

On Campus

A Lifetime Investment

Kluge's gift to bring many happy returns.

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John W. Kluge, during his 90th birthday party at the University two years ago, speaks with recipients of Columbia scholarships that he funded (Eileen Barroso).

As a young German immigrant living in Detroit in the 1930s, John W. Kluge dreamed of attending an Ivy League school. He had the brains, but not the money.

Columbia made an investment in Kluge '37CC, '88HON that paid off big time: The College awarded him an academic scholarship and he graduated with honors in economics, eventually becoming one of the world's most successful businessmen

and most generous philanthropists. The founder, chairman, and president of the communications giant Metromedia, Kluge has been especially kind to Columbia over the years, giving the University more than \$110 million, mostly to fund scholarships for students from underrepresented populations.

In his effort to improve access to higher education, Kluge recently outdid himself. On April 11, President Lee C. Bollinger announced that Kluge has pledged \$400 million to Columbia, all designated to support financial aid for undergraduate and graduate students. The gift, which will be made through Kluge's estate, is the fourth largest ever to a single institution in American higher education and the largest for financial aid.

The announcement was made at Low Library, in a ceremony that included Congressman Charles Rangel and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and was attended by former Mayor David N. Dinkins. The 92-year-old Kluge, appearing radiant and jovial in a bright green tie, was greeted by a standing ovation that lasted several minutes.

"When I came to Columbia in 1933, I was a country bumpkin," Kluge told the crowd. "I probably still am. The first time I walked up 116th Street and stood before this building, I was in awe. Columbia made me a better person. And as a beneficiary of a scholarship here, I want to help other young people benefit from this institution, just as I did."

The Gates Open Wider

"John's extraordinary gift, coupled with his earlier gifts, will help generations of Columbians," said Bollinger in announcing the \$400 million pledge. "The essence of America's greatness lies, in no small measure, in our collective commitment to giving all people the opportunity to improve their lives, especially through access to education. John's own life is a fulfillment of that American dream, and he has spoken frequently and eloquently of the critical role that Columbia played in his life. That he has chosen to direct his amazing generosity to ensuring that young people will have the chance to benefit from a Columbia education regardless of their wealth or family income is both a testament to his personal history and values and a challenge to all of us to do our best to live up to our nation's ideals.

Kluge has stipulated that half of the \$400 million go to Columbia College; University officials say it's too early to determine exactly how Columbia's other schools and colleges will share the rest. The College will use its portion to fund and improve financial aid packages so that students receive more grants and fewer loans, according to College dean Austin E. Quigley. The University has already begun shifting financial aid away from borrowing: Beginning this fall, the University will issue grants instead of loans to all Columbia College and engineering undergraduates whose families earn less than \$50,000 a year.

"With the help of John's remarkably generous gift," says Quigley, "we will, in future years, improve the quality of aid for all recipients."

Raising endowment for financial aid, as well as for faculty support, is a major emphasis of the \$4 billion Columbia fundraising campaign launched last September. The campaign has raised so far about \$2.2 billion, or 55 percent of the total goal, including Kluge's commitment.

Improving the quality of Columbia's student aid is crucial for several reasons, Quigley says. "First, if loan burdens are very high, students from low-income families are discouraged from applying," he says. "Second, students who enroll at Columbia need to have full access to the educational and social experience we offer. That's difficult if their loan burden is mounting every year, and they feel the pressure to devote more time to earning money.

"Third, we need to ensure that graduates have access to a full range of careers," he continues. "Students graduating with \$20,000 in loans are less likely to choose low-salary careers, even if that is where their sense of personal fulfillment and public responsibility would otherwise direct them. Providing more financial aid grants and fewer loans is vital if our full-need financial aid policy is to achieve its traditional goals."

Kluge's \$400 million pledge gives a dramatic boost to The Columbia Campaign, says Susan Feagin, executive vice president for development and alumni relations. "This represents 10 percent of our campaign goal, which is extraordinary," she says. "And virtually every part of the University has financial aid as one of its top campaign priorities, so the fact that John's gift is designated for financial aid is extremely important. It certainly gives us the confidence that we'll meet our goals, if other alumni are motivated by John's example. He has been clear that he understands

Columbia needs even more support for financial aid, and he wants his gift to challenge others to do what they can.”

Back When They Had Bootstraps

Kluge came a long way from his modest beginnings in Detroit, where his family relocated from Germany when he was eight. After attending Columbia and serving in the U.S. Army during World War II, he made his start in business with the \$15,000 purchase of a single radio station in 1946. Kluge went on to assemble the nation’s largest group of independent television stations, as well as restaurants and entertainment properties ranging from the Ice Capades and the Harlem Globetrotters to *Playbill* magazine. In 1986, Kluge sold his television stations to Rupert Murdoch, who turned them into the Fox network. Under the moniker Metromedia, Kluge has continued to invest in telecommunications and biotechnology interests.

The 25th richest American, according to *Forbes* magazine, Kluge has been among Columbia’s top donors for decades. For instance, he has given \$85 million to fund scholarships for economically disadvantaged students. About \$60 million of that has gone towards the Kluge Scholars Program, which awards four-year, need-based scholarships to approximately 50 first-year students at Columbia College every year. Founded in 1987, the program also runs seminars, networking events, and faculty-supervised summer research projects that encourage participants to pursue academic careers.

“I want to help ensure that Columbia will always be a place where the best and the brightest young people can come to develop their intellect, make something of their own lives, and give something back to our communities, our country, and our world,” says Kluge, who graduated from the College 70 years ago this spring. “Yet because Columbia’s endowment is not nearly as large as some of our celebrated peer institutions, achieving that goal will take support from many other Columbia alumni and friends. So I invite everyone to join me in this commitment to changing the lives of extraordinary students who will go on to be extraordinary leaders in our society.”

Denise De Las Nueces '03CC, who is the daughter of immigrants and was raised in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan, certainly saw her life change at Columbia. She attended as part of the Kluge Scholars Program and now is pursuing a medical degree at Harvard Medical School. "Mr. Kluge's altruism has allowed me to unhesitatingly take chances and accept opportunities without a concern for financial constraints," she told the audience at the Low Library ceremony. "As a member of an underrepresented group at an Ivy League university, I think there is something very powerful about knowing that someone believes in you."

Kluge is married to Maria "Tussi" Kluge and is the father of three children, Samantha, Joseph, and John, Jr., '05CC, who is writing his father's biography.



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