

POWERED BY PURPOSE

By Aaron Martin

Beginning with his time at Purdue, David A. Ricks (IM'90) has had his career defined by education and the opportunities it provides. Now, as chair and CEO of Eli Lilly and Company, Ricks is ensuring that others get the same chance.

Ricks capitalized on his Purdue education and a 1996 MBA from Indiana University to rise through the ranks at Lilly, eventually filling the top position in 2017. Under his guidance, the Indianapolis-based pharmaceutical manufacturing company has strengthened its longtime relationship with Purdue as a research collaborator and talent pipeline.

This relationship was reaffirmed October 27, when [Purdue and Lilly announced](#) a 10-year, \$42.5 million pharmaceutical manufacturing scholarship program that will give two exciting opportunities to 75–100 top incoming undergraduate students each year: the ability to study tuition free at Purdue and a guaranteed inside track on full-time employment at Lilly, including a guaranteed internship or co-op experience as a student.

The program, called Lilly Scholars at Purdue University, will award its first scholarships for the fall of 2023.

“Establishing this innovative program benefits everybody,” Ricks says. “For students, it’s about opportunity—the chance to learn and grow at one of the country’s top educational institutions, followed by preferred access to a job with Lilly. But it also helps Purdue recruit those students, who will hopefully one day become key pharmaceutical manufacturing talent for Lilly.”

To create a diverse pool of recipients from a broad range of backgrounds, the program will give priority to students in qualifying majors who are underrepresented in Purdue’s student body; have overcome obstacles such as socioeconomic or educational disadvantage; or are among the first generation in their family to attend college.

As part of this agreement, Purdue and Lilly will also collaborate to build out new curricula, experiential learning opportunities, and certificate and degree programs in pharmaceutical manufacturing. Advancement in the field is a priority at the university, which has invested \$250 million in life sciences in recent years. This includes \$19 million toward pharmaceutical manufacturing research and development in 2021.

“We believe this program is one of a kind,” Ricks says. “Lilly is investing in students and giving them avenues to professional success early in their undergraduate careers, while Purdue is building a comprehensive degree program that helps them recruit top scholars in a cutting-edge manufacturing field.”

Lilly is one of the largest employers and oldest companies in Indiana. Every year, the company hires Purdue graduates in engineering, sales, finance, human resources, marketing, procurement, supply chain, and other areas. In fact, Lilly employs nearly 2,500 Purdue graduates—more than from any other university.

“Purdue’s programs are rigorous and academically challenging—I know that firsthand,” Ricks says. “When you look at who has success with Lilly, there are three commonalities. Of course, there’s performance excellence. You have to be smart and deliver results. But as a company, fundamentally, we’re here because people need medicine. So acting with integrity and respect for people are two other important hallmarks of success for Lilly. These are traits Purdue graduates have, and that’s why they do well with the company.”

Ricks joined Lilly in 1996 as a business development associate and climbed through a variety of leadership positions in the U.S., Canada, and China before becoming chair and CEO.

“Lilly is a great place to work because, first and foremost, what we do has a direct, positive impact on the health and well-being of people around the world,” Ricks says. “I came to Lilly for the challenges and varied opportunities. But I stayed at Lilly because I believe in what we do: I want to come to work every day and know I’ve made a difference in people’s lives.”

While a Purdue student, Ricks was a member of the Phi Kappa Tau social fraternity. He is a former member of the Weldon School of Biomedical Engineering Advisory Board and stays connected to the university through engagements like Lilly Day at Purdue.

“My Purdue education challenged me and prepared me for life,” Ricks says. “It opened many doors for me, and I will never forget that. This new collaboration is built around those same fundamentals—great education and great opportunity. Together, we’re creating a transformational pharmaceutical manufacturing program with long-term benefits to Purdue, its students, Lilly, and patients.”