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UDP focus: Innovator, teacher, mentor, friend: Meet Jim Edgar

Sarah Caldwell Hancock

Kansas State University

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In 2015, he received a grant for a process to improve semiconductors, materials that are crucial to all devices that are commercialized or use radio waves — think cellphones and cable television boxes — by removing defects that can degrade efficiency. Another of his projects is generating Alzheimer's drug-screening devices, or UV LEDs, that can purify water or sterilize instruments with bacteria-destroying UV light. The National Science Foundation has supported his research for almost 25 years, and his work has brought him many publications and international recognition.

But what's most surprising about Edgar, professor and head of Kansas State University's chemical engineering department, is his ability to help others think through problems.

Former student Jason Schank put it this way: “He’s one of a kind — a wonderful mentor. Jim cares and sees the potential in everyone.”

Peng Liu, another of Edgar’s former students, said Edgar changed his life and made him who he is today.

Schmidt and Liu are founders of Nitricel Solutions, a Wichita company that makes aluminum nitride, a high-value material with applications in power electronics, acoustic electronics and UV LEDs. The company has 10 employees and boasts customers in Asia and the U.S. Lui and Schmidt both worked in Edgar’s lab for several years in the early 2000s. Liu obtained a doctorate in chemical engineering, and Schmidt graduated from K-State with a degree in electrical engineering before heading to Poland to get a master’s in chemical engineering from Warsaw University of Technology and a master’s in business administration from a program through Warsaw University in partnership with other European institutions.

Both Edgar’s former student Schank and another of Edgar’s former students, Peng Liu, said Edgar changed their lives.

“His generosity and encouragement has been great for me in my career,” said Liu. “He’s a very tireless person who is always working on improving the world.”

At the University of Illinois, Illinois Electrical and Computer Engineering Department head Daniele Venezia said that Edgar has been a mentor and role model to many students.

“I think he’s a role model for me and other students as an educator,” he said.

“Regardless of whether he helps achieve another break-through, Edgar will continue to ask new questions and train students to do the same. He employs five or six students at a time and says he strives to be encouraging, to appreciate their ideas and to aid their intellectual growth,” Venezia said.

Edgar said he is excited about the future and that he is looking forward to continuing his work.

“Innovator, teacher, mentor, friend: Meet Jim Edgar

By Sarah Caldwell Hancock

University distinguished professor James Edgar is no stranger to surprising innovations.

In 2015, he received a grant for a process to improve semiconductors, materials that are crucial to all devices that are commercialized or use radio waves — think cellphones and cable television boxes — by removing defects that can degrade efficiency. Another of his projects is generating Alzheimer’s drug-screening devices, or UV LEDs, that can purify water or sterilize instruments with bacteria-destroying UV light. The National Science Foundation has supported his research for almost 25 years, and his work has brought him many publications and international recognition.

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