

# R50 million donation to advance innovation in South Africa

*Alumnus Dr David Fine's generous donation will be used to establish the Angela and David Fine Chair in Innovation.*

JOHANNESBURG, GAUTENG, SOUTH AFRICA, April 4, 2022  
/EINPresswire.com/ -- R50 million donation to advance innovation in South Africa

From making air travel safer to detecting chemicals that can cause cancer, from developing advanced technologies for finding buried landmines, the curiosity of Dr David Fine, a Wits University alumnus, has resulted in innovations that have impacted on society for over 45 years.



Wits University alumnus and US-based innovator, Dr David Fine, has donated R50mil to Wits University to establish a Chair in Innovation

Now, the successful Boston-based innovator and entrepreneur is heeding the call from his alma mater to help establish an ecosystem to drive researcher-led innovation at Wits that will solve some of Africa's greatest challenges, and advance the public good.

In celebrating its centenary this year, Wits has identified innovation as [one of its major strategic thrusts](#) and Fine's generous donation of 3-million dollars (about R50 million) will be used to establish the Angela and David Fine Chair in Innovation.

"Innovators are problem solvers. They can think practically across multiple technical disciplines, and who use accessible and inexpensive methods and material to build products and services, that have real-life impact. South Africa needs a culture of innovation. My hope is that the Chair in Innovation will help place Wits at the leading edge of innovation in the Global South," says Dr Fine, now retired. He remains passionate about inspiring a new generation of innovative problem solvers.

“We are very grateful to Dr Fine for walking this [#Wits100](#) journey with us. His generous donation will go a long way towards propelling our research towards innovation, enabling scholars, researchers, students and those with curious minds to seek and create new knowledge, across disciplines and sectors. Dr Fine is leaving a legacy for future generations, and this Chair in Innovation will undoubtedly create an enabling environment for the flourishing of great ideas that will herald this continent into a new era of innovation, change, and growth,” says Professor Zeblon Vilakazi, Wits Vice-Chancellor and Principal.

Dr Fine graduated from Wits with an honours degree in chemistry in 1964. He later read for a PhD from Leeds University in the United Kingdom, before leaving for the US to run the Combustion Lab at MIT. He worked for 28 years at Thermo Electron (now Thermo Fisher) before establishing two companies of his own – CyTerra in 2000, and Vero-BioTech in 2006.

### World-firsts

Dr Fine has dedicated his life to transitioning high technology chemistry-based instruments from concept and research through to production and commercialisation.

Amongst his many achievements is the development of the first airport sniffers that could detect traces of plastic explosive residue in passenger luggage. This was in response to the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, that killed 259 people. Thousands of these devices have since been deployed around the world, making air travel safer. A similar device is also used to detect narcotics.

In the field of analytical chemistry, Dr Fine developed a method to detect traces of nitrosamines in foods, body fluids and in factories. Chronic nitrosamine intake is associated with numerous cancer sites. A third important innovation is a handheld detector for finding buried landmines, using a combination of ground penetrating radar and metal detection.

### Innovation. For Good.

In its first 100 years, Wits has on several occasions successfully risen to meet society’s needs to turn knowledge into impactful solutions. Wits was actively involved in pioneering the development of radar, the first in the country to own a mainframe computer, to access a quantum computer, to develop a digital innovation precinct, to house a Mirage jet for use in teaching and research, to discover and describe early pre-human fossils, to host a 5G lab, and to effectively transmit data through light.

More recently, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, Wits’ clinicians, researchers, social scientists, engineers, data scientists, legal experts, ethicists and others have played an important role in responding to the pandemic both locally and globally.

“It is an exciting time to be at Wits. The Chair in Innovation is part of our broader innovation strategy that includes the establishment of the Wits Innovation Centre (WIC) which will support several important initiatives that are due to be announced in the coming months. The ideal candidate for Chair in Innovation will be an innovator with a strong academic interest and experience in commercialising research ideas,” says Professor Barry Dwolatzky, Director of Innovation Strategy at Wits, founder of the Wits Tshimologong Digital Innovation Precinct and Director of the Joburg Centre for Software Engineering (JCSE).

“Innovation thrives in diversity, so naturally because Wits is a rich, diverse community of researchers, academics, students and staff, we are able to cultivate multidisciplinary collaboration, a key component towards finding solutions to the major challenges confronting humanity and our planet.”

### The Wits Centenary Campaign

Wits University has [made a formidable impact on society over the past 100 years](#) and is set to continue advancing society for good. It remains a beacon of hope for South Africa, and is well-poised to serve as a catalyst for change in the decades to come.

Wits celebrates 100 years of academic and research excellence, innovation, and social justice in 2022. It launched the Centenary Campaign, that aims to raise R3 billion to support, teaching, research and innovation, infrastructure development and students. A series of events is being planned which will culminate in a Homecoming Weekend from 2-4 September 2022, closer to Wits’ official birthday.

Erna van Wyk  
University of the Witwatersrand  
erna.vanwyk@wits.ac.za

Visit us on social media:

[Twitter](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

---

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/567482398>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2022 IPD Group, Inc. All Right Reserved.