

William Harris,
Science Foundation Arizona
www.sfaz.org

When you enter Dr. William Harris' office, something other than science jumps out at you. Photographs of Harris with state leaders like President George W. Bush hang near autographed photos of baseball heroes. His bookshelves feature rows of studies that lie near bats and leather balls. But upon closer examination, his baseball bat has a flat face with a curved end and is not a baseball bat at all. His bat is a hurling stick. And the stick is covered with autographs—from Ireland's prime minister and deputy prime minister.

Harris began his new role as president and CEO of Science Foundation Arizona fresh off a five-year term as Science Foundation Ireland's director general. He adopted hurling as his sport-of-choice after moving to Ireland, to strengthen the country's science industry in 2001. His work helped contribute to a booming, viable economy that has become a template for other nations to follow.

"In 1988, the World Bank almost declared [Ireland] bankrupt," says Harris. "Through education and a commitment to the idea that being rich is better than being poor, the country changed things around...These simple principles galvanized people to work together. Ireland wanted to create a cadre of competitive workers and speed was important in getting it done. The challenge was compelling."

Harris spent his career teaching chemistry at the collegiate level in South Carolina. Later, he worked for the National Science Foundation for 18 years, then came aboard Columbia University's Biosphere 2 project in Tucson and eventually returned to the south.

Born out of the 21st Century Innovation Fund and initiated in the spring of 2006, Science Foundation Arizona seeks to support the science, engineering and innovation industry within the state. The nonprofit is a public/private partnership and was appropriated with \$35 million to help create a competitive environment that encourages and supports knowledge-driven economics.

"We should be embarrassed by the fact that we rank 47th or 48th in education," says Harris. "How can you be an Arizonan and be at the bottom and think that it's okay? Why don't we have a shared consensus that we owe our children a good education?"

"A culture that welcomes new things and new ways of thinking is very attractive to young people," he says. "I'd like to create a culture where there is an ambition here for high school students to become the next Bill Gates or Michael Dell, where this state will inspire and support these students. Of course, I also want the next greatest baseball pitcher to come from here too," he adds.

