John Pappajohn

John Pappajohn was born in Greece. John and his mother immigrated to Mason City, Iowa, when he was nine months old to join his father, who was a U.S. citizen. He grew up in Mason City, where he attended public schools, and he received his BSC degree from the University of Iowa in 1952.

He did not interview for a job upon graduation but started his own insurance business. In 1962, he moved to Des Moines and organized the Guardsman Life Insurance Company (a public company), where he was chairman of the board from 1962 to 1969. In 1969, he sold his interest and became a venture capitalist.

Pappajohn organized Equity Dynamics Inc. in 1969 and continues as its president today. He also founded Pappajohn Capital Resources (a venture capital fund primarily investing in high tech, medical, and health care projects) in that same year. There are more than 15 portfolio companies in the Pappajohn Capital Fund, and it has averaged a 40% annual return on investments over the last 40 years.

Beta Gamma Sigma awarded Pappajohn a National Medallion for Entrepreneurship in 1997. In 1995, he was named a Horatio Alger Award recipient, and he currently serves as a member of the Horatio Alger Association Board of Directors. He is also on the board of the University of Iowa Foundation. He previously served on the board of Pine Manor College, Chestnut Hill, Mass. He has been a member of several boards of the Kennedy Center on a continuous basis for more than 24 years. He is the recipient of four Honorary Doctorate degrees. He is also vice chairman of the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C. He is the first Iowan to receive the National Philanthropist of the Year for the Arts. He and his wife Mary are listed as one of the top 200 art collectors in the world by Art News Magazine for years 1998 to 2014.

John and Mary Pappajohn have gifted over $100 million to various philanthropic causes, including at the University of Iowa, to support the John Pappajohn Business Building, the Pappajohn Pavilion, the John and Mary Pappajohn Cancer Center, and the John and Mary Pappajohn Biomedical Research Building. They have also contributed to Iowa State University, the Des Moines Art Center, and the National Gallery of Art. They have contributed more than $25 million to fund the Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Centers at five colleges in Iowa to promote job creation in the state. John and Mary Pappajohn have also established a scholarship fund for ethnic, disadvantaged, and minority students and have granted more than $4 million in scholarships.

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