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Obituary: Fred Kavli, Founder and Chairman of The Kavli Foundation

November 21, 2013

Fred Kavli, founder and chairman of The Kavli Foundation, passed away peacefully today in his home in Santa Barbara at the age of 86.

A philanthropist, physicist, entrepreneur, business leader and innovator, Fred Kavli established The Kavli Foundation to advance science for the benefit of humanity. Based in Southern California, the Foundation today includes an international community of basic research institutes in the fields of astrophysics, nanoscience, neuroscience, and theoretical physics. Located on three continents, the institutes are home to some of the most renowned researchers in their fields. The Foundation has also established and supported an international program of conferences, symposia, endowed professorships, and other activities. This includes being a founding partner of the biennial Kavli Prizes, which recognize scientists for their seminal advances in three research areas: astrophysics, nanoscience, and neuroscience.



Fred Kavli (*Credit: Dan Dry*)

Kavli began the Foundation in 2000 after divesting his interests in the Kavlico Corporation - a company that he founded and operated as the CEO and sole shareholder, and which became one of the world's largest suppliers of sensors for aeronautic, automotive and industrial applications.

"This is a painful loss for the Foundation and for all of science," said Rockell N. Hankin, Vice Chairman of the Foundation. "We can only take comfort in his extraordinary legacy, which will continue advancing critically important research that benefits all of humanity, and supports scientific work around the globe."

Said Robert W. Conn, President of the Foundation, "We will forever be grateful to Fred Kavli - someone who, with the Foundation, invested his heart and soul into ensuring that science will make this a better world for future generations. And we will carry forward

this mission with the same commitment and dedication that he gave to science and his life."

About Fred Kavli

A naturalized American citizen, Kavli was born in 1927 on a small farm in Eresfjord, Norway - a village nestled in the mountains along the Eira River. Kavli would later recall these early days as giving birth to his interest in science, which would blossom further while studying physics at the Norwegian Institute of Technology (now known as the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim). Building his business acumen, Kavli financed his studies with proceeds from a small business he and his brother, both teenagers, ran during World War II, making wood briquettes that could be used as fuel for modified automobiles. Immediately upon completing his studies in 1955 and receiving an engineering degree, he left for Canada and one year later came to the United States. After two years in California, he built upon his entrepreneurial spirit and experience and founded the Kavlico Corporation in Los Angeles in 1958 - later relocated to Moorpark, California. Under his leadership, the company would become one of the world's largest suppliers of sensors for aeronautical, automotive and industrial applications with its products found in such landmark projects as the SR-71 Blackbird and the Space Shuttle.

The company would receive many distinguished awards under Kavli's leadership and patent numerous technological breakthroughs. He remained CEO and sole shareholder of the company until the company was sold in 2000. He subsequently established The Kavli Foundation to support scientific research aimed at improving the quality of life for people around the world.

Over time, the Foundation has established and endowed research institutes at leading universities worldwide, focusing on the areas of astrophysics, nanoscience, neuroscience and theoretical physics. Today, there are seventeen such institutes and there will be more in the years to come. The Foundation has endowed research institutes in neuroscience at Columbia University, Yale University, the University of California, San Diego and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology; in nanoscience, there are Kavli Institutes at the California Institute of Technology, Cornell University, Harvard University, the Delft University of Technology, and the University of California, Berkeley; in astrophysics and cosmology, the institutes are at Stanford University, the University of Chicago, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Cambridge, Peking University, the University of Tokyo; and in theoretical physics, the institutes are at the University of California, Santa Barbara and the Chinese Academy of Sciences. The Foundation has also endowed seven university professorial chairs, sponsors science symposia and workshops, supports initiatives to engage the public in science and that help scientists themselves be better communicators, and supports excellence in science journalism. This includes endowing the AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Awards administered by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Starting in 2008, the Foundation launched a series of science prizes to recognize scientists for their seminal advances in astrophysics, nanoscience and neuroscience. Consisting of a scroll, a gold medal and a cash award of one million dollars, a Kavli Prize in each of these areas is awarded every two years. The Kavli Prizes are presented by the King of Norway

in a ceremony in Oslo, Norway and are a partnership between The Kavli Foundation, the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, and the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. In acknowledgement of their achievement, U.S. laureates have been consistently invited to meet the President in the Oval Office in recognition of the importance of science in achieving a better and more prosperous society.

In addition to establishing institutes and prizes, the Foundation has brought together scientists at meetings that facilitate open dialogue and an exchange of ideas. These meetings have precipitated such major initiatives as the Brain Activity Map proposal, which was a major catalyst for President Obama's Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies (BRAIN) Initiative announced in April 2013.

Fred Kavli is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a member of the Norwegian Academy of Technological Sciences, and a former member of the U.S. President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. A former member of the University of California President's Board on Science and Innovation, he is a Trustee of the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) Foundation. His many honors include receiving the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit for Outstanding Service and honorary doctorates from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Northwestern University, and the University of Oslo. In 2011 he received the Bower Award for Business Leadership from the Franklin Institute, one of the oldest science education centers in the United States, and the Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy, which is given biennially to one or more individuals who, like Andrew Carnegie, have dedicated their private wealth to public good, and who have sustained impressive careers as philanthropists.

In addition to supporting scientific research and education, Kavli's philanthropic activities include the Fred Kavli Theatre for Performing Arts at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza, as well as other projects.

Fred Kavli contracted cholangiocarcinoma, a rare form of cancer, about a year ago and succumbed to complications due to surgeries. He is survived by two children, and nine nephews and nieces.

Additional materials available at [The Kavli Foundation website](#):

- Interview of Fred Kavli by Alan Alda (video)
- Profile of Fred Kavli (courtesy of Vesterheim Magazine)
- Extended biography

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