November 1, 2017

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees
FROM: Susan Herbst
RE: Naming of Jerry Yang Road

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board of Trustees approve the naming of the access road to the UConn Dairy Bar, Jerry Yang Road.

BACKGROUND:

Xiangzhong (Jerry) Yang (1959-2009) was a professor in the department of Animal Science and founding director of the Center for Regenerative Biology at the University of Connecticut. Scotland was famous for Dolly the cloned sheep. The U.S. was equally well known for Amy, the first cloned bovine calf produced in North America; a feat achieved by Jerry Yang and his research team in 1999. His pioneering work in nuclear reprogramming and stem cell research positioned UConn’s agricultural biotechnology research as a worldwide leader. In recognition of Jerry’s research and its broader promise, the University approved construction of a second floor in the Advanced Technology Labs and the hiring of five new faculty members from across the University to advance its promise in stem cell research by forming the Center for Regenerative Biology.

As a visionary leader, Jerry’s contributions to humanity extended beyond laboratory science to include exchanges for the benefit of improved communication and collaboration. As a Ph.D. student at Cornell University, he established the society of Overseas Chinese Agricultural Students, organized its first conference and published its official journal. In 1994, he obtained funding from the Rockefeller Foundation and established “China Bridges International,” a scholarship program to support overseas Chinese scientists to conduct short-term research in China. Shortly after arriving in Storrs, he led a UConn presidential delegation to China’s Ministries of Agriculture and Education. In 2004, he funded and led a delegation of editors and representatives from the premier science journal, Nature, to visit the labs of accomplished scientists who had returned to China following their overseas educations. Subsequently, Nature published a special issue “China’s Voice” featuring articles of ground-breaking science from this group of scientists.
Jerry Yang was revered as a scientist by his home country and this provided access to China’s Premier for enhancing the lives of others. Jerry recommended three key advancements that were implemented and that helped millions:

1. Having been educated in a one-room school in rural China, Jerry never forgot the harsh life of local teachers who had to farm to support themselves. He contributed to the establishment of salaries for rural teachers nationwide.

2. Seeing the lack of dairy products in the Chinese diet, Jerry worked with the Premier to gain approval for importation of American cattle genetics, subsidies to farmers to improve China’s dairy industry, and for free “student milk” for all school children.

3. Recognizing the underdevelopment of science and technology in China, Jerry recommended that the Premiere introduce a Chinese version of SBIR/STTR research grants which focus on public-private partnerships.

Jerry’s final recommendation, which was funded but stopped short in its implementation by the progression of his salivary gland adenocarcinoma, was to establish a world-wide human stem cell hub in China.

In his memory, his hometown, Hebei Province, carved him and his cloned calf on the stone wall in their provincial park, erected his statue in their best elementary school, and is renovating the home that Jerry grew up in as a museum. The naming of the Storrs campus road that runs behind the very building that Jerry worked in day and night, as “Jerry Yang Road”, is appropriate and well-deserved to honor an internationally known scientist, leader, educator and visionary.