



JACK JACKSON WITH A PHOTO OF HIS LATE WIFE, KATIE.

Of Earth and Worth

How the historic Jackson gift created seismic change in UT's geosciences

BY SHARON REYNOLDS

Jack Jackson was a firm believer that educational opportunities in life stretch far beyond the walls of teaching institutions.

Just 3 years old when his father died, Jackson was raised by a strong mother who instilled positive values in her only son. As director of public welfare for the City of Dallas, Edna devoted her life to the underprivileged. During Jackson's youth, he spent time at her office befriending policemen, firemen, and ambulance drivers. Once Edna's workday ended, she and Jackson delivered food to hungry families. He witnessed tragic emergencies, became street smart, and developed an enduring compassion.

Jackson lived through the Great Depression and was fortunate to have father figures along the way who taught him how the world worked. After high school, Jackson found a job at his cousin's gasoline plant in East Texas, where he worked hard and learned the oil business. He also learned to take charge and create his own opportunities.

Two years later, Jackson's cousin encouraged him to go to college. Jackson came to UT Austin to study petroleum engineering, but after a rough academic start, he transferred to Temple Junior College. There he met the love of his life, Katie. He returned to UT Austin, where he graduated with a B.A. in geology and minors in anthropology and math.

Jackson served in the Navy and worked for the U.S. Geological Survey during World War II. He made his fortune in the oil business and through real estate investments. Many described him as an extraordinary man who knew that the best way to do business was with his heart. He cherished family and friends.

In 1975, Jackson was appointed to the Advisory Council of the Geology Foundation of UT's Department of Geological Sciences. Dr. Bill Fisher became the director of the foundation

in 1984, and they shared a close friendship that would last until Jackson's death in 2003. Over time, says Fisher, Jackson developed a deep trust in the foundation's mission.

"The two most important things in Jack's life were marrying Katie and getting his degree in geology from UT Austin," says Fisher. "He and Katie strongly believed in the power of education to help mankind."

The Jacksons made a \$15 million gift for a new wing to the Geology Building, followed by a \$25 million gift to form the new John A. and Katherine G. Jackson School of Geosciences. It was just the beginning of Jackson's larger plan to leave the bulk of his estate to the school.

Jackson and Katie's marriage spanned 60 years. In 2002, shortly after Katie's passing, Jackson made an incredible announcement. He would leave a permanent endowment and royalties from oil and gas interests from his estate to the Jackson School of Geosciences, raising it from a department to become one of UT's then 16 colleges and schools. It was the largest gift in UT history, conservatively appraised at the time of his death at between \$150 and \$200 million. His gift consolidated the university's three major geosciences units to create the strong foundation of a research and academic powerhouse.

"Jack considered it to be an investment in the school that launched his career and gave him life opportunities," says Fisher. "It dramatically expanded the school's mission. The Jackson School has become the largest and most diverse geologic entity within the U.S., where world-class faculty and research scientists are training the next generation of scientific talent."

Today the Jackson estate is valued at more than \$300 million and continues to appreciate. The endowment and earnings from mineral rights have enabled the Jackson School to hire top faculty and research scientists, build state-



UT RESEARCHER NICOLA TISATO STUDIES MINERAL DEPOSITS IN ASPERGE CAVE IN FRANCE WITH RESEARCH COLLEAGUES.

of-the-art facilities that increase the depth and breadth of its research, and enrich student education. Whether students and researchers are analyzing frozen methane deposits under the Gulf of Mexico, developing technology for future NASA missions, or presenting scientific talks or posters at national conferences, the world has become their training ground through experiential learning.

Jim Langham was Jackson's lifetime friend and financial advisor and says Jackson would be proud of what the Jackson School has become. "He benefacted the school that, he felt, helped make him a fortune," says Langham. "In the last few years of his life, he was able to see some of the benefits of what his fortune was going to do, and I think he was happy with what he did."

According to *U.S. News & World Report*, the Jackson School is presently ranked eighth in the earth sciences. Dean Sharon Mosher says there's more work to be done. "Jack and Katie's gift was intended to create a firm foundation for the future of the Jackson School — one that others could strengthen moving forward," says Dean Mosher. "We must continue building on that foundation to further expand and sustain programs. We are confident that we will one day become the top earth science program in the nation." ✨

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