

Trustee



Jessie J. Knight, Jr.

“I realize that many universities claim this, but what really is unique about UC San Diego and very real to this community is UCSD’s commitment to research, and bridging the world of research with the private sector,” says Jessie J. Knight, Jr. “Across this university there is a great understanding of entrepreneurship and the vital importance of interaction with private industry.” He has seen this as a judge for the Most Innovative New Products Award given by the University of California’s CONNECT program for the region’s biotech, high-tech and general market industries.

As a broadly entrenched San Diego businessman, Jessie has helped build the academia/industry bridge from the other side. Jessie is currently Executive Vice President of External Affairs for Sempra Energy. Prior to that, he served as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E). Previously, Jessie had a central view of the university/community interface while President and Chief Executive Officer of the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Jessie is a native of Missouri who launched his corporate career on the West Coast with the Dole Foods Company, where he spent 10 years in domestic and international operations, the last five years as Marketing Director for Dole’s U.S. and Canadian canned and juice retail grocery products divisions.

Jessie next became Vice President of Marketing for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *San Francisco Examiner* newspapers, where he won an unprecedented five national Clio Awards for television, radio and print advertising, and a Cannes Film Festival Golden Lion Award for business marketing.

Jessie was appointed by Governor Pete Wilson to serve as Commissioner for the California Public Utilities Commission, where he was recognized nationally as the leading regulatory voice to restructure the telecommunications and energy industries to create competitive markets.

Prior to this appointment, he had moved to the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce as Executive Vice President. From this experience, he was lured to San Diego’s Chamber of Commerce in 1999. Soon he was asked by then-Vice Chancellor of UC San Diego Health Sciences and Dean of the School of Medicine, Ed Holmes, to serve on his advisory board.

“Since working at the Chamber of Commerce, I have always had an affiliation with the campus,” says Jessie. “Next, it was working on initiatives through the Jacobs School of Engineering, later joining the Founding Board of Advisors when Dean Robert Sullivan came on at the Rady School of Management, and when [Chancellor] Marye Anne Fox came to town, she asked me to be on the Board of Overseers.”

Jessie has served on the boards of many public and private companies and not-for-profit organizations, among them the World Affairs Council of Northern California, the International Newspaper Marketing Association, the U.S. Postal Service, the University of Wisconsin School of Business, the San Francisco Foundation's Investment Review Committee, Blue Shield of Northern California, Avista Corporation and Alaska Airlines.

Locally, Jessie has served on the Economic Development Corporation, Convention and Visitors Bureau, World Trade Center, International Community Foundation, Rady Children's Hospital and Secure Our E-city Cybersecurity Foundation.

In 2012, Jessie was honored with the Scripps Institute of Oceanography's Scientists' Recognition Award, one of the highest awards bestowed to an individual. In 2006, the California Black Chamber of Commerce honored him with its Visionary Award for professional accomplishments and community commitment. Among his many honors, Jessie has been recognized by the United States Marine Corps and the United States Navy. In 2001, he was one of 64 U.S. citizens chosen by then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to join the Pentagon's Joint Civilian Orientation Conference organization.

Jessie is a graduate of St. Louis University, a fellow of the University of Madrid and holds an MBA from the University of Wisconsin. As Vice President and Wealth Management Advisor to US Bank, Jessie's wife Joye Blount carries a volunteer schedule that rivals her husband's. "We are both committed to the community," says Jessie. "It is how we were both raised, growing up. I was the first college graduate in my family, and both my wife and I have always had an appreciation for education. All of my brothers and sisters have advanced degrees, though my father only completed 3rd grade, and my mother only completed high school. Joye and I want to give back; it is part of who we are.

"Having served on different boards across the university will allow me to now participate on the Foundation and experience the University at a more strategic level."