



Jim and Martha Seneff with the inaugural cohort of the James M. Seneff Scholars.

TEN QUESTIONS **James M. Seneff** (B.S. '68)

In fall 2019, the College of Business welcomed its first cohort of top undergraduate business students in an elite honors program named in honor of alumnus James M. Seneff, founder and executive chairman of Orlando-based CNL Financial Group. The James M. Seneff Honors Program was established through a generous gift to the college by the CNL Charitable Foundation. We caught up with the College of Business alumnus to discuss his vision for the program.

1 What led you to create the James M. Seneff Honors Program?

I have been blessed to be able to support a wide range of charitable, civic and education causes for nearly 50 years. The CNL Charitable Foundation, my company's foundation, and I are now focusing more time, energy and resources on proactive, strategic investments to influence the culture of capitalism through young leaders who will shape our culture and world for generations to come. The program will help the college move to the next level in its ability to attract the brightest students and provide them with an innovative and relevant education.

2 What do you hope Seneff Scholars will accomplish through the honors program?

The Seneff Scholars are remarkably bright and have demonstrated excellence in the pursuit of learning. We want them to go beyond traditional academic thinking as they approach issues and understand how to think horizontally, not just vertically. Through this program, they will strengthen their leadership abilities, develop entrepreneurial skills and forge lifelong professional connections. We want them prepared for whatever comes their way.

3 What do you envision for the future of the James M. Seneff Honors Program?

I foresee it developing into a preeminent honors program that top high school students will see as a critical differentiator. Today's students want more from college than four years of traditional classroom learning. I see our program as one that not only provides a creative, cutting-edge learning environment, but also one that continuously evolves with the demands of industry and society.

4 What do you enjoy most about interacting with the Seneff Scholars?

While many college students strive for academic achievement, our scholars are in search of much more. Spending time with them is personally rewarding but what I find most encouraging is to see their sincere desire to grow in all areas of their lives. Working with them gives me a great deal of optimism for the future.

5 What are two of the most important pieces of advice you can give students who strive to be leaders in their professional and personal lives?

First, expand your mindset beyond business and numbers. Today's challenges require holistic thinking and openness to different ideas, perspectives and approaches. That is what drives innovation. Second, be grounded,

disciplined and take a long-term perspective in all that you do. Success is driven by philosophically understanding who you are and what you want to achieve, creating a plan to make that happen and then methodically and relentlessly working to bring that vision to life.

6 You are offering this year's Seneff Scholars an experiential opportunity with CNL. What is your goal for students who participate?

We are offering a consulting project to explore the core tenants in many of the most cited books on business, economics and history. Specifically, we have asked the scholars to consider these concepts and explore how various external factors have impacted these ideas. We hope that by providing this real-world environment project the scholars will better understand how to use creative solutions to solve problems.

7 In addition to the Seneff Honors Program, you established the James M. Seneff Fund for Preeminence. Why was it important for you to do this?

The fund ensures the college can invest in the things that make a college great. These include enhanced student experiences, fulfilling faculty needs, strengthening existing programs and creating new ones. This discretionary support gives college leaders the flexibility to fund key initiatives that will ensure FSU remains competitive with other leading business schools.

8 What role did FSU play in preparing you to create and take the helm of your hugely successful business?

In my finance classes, I learned about compounding investment returns, which Einstein said was "the eighth wonder of the world." I learned that in order for compounding to work for you it required protecting the downside and letting the upside take care of itself. I also learned that compound investing is a long-term process which inspired me to create a 50-year business plan that I created shortly after I left FSU. We overestimate what we can do in five years and underestimate what we can do in 50 years.

9 What are your fondest memories at FSU?

I came from Indiana so I loved the wonderful weather in Tallahassee as well as night football games. I formed lifelong friendships while there that I still have to this day. I started a business after my sophomore year that I managed until I graduated so I loved going to my business classes to learn what I was supposed to do next in my business.

10 What engenders pride in your alma mater?

It has been encouraging to see FSU's continued focus and commitment to the College of Business, which is essential for the future of business growth in our state. I am impressed with the remarkable rise in national rankings FSU and the College of Business have achieved. These numbers reflect hard work and commitment to be recognized as the preeminent university and college they are.

