ONE philanthropic New Yorker has taken college gift giving to the next level.

Rather than donate a picturesque statue or new computer system, Jerry Cohen and his wife, Adrianne, devised and continue to fund a program that is helping NYU Stern School of Business undergraduate students to smell the roses off campus.

"There are a lot of things students need other than basic courses and teaching," says benefactor Jerry Cohen, a distinguished real estate veteran, who earned both a Bachelor of Science and an MBA through Stern over 30 years ago.

"These students are so bright and so focused, many of them don't take the time to enjoy any of the cultural benefits New York City has to offer."

Now in its second year, the Cohen Arts and Culture Experience (CACE) program offers students the opportunity to explore a full range of arts, music and other events that our metropolis is renowned for.

Last year, 1,200 Stern students (more than half the student population) took advantage of the outings — about 10 per semester.

Students were treated to the Broadway musical "Wicked," a SoHo art gallery tour, jazz at Lincoln Center, the Manhattan Theatre Club and the Museum of Natural History — at little or no cost to themselves.

"We charge them $5 per event. Much of it is covered by the Cohens' gift," said Sally Blount-Lyon, the school's dean.

The Cohens, who are passionate arts enthusiasts, have accompanied the students on several events.

"Each time we do it, it's exciting to see others enjoy what we believe are the special things to enjoy here. On any one night, there can be three great events taking place. But unless you're introduced to it, you'll be out of reach and out of touch," said Cohen.

With a majority of out-of-town pupils, "We're not only teaching them about New York City, but how to live here," said Dean Blount-Lyon. "These are our future business leaders. If they're going to thrive and be effective, they not only need to know how to do spreadsheets, but they need to be interesting people to have dinner with," she adds.

Jerry Cohen agreed. "I think it's as important as your technical expertise. The most successful people are more rounded and able to speak in their feet. The full range of arts and cultural experiences doesn't exist any-where in the world the way it does here," he said.

Even for some of those born and bred here, the CACE program is valuable.

"There's so much going on in the city, but with limited funds it's hard to take a minute to stop and explore," said Stern student Alina Costica. "Now in her junior year, the finance major is grateful for the affordable CACE leisure pass.

Besides entertainment value, "We're learning how business and entertainment intertwine. I'm able to talk about these events in a sophisticated way on job interviews. It's helpful to be able to speak about something other than business," she added.

CACE has become such a hot program that there is now a random selection process for getting tickets. Students have also formed an advisory board to provide input on the types of events that are planned.

"We have accepted proposals from students for Off-Broadway plays and exhibits. Other students have lobbied for excursions to restaurants serving international cuisine, such as Ethiopian," said Costica.

This semester, the CACE line-up includes the New York Philharmonic, the Metropolitan Opera and classical guitar at Carnegie Hall.

With such overwhelmingly positive feedback, Cohen hopes the program will continue to evolve.

"We're giving it more variety. Next spring we're working on the Conservatory Gardens and the Museum of Modern Art. Rather than read about it all in a book, we're giving them an introductory taste and hopefully instilling an appreciation," he said.

For more information, visit www.stern.nyu.edu/cace

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