

About Ken Olsen

"Even though I have been an entrepreneur, I have always been a scientist first and foremost."

—Ken Olsen (1926–2011)



Kenneth Harry Olsen, known around the world as founder and former CEO of Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) and one of the 20th century's great leaders in computer science, passed away February 6, 2011. Born in 1926 in Bridgeport, Connecticut, he was educated at M.I.T and, while a graduate student, worked on a team that developed air defense technology and core memory, the precursor to today's RAM. During Olsen's 35-year leadership tenure, DEC pioneered the concepts behind interactive computing, and created one of the first digital "mini-computers" for commercial use. Along with these milestones in technology, Olsen's leadership style and entrepreneurial philosophy have also been foundational for today's information and computer networking industry.

"As an inventor, scientist, and entrepreneur, Ken Olsen is one of the true pioneers of the computing industry," wrote Bill Gates, founder and chairman of Microsoft, in a letter on the occasion of the groundbreaking for the Ken Olsen Science Center, in 2006. "He was also a major influence in my life and his influence is still important at Microsoft through all the engineers who trained at Digital and have come here to make great software products."

Mr. Olsen strongly believed that science is "more than a study of molecules and calculations; it is the love of knowledge and the continued search for the truth. The study of the sciences promotes humility, leaving us with a clear sense that we will never understand all there is to know. At the same time, science provides a defense for truth,

authenticates Christianity and stems from the nature of God."

Inspired by the openness with which science is taught at Gordon as well as with the critical thinking and empirical approaches of the faculty, he joined the Board of Trustees in 1961, and helped launch the Heart of Discovery campaign at Gordon with a lead naming gift for the new science center.

"Ken Olsen was a pioneer of the computer age, but beyond that, he was a good man," said Tom Phillips, former chairman of Raytheon and fellow board member at Gordon College. "He was a major philanthropist who did his giving quietly, never seeking recognition or thanks. Ken's many contributions to business, leadership and technological innovations were unmatched. He cared deeply about his family, his faith and of course, his work, and sincerely expected that each would help make the world better. That was his legacy and I'm proud to have called him friend."