

VINOD K. DHAM

University of Cincinnati Alumni Association William Howard Taft Medal for Notable Achievement

Vinod K. Dham, CEAS '77
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President Pinto, distinguished guests, faculty, members of the Alumni Association, and fellow Bearcats — Thank you, President Pinto, for this generous recognition, and my sincere thanks to the Alumni Association's selection committee for bestowing upon me its highest honor.

To receive an award bearing the name of William Howard Taft — a proud Cincinnati who uniquely served our nation as both President of the United States and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court — is profoundly humbling. His life stands as a testament to public service, integrity, and excellence — values that continue to inspire all of us.

More than fifty years ago, when I first arrived in the United States to begin my journey at the University of Cincinnati, I came with little more than a dream — and eight dollars to my name. At the time, the Government of India permitted travelers to carry only eight dollars out of the country. Having been offered a full tuition scholarship and a research assistantship by the University of Cincinnati, I had naively assumed that those eight dollars would be enough to sustain me until I arrived here.

On my second day on campus, I met Mrs. Mary Campbell, the Foreign Student Advisor, who had been corresponding with me for over a year to help make my admission possible. What she expected to be a simple welcome meeting became a moment forever etched in my heart — one that taught me the true meaning of compassion, kindness, and human generosity.

When I asked her about receiving my \$325 monthly research assistantship, she gently explained that it would begin only after I started my research duties. I was momentarily speechless. I shared with her that I had only eight dollars to my name — and that I needed to pay for my dorm, health coverage, and even necessities like food.

She was visibly taken aback. Without hesitation, she stepped out of the room and returned moments later with \$120 in cash — what she described as a loan from petty cash — repayable over six months once my assistantship began. I felt an overwhelming sense of relief — and a gratitude that has stayed with me ever since.

When I walked this campus as a student, I believed I was here to earn a degree. What I did not yet realize was that I was stepping into a place of personal transformation — a place where individual drive and

ingenuity find an ecosystem that nurtures the realization of human potential and, ultimately, enables widespread impact.

This extraordinary university does not simply create graduates — it creates contributors; not just careers, but legacies; not just success stories, but stories of transformation.

I was fortunate to witness that firsthand. My batchmate, Tsai Ming-kai — who went on to found MediaTek in Taiwan — helped enable the global mobile revolution. Today, MediaTek powers billions of devices worldwide and is valued at over \$90 billion.

Together, our journeys reflect what this institution makes possible.

Thanks to UC for seeding this DNA, I had the privilege of spending the first 25 years of my career helping build the personal computer revolution — through my work on Intel's 386, 486, and Pentium microprocessors — which helped shape the computing industry and touched millions of lives.

In the past quarter century, I have been equally committed to giving back — helping build India's startup and venture capital ecosystem and supporting the development of its domestic semiconductor industry.

For me, that transformation began in the Electrical Engineering Department's semiconductor laboratory.

I owe a deep debt of gratitude to Professor Henderson and Professor Nevin. They did not simply teach — they challenged. They pushed me to think deeper, to question assumptions, and to embrace complexity. Their exacting standards cultivated not only technical competence, but resilience and intellectual honesty.

And yet, as I reflect today, I am reminded that no meaningful journey is ever taken alone. This recognition is not mine alone. It belongs to the mentors who guided me, the family who supported me, the colleagues who collaborated with me, and the broader community that believed in what we were building — sometimes even before we fully did. It also belongs to this extraordinary university.

I am forever proud to be part of the University of Cincinnati's legacy. I am reminded that the true power of an institution is not measured by its buildings or rankings, but by the lives it transforms — and the ripple effects those lives create.

I am deeply honored to carry the Bearcat spirit forward continuing to build, to innovate, and to give back in ways that expand opportunity for others, just as it was once extended to me. Thank you.

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