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Cal Poly Receives Another Significant Anonymous Gift

SAN LUIS OBISPO – A record-breaking year for fundraising at Cal Poly ended with yet another extraordinarily generous gift from anonymous donors.

The most recent gift, a $10-million bequest commitment, brings private support for the fiscal year which ended June 30 to more than $91 million, the highest committed total ever for annual fundraising at Cal Poly. According to the most recent report from the Council of Aid to Education regarding voluntary support of education, Cal Poly ranked third in gifts received and had the largest endowment out of 144 public master's degree institutions that participated in the ranking.

The gift reflects the donors' strong belief in the university as a whole, with half designated for student support through scholarships and half for strategic initiatives at the direction of campus leadership. It was made by an alumnus and his wife who simply believe in the learn-by-doing educational approach of Cal Poly, as well as its polytechnic mission, according to President Warren J. Baker.

"A gift of this kind, wonderfully generous in and of itself, is especially helpful because it assists students with scholarship support and provides flexibility to fund new initiatives. It will also certainly inspire others to act," Baker said.

The alumnus explained his gift this way: "As you get older, you begin to think about what you've got to show for a lifetime of work. In the final analysis, it isn't the 'stuff' that matters; it's the people. As someone who struggled to make ends meet as a student at Poly, I feel good about giving both the institution and its students a helping hand."

The most recent anonymous bequest commitment follows on the largest bequest commitment ever made to Cal Poly or any California State University campus. In 2007, the Architecture Department with the College of Architecture and Environmental Design received a bequest commitment of $60 million.

Cal Poly's experience with donors who wish to be unnamed wasn't unique in the 2007 academic year, according to the Chronicle of Philanthropy.

The publication's list of $1-million-plus gifts that were announced in 2007 at campuses around the county included 87 unnamed donors, with gifts totaling some $1.1 billion, far more than the totals of large anonymous gifts documented by the publication in recent years.

What is prompting this trend of donors choosing to not reveal their names? "Some may do it out of concern for family and privacy. And some simply want the gift to be the focus – not themselves – hoping that others be motivated to give," Cal Poly Advancement Vice President Sandra Ogren said.

Bequests and gifts by many other Cal Poly alumni and supporters through the years have created the largest endowment in the CSU, which is now approximately $170 million. "The annual benefit to the campus from the endowment is approximately $6.5 million – the result of several generations of past gifts, many from the population group known as the 'Greatest Generation.' It is exciting now to see the next generation, the Baby Boomers, leave their mark on the University through bequests and other gifts," Baker said.

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