Loyal to Loyola
Former McDonald's CEO gives $40 million to university's business school
By Jodi S. Cohen
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Michael Quinlan was 18 years old, a broke college student at Loyola University Chicago, when a fraternity brother suggested his mother might be able to help Quinlan get a job.

The mother was the secretary for Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's, and Quinlan began working in the company's mailroom so he could pay for books and living expenses.

"She hired me for $2 an hour and there you go, that took up the next 40 years of my life," said Quinlan, who went on to become McDonald's CEO and chairman of the Loyola board of trustees.

Quinlan, who grew up on the city's Far West Side, the son of a traveling salesman and a stay-at-home mother and the first in his family to attend college, was only able to attend Loyola because the university provided a full-tuition scholarship.
On Saturday night, Quinlan announced he is returning the favor. He will give $40 million to the business school, which in turn will be renamed the Michael R. Quinlan School of Business. Similar to the Kellogg school at Northwestern University, or the Booth school at the University of Chicago, the Quinlan name will be used to brand the business school as it prepares to build a new location on the growing downtown campus.

"This is a local kid, from a middle-class family, who comes to Loyola and works his way up in a company that he helped make an international giant," said the Rev. Michael Garanzini, Loyola's president. "It has all the elements that we like to think of as part of Loyola and Chicago's legacy."

Quinlan's $40 million donation — the largest gift to Loyola from an individual — will enable the school to begin construction soon on a nine-story building at the northeast corner of State Street and Pearson Avenue.

The building is the latest development in the university's downtown location, known as the Water Tower campus. Since 2005, the university has added a dorm and student center, expanded the law school and built a new School of Communication.

The donation will nearly triple the business school's endowment to $60 million. The money, about half of which will be donated right away, also will be used to recruit top faculty and students and develop academic programs. There are about 2,250 undergraduate and graduate students studying business at Loyola.

"We have only one school of business so it is important, if we are going to put a name on it, that it be a significant enough gift to make an impact," said Jonathan Heintzelman, Loyola's senior vice president for advancement.

Quinlan, 67, grew up about a mile from Oak Park and graduated from Fenwick High School. He was the oldest of five children and the only one to graduate from college.

He applied to Loyola and the University of Illinois at Chicago, and was offered a scholarship to both.

Quinlan had just started his sophomore year when he shared his financial woes with a fraternity brother. "As usual, I was broke and made a remark that I had to get a part-time job or drop out of school and earn enough money to keep going," he said.

Quinlan worked 20 to 25 hours a week while in school, commuting from the campus in Rogers Park to McDonalds' corporate office downtown. During the summer and holiday breaks, he worked full time and then got a job in the company's purchasing department after he graduated.

He also enrolled in Loyola's evening MBA program and got master’s degree.

For 35 years, Quinlan worked his way up in the fast-food chain in jobs including purchasing director, store manager, regional manager, vice president and president. He was the company's
third CEO, a position he held for about 11 years until 1998. He helped develop the Egg McMuffin, and joked in an interview last week that he ate about 2,000 of them in the process of perfecting it.

He joined the Loyola board of trustees in 1983 and has been its chairman since 1999. He credits Loyola with giving him an education in "moral principles, ethics, treating people the right way, giving back to society."

Garanzini said he began talking with Quinlan two years ago about making a large donation to the business school. Several months ago, school officials presented Quinlan with a custom-designed brochure touting the potential impact of the donation.

University business schools increasingly are being named after big donors. In 2011, about 36 percent — or 219 — of business schools had names attached to them, up from about 20 percent in 1991, according to a survey of schools accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. The increase is driven not only by the fundraising opportunity, but also by the desire to promote a distinct "brand."

One of the largest donations — $300 million — went to the University of Chicago's business school in 2008. The gift came from David Booth, an alum who started an investment firm after graduating. Earlier this year, Chicago investment banker Richard Driehaus gave $30 million to DePaul University's business school, which now bears his name.

Quinlan said he looks forward to seeing his name associated with Loyola's business school.

"When people ask me where did I go to college, I am very proud to tell them I am a two-time graduate of Loyola," Quinlan said. "It has given me more than I have given it."