Ernest Cockrell, Jr.
B.S.P.E. 1936, M.S.P.E. 1936

Ernest Cockrell Jr.’s substantial support of his alma mater and his service on its councils was prompted by a strong sense of gratitude he felt for the education he received at The University of Texas at Austin, where he earned B.S. and M.S. degrees in Petroleum Engineering in 1936. He was a member of one of the first petroleum engineering classes at UT, and would help launch the petroleum industry as we know it today.

Ernie served on the UT Development Board from 1959 until his death in 1972 at the age of 57. He was also a founding member of the Chancellor’s Council, charter member of the UT Engineering Foundation, and chairman and charter member of the advisory board of the Department of Petroleum Engineering. Named a Distinguished Graduate of the College of Engineering in 1962, he was a life member of the UT Ex-Students’ Association and an honorary member of the “T” Association.

Ernie devoted most of his energies to the exploration for and the development of oil and gas, but he also had interests in ranching, banking, real estate and investments. A product of the depression, he was a self-made man, as was his father before him. After working a short time for Texaco, Ernie formed both an oil company, Producer’s Oil, and a drilling workover company. He would go on to serve as president of Production Maintenance Company and Oil Production Maintenance, Inc. (1942-1955), president of Texas Production Company (1948-1972) and chairman of the board of the Cockrell Corporation (1966-1972). He was also a director of Bank of the Southwest, Southwest Bancshares, Inc., Pennzoil Company and Duval Corporation.

Ernie’s legacy of giving has continued even four decades after his death. Over time, The Cockrell Foundation has funded 29 endowed chairs and each year awards 331 undergraduate scholarships and 34 graduate student fellowships. More than that, the impact of The Cockrell Foundation can be felt through the support of the friends and companies who have been inspired through Ernie’s vision of philanthropy. In July 2007, the Board of Regents of The University of Texas at Austin renamed the College of Engineering the Cockrell School of Engineering in honor of Ernest D. Cockrell and his wife Virginia. Their estate gifts have developed the equivalent of a $220 million endowment for the school, which continues to grow to this day.