

[Sam Pitroda, telecommunications guru, is luncheon speaker at Morrill Conference](#)

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[ALBC Morrill Conference - October 24, 2009 at Champaign-Urbana](#)

Sam Pitroda's name may not be a household word in the United States or even in his home city of Chicago, but throughout India he is venerated as the man who is most responsible for the Indian communications revolution. According to the now legion stories about his rise to prominence, he somehow and with great audacity convinced the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and then her son Rajiv, that he could insure India's democracy, serve the poorest sectors of India – especially the rural areas – and truly build a nation out of many disparate part – through telecommunications.

Pitroda was not born into great family wealth. He was schooled in Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat, then completed his master's in physics and electronics at Maharaja Sayajirao University in Vadodara. Thereupon, winning a scholarship, he came to the United States and completed a master's in physics and electrical engineering at Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago.

Upon graduation he worked at GTE, but soon formed his own company – Wescom. The holder of more than 100 patents, he solidified his reputation as a telecom inventor and manager-producer. In 1975 he invented the Electronic Diary, one of the earliest hand held computers. He was also among the pioneers in digital telephone switching technology and mobile phones for emerging markets.

In 2005 India's Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh appointed Pitroda to chair the National Knowledge Commission, an advisory body that recommends and directs reforms, focusing on: education, science and technology, agriculture, industry and e-governance. The mission of the Commission is to:

- Build excellence in the educational system.
- Promote creation of technology laboratories.
- Improve the management of institutions engaged in Intellectual Property Rights.
- Promote knowledge applications in agriculture and industry.
- Promote the use of knowledge capabilities in making government an effective, transparent and accountable service provider to the citizen and promote widespread sharing of knowledge to maximize public benefit.
- Create more liberal arts colleges and public universities (now there are 350 - 1500 are planned by 2015).
- Synergize all of government's e activities.

Why you ask: Is Pitroda speaking at a conference which links the Lincoln educational heritage to the future of public land grant universities? He, like Nehru, sees in the Lincoln legacy a paradigm for the future. He believes the “consumption model is outdated.” Great minds in the universities of the United States and Europe should focus on Asia and Africa. Working in

collaboration, new paths to prosperity for those who are at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid can be found. The land grant universities have played major roles in earlier biotech and agricultural revolutions.

Pitroda's talk at the Morrill Conference is a challenge to the universities to husband scarce resources but use their technology for the betterment of all. India is expanding the number of its liberal arts and technical colleges; it will seek partnerships with the public and grant universities.

Pitroda's restless mind is fastened on the endless possibilities of future collaborations.

Watch Sam Pitroda speak on Oct. 24, 12:00 PM

[Morrill Conference](#)

October 24, 2009 | 8:00 AM–5:30 PM

Illini Union

1401 West Green Street

Urbana, IL 61801

Morrill Act Exhibition

Krannert Art Museum

500 East Peabody Drive

Champaign, IL

Please use the Kinkead entrance.