The beginning of the academic year here and across the United States was affected by events both tragic and remarkable. Before classes even began, Cal Poly, along with its sister CSU campuses, rallied to admit students from universities closed abruptly by Hurricane Katrina.

Ten affected students were admitted to Cal Poly for the fall and winter quarters, emergency housing was found, and financial and other support was generously donated by Cal Poly and local communities.

While students from the Gulf Coast region headed West, graphic communication senior Nick Hoover traveled to Jefferson Parrish, La., as a volunteer with the American Red Cross.

As we opened our doors for the displaced students, we also hosted visits from other guests.

In September, we hosted aerospace entrepreneur Burt Rutan (AERO '65), who has garnered numerous honors and awards, including last year's $10-million Ansari X Prize for SpaceShipOne, the first manned private aircraft to travel into space.

During Fall Convocation, I was pleased to award him the Cal Poly President's Medal of Excellence, making him only the fourth person in the university's history to receive the honor.

Rutan opened Fall Convocation with the keynote presentation “Space, for the Rest of Us.” He delivered the keynote address at the Centennial Campaign closing event later that day, as well.

Kinko's founder and Cal Poly benefactor Paul Orfalea was on campus in October for a presentation and to sign copies of his new book “Copy This!” – an inspirational story by a remarkable man.

In 2000 Paul Orfalea, through the Orfalea Family Foundation, gave $15 million to the College of Business and $1 million to the Associated Students Inc. Children's Center. Both the college and the center now bear his name.

This year Mike Mantle (BUS '79) pledged $12,500 over five years to establish a named endowed scholarship in the college. Each year, Mike's pledge payment will be matched by proceeds from Orfalea funds.

From disciplines across campus, students who aspire to become teachers are also benefiting from scholarships. The Mary Stuart Rogers Foundation has provided more than 25 scholarships every year for the last five years and has pledged to fund scholarships for another five years. John Rogers, president of the foundation, was on campus in October to host the annual banquet in honor of the Rogers Scholars.

This fall we welcomed Mohammad Noori as the new dean of the College of Engineering and Professor Timothy Kearns as the new vice provost for information technology services and chief information officer. We also look forward to the official arrival of William C. Harris, director general of Science Foundation Ireland, who will serve as provost and vice president for academic affairs starting next summer.

Our ability to attract and retain distinguished academic leaders and faculty is enhanced by the generous gifts of our donors. In this issue we present our 2004-2005 Honor Roll of Donors, recognizing those who gave to Cal Poly during the last fiscal year.

Once again we’ve achieved the distinction of being rated the best public master’s university in the West by U.S. News & World Report in its 2006 America’s Best Colleges guidebook. We’re No. 1 for the 13th straight year, and we couldn’t have done it without you.

Although our record-breaking Centennial Campaign officially ended in December 2004, with your continued support, we will endeavor to maintain the momentum created by this campaign.

We still have much to accomplish and I am optimistic. I hope Burt Rutan won’t mind my borrowing one of his original sign-offs: “Looking Up ... Way Up.”