Couple who met at UW-Stout donate $1M to university

MENOMONIE — Two UW-Stout graduates have contributed more than $1 million to the university that they say launched them into a successful business - and brought them together as a couple.

"We did meet at UW-Stout," said Brian Jennerjahn, a 1964 graduate, about his wife, Ruth. "We lived within six miles of each other, but we had to go to school 200 miles away to meet."

The Jennerjahns, who grew up in the Appleton area, recently gave the university $100,000, pledged another $200,000, and made a paid-up life insurance policy gift of $750,000.

"We feel that UW-Stout contributed a lot to our success," Ruth said. "It was a great school for us."

"We want to afford that opportunity to other people," Brian said.

The couple said their donation was inspired by reading about the more than $1 million donation of Charlotte and Bob Janeczko, another couple who attended UW-Stout in the 1960s.

"We never thought of doing that (kind of donation)" until we read about the Janeczkos' donation, Ruth said. "I hope it does have a snowball effect."

Chancellor Charles Sorensen praised the Jennerjahns for their generosity.

"We are incredibly fortunate to have graduates like the Jennerjahns, who never have forgotten the university that helped them down the road to success," Sorensen said.

Brian and Ruth put the degrees they earned at UW-Stout to good use. Ruth (home economics education) graduated in 1963, and Brian (industrial technology) a year later.

After graduation, Ruth taught at Nicolet High School in suburban Milwaukee and later was a home economist for Wisconsin Electric Power Co.

Brian took a succession of engineering-related positions that included Square D in Milwaukee, Mercury Marine in Oshkosh and 3M in Hartford City, Ind. He eventually rose to be plant engineer at the 3M Duplicating Plant in Hartford City.
In 1979 Brian began his own business, Jennerjahn Machine, in Matthews, Ind. The company began as a two-person operation: Brian designed and built the machines, and Ruth acted as bookkeeper and gofer for parts. The company makes slitting, rewinding and packaging equipment.

Today, Jennerjahn machines are found in countries on every continent, except Antarctica. The couple sold the company to their son last October and later decided it was time to significantly increase their giving back to the university that gave them their start - and brought them together.