In celebration of ICES' 10th anniversary, the Applied Computational Engineering and Sciences Building at The University of Texas at Austin, will be renamed the O'Donnell Building for Applied Computational Engineering and Sciences, to honor Peter and Edith O'Donnell, Jr. of Dallas, whose foundation built the building and gifted it to the university.

The Board of Regents of The University of Texas System unanimously approved the renaming Feb. 14.

The O'Donnell Foundation, along with Peter and his wife Edith, have given more than $135 million to the university since 1983. This includes 159 endowments for student fellowships, faculty support, and graduate education programs. The total market value of the endowments made by Peter and Edith O'Donnell and the O'Donnell Foundation, and gifts that he has caused to be made through challenge grants and the use of matching funds, currently exceeds $407 million. These funds enhance the university's ability to recruit outstanding faculty and students.

Consistent with its emphasis on graduate-level engineering, science, and mathematics education, the O'Donnell Foundation built the $32 million state-of-the-art 180,000-square-foot POB building in the year 2000 to house 300 graduate students and researchers, more than 70 faculty, and 60 annual visitors from industry and other schools.

Located near the center of campus, the building was designed as home to the interdisciplinary graduate and research program now known as the Institute for Computational Engineering and Sciences (ICES). Now, after years of encouragement from the university, the O'Donnells have agreed that the 10th anniversary of ICES provides the appropriate impetus for allowing their name to be added to the building.

Supported by the O'Donnell Foundation since its inception, ICES draws together faculty from five schools and colleges, and 18 university departments to teach graduate students and conduct research. The Institute’s work combines the use of computers, mathematics, and various scientific disciplines to address formidable technological challenges including treatment of cardiovascular disease, new sources of energy, the design of advanced materials, nano-manufacturing and many more.

“By any measure, Peter and Edith O'Donnell are among the greatest supporters of The University of Texas in its 130-year history,” said President Bill Powers. “Their transformative generosity is based on the belief in our power to change society for the better. It brings honor to UT to have their names connected with the campus in perpetuity.”

Peter O'Donnell earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics at the University of the South in Tennessee and a master's degree in banking and finance at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School. Edith O'Donnell earned her bachelor's degree in psychology from The University of Texas at Austin.

The building was constructed under an unusual arrangement in which the O'Donnell Foundation leased the land from the university, built the building and deeded it to the university on completion. With Austin Commercial as the general contractor, the new building was constructed in record time and within budget with hands-on supervision by Peter O'Donnell.
The O'Donnells have previously requested anonymity for their gifts to the university. With the exception of the building, O'Donnell gifts were made on the conditions that matching funds were provided, and that the gifts bore the names of those providing the matching funds. A single anomaly is the “Peter O'Donnell, Jr. Centennial Chair in Computing Systems,” which is assigned to the director of ICES.

“No one in history has had a greater impact on science and engineering in Texas than Peter O'Donnell,” said J. Tinsley Oden, director of ICES, a member of the National Academy of Engineering, holder of the Cockrell Family Regents’ Chair in Engineering, and professor of aerospace engineering and engineering mechanics, and of computer science, and of mathematics. “His extremely generous and strategically planned support of computational science and engineering has made possible the creation of one of the top academic and research programs in the world, and has led to advances of great benefit to not only all Texans, but to all Americans.”

A dedication of the building and celebration of the ICES 10th anniversary is scheduled for March 26 at 4 p.m. at the O'Donnell Building, 201 E. 24th Street.