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Brock University – Marketing and Communications

*\*NOTE - Attached to this release are photos, an infographic and links to video for media use. Captions and more information can be found at the end of this release.*

## Niagara family’s transformative \$5M gift boosts Brock Engineering

From his office of the Thorold biotechnology company he founded more than 20 years ago, Yousef Haj-Ahmad can see two important things for Niagara: Brock University and a world of potential.

Haj-Ahmad (BSc '80, MSc '82) launched Norgen Biotek Corp. in 1998 while he was a Professor of Biological Sciences at Brock, where he also earned his undergraduate and master’s degrees, and he has grown Norgen into a world-renowned company advancing the field of biotechnology research and testing.

Haj-Ahmad retired from Brock to run Norgen full time, but throughout the years has supported the University and its students both financially and by launching the careers of countless graduates.

Now, through a \$5-million gift from the Haj-Ahmad Family Foundation, “Dr. Haj,” as he’s known to the 80 or so employees at Norgen, will have another game-changing impact in Niagara and beyond through the Yousef Haj-Ahmad Department of Engineering at Brock University.

The decision by Haj-Ahmad and his family to make a transformational gift to the University is the result of their lifelong collective connection to Brock, and their belief that their alma mater can play a major role in an emerging sector.

“This is the century of knowledge and science, and engineering is across all of the sciences,” says Haj-Ahmad. “Brock University can have a major impact in the community and worldwide. I’m thankful that I’m able to give back to a community and a university that put me on the right track.”

Officially launched in 2021 with the offering of a minor in Engineering, the newly-named [Yousef Haj-Ahmad Department of Engineering](#) now includes six faculty members (with more to

be hired) and plans to welcome its first cohort of undergraduate Integrated Engineering students for the 2024-25 academic year.

Students will explore topics such as big data, artificial intelligence, medical devices, sustainability and climate change, robot automation, manufacturing and transportation.

“Launching academic programming in the area of engineering is a significant milestone in the history of Brock University. As one of only three Canadian universities offering Integrated Engineering programs at the undergraduate level, this move fills an important need for a wide-ranging sector,” says Brock University Interim President Lynn Wells. “The contribution from the Haj-Ahmad family will have a major impact on the lives of generations of Brock students, on the local economy and on broader society as well.”

Gord Arbeau, Brock’s Associate Vice-President, Advancement and External Relations says the Haj-Ahmad family gift is a transformational act of generosity, saying it will go a long way in helping students.

“This generous gift advances a new Engineering program, and with it the careers of the next generation of engineers who will use their studies to tackle the most complex problems faced by those in Niagara and around the world,” says Arbeau. “The entire Brock community sincerely thanks the Haj-Ahmad family for this wonderful gift and for their ongoing support of Brock students.”

Integrated Engineering takes key concepts from traditional engineering fields – such as mechanical, civil and electrical – and brings them together into a single coherent program where students learn about each field as well as the connections between them.

“Brock’s innovative approach will have a significant impact because, unlike specialized engineering programs, our students will graduate with a diverse and broad set of skills,” says Interim Department Chair Beatrice Ombuki-Berman. “We want to attract students who may not have considered engineering as a career, but who bring other skills and talents to their careers. Industry leaders throughout Niagara are eager for Brock to get started because there is already a significant need for this approach and type of engineering education.”

Faculty of Mathematics and Science Dean Ejaz Ahmed says the Department of Engineering is “an important next step” in the Faculty’s future.

“This will open the doors to new possibilities for our faculty members and students from teaching, learning and research perspectives,” Ahmed says. “It will provide a broad skill set necessary to solve many of the world’s most challenging problems.”

As someone who has watched the biotechnology and engineering fields merge and evolve, Haj-Ahmad says Brock can become a world leader.

“Brock University is in the process of competing with the leading universities around the world and it has its place,” he says. “Universities must have a global impact. Brock is not just Niagara, it’s global.”

An important part of the Haj-Ahmad Family Foundation’s gift to the University is the establishment of the Haj-Ahmad Engineering Scholarship for Women, which will support female students pursuing STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education each year, paving the way for generations of skilled female engineers.

For Haj-Ahmad’s daughters Lila and Miriam, who are both Brock graduates, it was an important part of the contribution.

“My mom was an engineer in Syria and my sister and I are both in the STEM sector, so it just felt like a good next step,” says Lila Haj-Ahmad (BSc ’16). “It really helps advance the academic community at Brock, especially with the integrated program.”

Miriam Haj-Ahmad (BA ’19) hopes the family’s gift will inspire others.

“It’s exciting to be able to say that at the place where I went to University, we’re helping to establish a new department and program,” she says. “Hopefully the people I went to school with at Brock and the other alumni will look at our family and be inspired to also do things like this.”

Sibling Zak Haj-Ahmad (BSc ’17) says many of his own achievements and those of his family are thanks to Brock.

“Everyone at Brock is really part of a big family and that’s what Brock means to me,” he says. “Brock welcomed my own family and helped us achieve our goals in life. Knowing we can do the same for future generations is really an incredible feeling.”

With such a close family connection to the University, the Haj-Ahmad partnership will certainly open the doors for many future integrated engineers, Ombuki-Berman says.

“It’s so fitting that the Haj-Ahmad family is the first donor because we want this Department to be very community involved with work-integrated engineering,” she says. “By having a local community member give in this way, it’s a testament to the fact that they’re going to support us and we’re going to work with them to get our students the experience they need.”

Visit the [Brock University website to learn more about the Yousef Haj-Ahmad Department of Engineering](#).

**Additional Quotes:**

“Through this funding, the Yousef Haj-Ahmad Department of Engineering at Brock and the Haj-Ahmad Engineering Scholarship for Women is poised to change the game as it will open doors to a high-quality education, and then careers in engineering for generations of women. I applaud the Haj-Ahmad family and Brock for advancing STEM education.”

- Stephanie Thompson, Engineering Leader/Founder, STEM by Steph

“One of the most important engineering feats in Niagara is turning its greatest renewable resource, the Falls, into electricity that powers our businesses and homes. Hatch is proud to have played a leading role in power generation both locally and globally, with a history in Niagara that goes back nearly 100 years to the formation of its predecessor, H. G. Acres. We look forward to seeing a new generation of engineers coming out of the Brock Engineering program who will be important to Niagara’s economic growth and who will have the skills and knowledge to meet the demands of our rapidly changing world.”

- Jonathan Atkinson, Director, Business Development and Regional Manager (Ontario) Hydropower and Dams at Hatch

“We rely on engineers who take an average of eight years after graduation to develop. Retention is critical and proves to be overwhelmingly successful only with engineers who have a prior nexus to the Niagara region. Whiting Equipment Canada fully supports the development of the Yousef Haj-Ahmad Department of Engineering and very much looks forward to closely collaborating with Brock University after its implementation.”

- Rudi Kroeker, President and CEO, Whiting Equipment Canada

“We often hire engineers outside of Niagara and bring them to our region, but that is often difficult. An Engineering program at Brock would allow local students to study engineering and remain with their families in Niagara upon graduation. We look forward to collaborating with Brock in the development of the region’s future engineers.”

- Edward Spencer Fox, MEng, MBA, PEng, President, E.S. Fox Limited

“As a longtime partner, Niagara Region is pleased to share its support for Brock University’s plan to develop an engineering program. Brock’s reputation for educational excellence provides a solid foundation for the expansion into the engineering education field, and its commitment to improving the vitality of the Niagara region cannot be understated. The creation of this program will serve to enhance the region’s standing across the province and across the country.”

- Jim Bradley, Chair, Niagara Region

#### **Attachment captions and descriptions:**

- **YousefHaj-Ahmad.jpg:** Yousef Haj-Ahmad inside Norgen Biotek, the Thorold-based company he started in 1998 that now employs more than 80 people.
- **Haj-AhmadFamily.jpg:** The Haj-Ahmad Family Foundation has donated \$5 million to create the Yousef Haj-Ahmad Department of Engineering at Brock University.

- **EngineeringTimeline.jpg:** Brock University's Yousef Haj-Ahmad Department of Engineering will continue to develop and launch programming over the coming four years.
- **[Yousef Haj-Ahmad Video:](#)** Yousef Haj-Ahmad talks about his company Norgen Biotek's involvement with Brock University and why he wanted to support the expansion into Engineering.
- **[Haj-Ahmad Family Video:](#)** The Haj-Ahmad family talks about what it means to be giving back to Brock and creating a legacy for future generations.
- **[Lynn Wells Video:](#)** The Haj-Ahmad family talks about what it means to be giving back to Brock and creating a legacy for future generations.

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For more information or for assistance arranging interviews:

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