CIVIL ENGINEERING GETS A BOOST FROM THE BEAVERS

"HEAVY ENGINEERING" ASSOCIATION HOPES TO STEER MORE STUDENTS TOWARD ON-SITE CONSTRUCTION WORK  By Derrick Bang

THE UC DAVIS DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING just earned additional respect from some influential Beavers.

The Beavers, a "heavy engineering" construction association founded in 1955, works to generate greater attention to the contractors who rarely get credit for their role in building and maintaining the massive American infrastructure. The association drew its name from the fact that many inaugural members were dam builders, with notable projects including the massive Hoover Dam.

Today, The Beavers Charitable Trust has established endowed scholarships for civil engineering and/or construction management at 41 U.S. colleges and universities, with a cumulative value of $5 million.

UC Davis, as one of those schools, has for the past decade benefited from a $20,000 endowed scholarship for undergraduate civil engineering students. That figure just received a significant boost: a $100,000 "Presidential Endowment" bestowed to the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering by The Beavers 2013 president, Hirokazu (Hiro) Onozaki, of the Obayashi Corp.

This prestigious gift was made, in part, because of an existing relationship between UC Davis and Obayashi: a collaboration that began with considerable research work in the 1990s, at UC Davis' Center for Geotechnical Modeling.

UC Davis alum DAVE WOODS '77, executive director of Beavers Inc. and The Beavers Charitable Trust, has been with the association since 1999. His job includes liaising with professors at the supported campuses. Woods' liaison at UC Davis is John Harvey, a professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, chair of the Transportation Technology and Policy Graduate Group, and PI of the UC Pavement Research Center.

"I've been working for years with John," Woods explains, "I've watched his department develop a construction engineering and management minor. We thought that was a great idea, because most civil engineering programs focus more on design than construction. Once Hiro announced his Presidential Endowment to UC Davis, we rolled that into the existing endowed scholarship, now targeting students in civil engineering, with the new construction engineering and management minor. Some of the funds also will help the department promote this program."

This new endowment also is well-timed to take advantage of a rising industry trend that finds heavy engineering contractors seeking students as summer interns. Among its many other functions, The Beavers' website has a section that matches contractors and students for such internships.

Obayashi also is part owner of San Mateo-based Webcor Builders, the West Coast's largest commercial construction company.

"In the fall of 2012, several UC Davis engineering undergraduates were among those who participated in San Francisco's Student Day project," Woods explains. "We put them in hard hats, safety glasses and gloves, and walked them around a $4 billion project in downtown San Francisco. A lot of students don't realize how exciting such work is, until they've been on a construction site and witnessed the energy involved with building things.

"That's one of the things that people in this industry take the most pride in: being part of projects that will serve society long after they're gone!"