

# UW-Stevens Point lands its largest donation ever



University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Chancellor Thomas Gibson, left, applauds as a banner announcing a donation from Sentry Insurance is unveiled on Thursday at the Dreyfus University Center in Stevens Point.

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## \$10 million gift from Sentry Insurance to go toward business school upgrades

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The University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point unveiled a \$10 million gift Thursday, the largest donation in the school's history, which will help the institution elevate the profile of its business school and enroll more students.

Sentry Insurance, a 4,800-person business insurance company headquartered in Stevens Point, gave the gift to the university, which will rename its School of Business and Economics as the Sentry School of Business and Economics.

Most of the gift — one of the largest that a regional UW campus has ever

received, according to UW-Stevens Point — will go toward renovating Collins Classroom Center. The 1966 building is used for general education classes and was already slated for an upgrade. It will become the business school's standalone building and be renamed Sentry Hall.

The corporate naming of the building and school is part of a growing trend among universities in Wisconsin and nationally. The UW Board of Regents in early 2020 loosened its policy to allow for academic buildings, colleges and schools to bear the names of businesses, nonprofit organizations, foundations or other outside organizations. Before then, most

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Sentry Insurance CEO Peter McPartland, left, and University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Chancellor Thomas Gibson shake hands on Thursday in Stevens Point. Sentry is making a donation of \$10 million to renovate the Collins Classroom Center and establish a Sentry School of Business and Economics at the university.

## UWSP

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UW campuses stuck to individual donors when it came to naming rights.

"A corporate gift of this size demonstrates a significant investment in the university," UW-Stevens Point Chancellor Thomas Gibson told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. "If we look across the country, corporate namings are no longer so unique. I think many institutions that are really engaged with corporate partners are pursuing these types of opportunities to create more value for their institution and certainly to create more opportunities for students, faculty and staff."

Gibson, who celebrates his two-year anniversary as chancellor next month, noticed early in his tenure that the business school needed a "more visible presence" on campus and in the larger community. It shares a home with the School of Education and the School of Health Sciences and Wellness in a facility that Gibson said doesn't match the quality of the programs and faculty. Other universities with business schools tend to have 20% of their student body enrolled in a business program, whereas UW-Stevens Point's share is about half that, he said.



The Sentry Insurance Foundation made a record-setting gift of \$10 million to UW-Stevens Point's School of Business and Economics. This preliminary rendering of a renovated Collins Classroom Center will change as design work begins in 2023. UW-STEVENS POINT

UW-Stevens Point sees an opportunity to leverage Sentry's brand and reputation to raise the school's profile, as well as the institution as a whole, he said.

"We've always been a community-engaged institution," Gibson said. "They look to us to provide a talent pipeline. We look to them to provide internships and co-ops. Supporting each other in this way is of mutual interest."

### Sentry and UW-Stevens Point have long partnered

While the \$10 million donation is Sentry's largest gift to date, the company has long supported UW-Stevens Point. For example, the company gives away \$140,000 in annual student scholarships and donated \$4 million in 2016 to develop a data analytics program and endow two faculty positions.

"They had me at hello," Sentry CEO and president Pete McPartland said of the university's initial discussions about expanding the business school's prominence. "We knew we wanted to get involved."

That would have been the case even before the pandemic, though McPartland said the tight labor market since then has reinforced the importance UW-Stevens Point plays in producing career-ready students. Sentry often turns to the university when hiring, snagging 558 graduates within the past five years, many of whom are local and plan to spend their careers in central Wisconsin.

UW-Stevens Point officials hope to double the number of students enrolled in business from nearly 900 to 1,800. About \$3 million of the gift will go toward recruitment and marketing efforts to meet that goal, as well as to establishing new centers focused on entrepreneurship and women's leadership.

The rest of the money will help cover the \$39 million price tag to renovate Collins Classroom Center into Sentry Hall. Securing the gift now will fast-track the project, Gibson said. Design and planning work will begin next year; university officials hope to receive some state money for the project in the 2025-27 budget biennium.