

Tulane receives \$1 million gift from Elana Amsterdam and Rob Katz to expand COVID-19 testing

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Rob Katz, chief executive officer of Vail Resorts, and Elana Amsterdam, a New York Times bestselling author and founder of Elana's Pantry.

Tulane University has received a \$1 million gift from Elana Amsterdam and her husband Rob Katz to significantly expand its molecular pathology lab to increase COVID-19 testing capacity within the region.

The funding will enable Tulane University School of Medicine to purchase new equipment and hire additional full-time staff to ramp up capacity to process up to 1,000 COVID-19 tests per day at its downtown lab. The facility can currently run up to 300 tests per day and deliver results within 24 hours.

Amsterdam is a *New York Times* bestselling author and founder of Elana's Pantry, and Katz is the chief executive officer of Vail Resorts.

"We know that widespread testing is critical in stopping the spread of COVID-19. With support from Elana and Rob, we will substantially increase our ability to test individuals in the community who are symptomatic, those who have been exposed to the illness as well as vulnerable populations who are most at risk," said Tulane University President Michael Fitts. "We are so grateful to Elana and Rob for their generosity and commitment to helping New Orleans and the region through this healthcare crisis."

The gift also will enable Tulane to increase testing capacity for programs underway for first-responders, nursing home residents, incarcerated populations, mental health facilities and healthcare workers.

"Rob and I feel very fortunate to be able to provide support to the amazing team at the Tulane School of Medicine and the work they are undertaking to improve and broaden COVID-19 testing. We cannot recall another moment during our lives that has caused so much disruption — to our work, our health and our communities. Making testing widely available is critical to address the challenges we all face," said Elana Amsterdam.

The School of Medicine [established the COVID-19 testing facility in March](#) when the city confronted a critical shortfall in testing capacity as the coronavirus spread throughout New Orleans. The facility, which was recently expanded to include an adjoining lab, offers the PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test being used by the CDC.

Plans call for purchasing new equipment that will automate many of the steps needed to increase output to process blood, nasal swabs or saliva samples. Medical school researchers are also working on highly sensitive next-generation tests that use CRISPR genetic editing technology to screen samples. The lab will be equipped to incorporate those tests as they are developed and approved for clinical use.

From April 1 to mid-May, the Tulane lab ran approximately 3,000 tests, including almost 1,400 from Orleans Parish Prison, 300 from the Morial Convention Center clinic and 600 from patients of state mental health facilities.

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Michael Fitts