that a career in fundraising has become so much more to me than I could have ever imagined - and especially at the University of Arizona Wyant College of Optical Sciences.



I sincerely appreciate all of the donors to this College because your every dollar means that you are working together to further the global impact that optics can deliver.

And I am **most thankful to you, Jim Wyant**, for hiring me into this role ten years ago and then giving me this **unforgettable opportunity to have a small part in your life's great story**.

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