

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

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## Kimmels donate a record \$27.5M to Temple

**The gift will help fund a new home for the university's media and performing arts schools.**

**By Susan Snyder**  
Staff Writer

Philanthropists Sidney and Caroline Kimmel are giving \$27.5 million to Temple University, the largest gift in the Philadelphia school's 141-year history.

The gift, which Temple president John Fry announced during his inauguration Friday, will help to fund Temple's new home for its Klein College of Media and Communication and Center for the Performing and Cinematic Arts. The new building, which Fry said will become the western gateway to the North Philadelphia main campus, will be named the Caroline Kimmel Pavilion for Arts and Communication.

The historic gift, initiated recently by a call from Fry to Kimmel's advisers, comes just a little over five months into the former Drexel University president's tenure as Temple's leader. Temple's previous largest gift was \$25 million from Lewis Katz, former co-owner of The Inquirer and longtime Temple board member, in 2013, months before he died in a plane crash, Temple officials said.

"Of all the people to give you a vote of confidence, the Kimmels are probably the best because of all they've done for so many venerable institutions," Fry said in an interview before the announcement.

The Kimmels, who reside in Beverly Hills, have long ties to the Philadelphia region, making major gifts to the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts in Philadelphia as well as to Thomas Jefferson University, where the medical school bears Sidney Kimmel's name following a record \$110 million gift in 2014, and

→ SEE KIMMELS ON A9



Sidney and Caroline Kimmel have long ties to the region, making major gifts to the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts as well as to Thomas Jefferson University. Courtesy of Sidney and Caroline Kimmel

# Kimmels

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where a biomedical research building has his wife's name following a \$70 million gift. They are leading donors to cancer research, and they have committed more than \$850 million to philanthropic causes.

Sidney Kimmel, a South Philadelphia native and son of a cab-driver who grew up in a family of modest means during the Great Depression, made his fortune in the fashion industry, founding the women's clothing line Jones New York. He went on to become a movie producer, launching such hits as *Moneyball*, *United 93*, and *Crazy Rich Asians*.

He attended Temple for a brief time, but did not graduate, having to go to work to help support his family.

"I cannot think of a more important time to stand up, loudly and clearly, to support Temple as it opens this new chapter in its storied history," Sidney Kimmel said in a statement. "Temple is the embodiment of diversity and inclusivity: No matter who you are or where you are from, Temple is opportunity, a launching pad for those with drive who are willing to work hard."

In an interview from California earlier this week, Caroline Kimmel noted the importance of donating to Temple at a time when the values of diversity and equity are under scrutiny by the Trump administration and as the federal government pauses or cancels hundreds of millions in funding to the nation's universities.

"I think you'll see more and more philanthropists stepping up to fill a void there, and it's a shame that that's the way it is," she said, "but if you want to be a realist, that's really what's happening and you know we feel extremely fortunate to fill that void."

The Kimmels also said they were proud to help Temple during this "inflection point" in its history.

"John Fry is breathing new life into Temple, and we couldn't think of a better moment to be supportive of him," Caroline Kimmel said, "and demonstrate leadership at a time of big change to the university and North Broad Street."

Fry recalled first meeting the Kimmels at the opening of the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia in 2001 when Fry was working for the University of Pennsylvania. More recently, while president at Drexel, he said he helped support Jefferson's quest to have its Kimmel cancer center gain a National Cancer Institute "Comprehensive" Cancer Center designation, the highest level, which it did last spring.

Their gift, he hopes, will "kick-start" increased philanthropy to Temple, which was one of the goals he announced when he became president. Fry said in January he would authorize a "thorough review" of the school's Institutional Advancement and Alumni Office — its primary fundraising arm — in advance of Temple's 150th anniversary, just a decade away. Mary Burke, vice president for institutional advancement, resigned last month. Fry tapped Al Checcio, who previously led fundraising at the University of Southern California and Fordham University, to serve as interim vice president.

"This place deserves it," Fry

said of increased philanthropy. "It deserves ... more of these types of investments from our alumni and friends than it has had in the past."

The University of Delaware recently announced a \$71.5 million gift, its largest.

"There is no reason why Temple shouldn't be playing in that league," Fry said.

Kimmel began his career as an inventory clerk, then worked as a traveling salesman and knitwear designer and eventually rose to president and CEO at the Villager, a clothing company. After starting Jones, where he remained chairman until 2014, Kimmel led the company to hit \$5 billion in revenues. It included brands such as Nine West, Anne Klein, and Gloria Vanderbilt.

He then created film production companies Sidney Kimmel Entertainment and SK Global, which produced more than 70 films. Caroline Kimmel said the couple recently sold a documentary she produced on their friend Paul Anka to HBO. Sidney Kimmel and Anka sang a rendition of Frank Sinatra's "My Way" during the Kimmel center opening, she said.

"He and Paul were actually a big hit," she said.

Kimmel said her husband was intent on giving to institutions during important points in their history. In 1998, he led a march on Washington for more money for cancer research; the National Cancer Institute's budget was doubled.

He started the Kimmel Scholars Program in 1997, which provides awards to promising cancer researchers. The couple has made major gifts toward cancer centers at Sloan Kettering and Johns Hopkins, among other donations.

The record gift at Temple isn't the first Kimmel has given to the university. He donated \$2.4 million to Temple and its hospital in 1994. Caroline Kimmel said that likely had to do with former Temple board chair the late Howard Gittis, who was a good friend of Sidney Kimmel's.

"Sidney has always been a fan of the school," she said.

"Temple is Philadelphia and Philadelphia is Temple," Sidney Kimmel said. "I love the city and have 'invested' heavily in it."

Caroline Kimmel said they plan to come for the new building's opening, slated for fall 2027.

Site work has begun on the 199,000-square-foot facility on the west side of Broad Street, across from the entrance to Polett Walk. It will provide new space for the Klein media and communication school; the School of Theater, Film and Media Arts; and the Boyer College of Music and Dance. The approximately \$218 million facility also is being funded with \$140 million in state dollars; no tuition money is being used, the university has said.

Among the building's features are a 375-seat proscenium venue, a 180-seat cinema, a 140-seat black box theater, and a screening room.

The building will not only be for the campus, but for its community and neighbors to see great performances, Fry said.

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