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Cal Poly Honors the 1960 Football Team

SAN LUIS OBISPO – The weekend of Sept. 29 will be one of the most meaningful in Cal Poly history as the 1960 Cal Poly Mustang football team is honored during two days of ceremonies.

The 1960 crash of a charter plane carrying members of the Mustang football team has been memorialized in various ways over the years. Now, nearly half a century later, more than 400 friends and family members of the 1960 team will join with the campus and local community for “Remembrance and Celebration,” the Cal Poly Mustangs’ tribute to the 1960 football team.

Families of team members and university officials have worked together for more than a year to produce the events that will be held this weekend.

On Friday night, Sept. 29, the 1960 football team will be inducted into the Cal Poly Athletics Hall of Fame. The unity and depth of brotherhood shared by the 1960 players made the group an ideal selection for Cal Poly’s unprecedented selection of an entire team for Hall of Fame honors, according to Alison Cone, Cal Poly athletics director.

On Saturday evening, Sept. 30, Cal Poly will recognize the 1960 football team and dedicate Mustang Memorial Field during halftime at the Mustang football game with Southern Utah in Alex G. Spanos Stadium.

Eighteen of the original 25 survivors of the tragic plane crash are still alive, and many will be present for the remembrance ceremonies, as well as a number of family members.

The Plaza will be open to the public beginning Saturday, September 30, during game times. After the stadium renovation is completed later this fall, it will remain open.

“This dedication is one of the most significant moments in Cal Poly’s history, as well as for me personally,” said Cal Poly President Warren J. Baker. “The new Mustang Memorial Plaza is Cal Poly’s tribute to the 1960 team. With this plaza we will preserve forever the memory of the 18 who perished in the tragic crash, so that their hopes and dreams live on.”

About Mustang Memorial Plaza:

Mustang Memorial Plaza, located at the entrance to Alex G. Spanos Stadium, is a permanent memorial to the 18 individuals who lost their lives on Oct. 29, 1960. The memorial’s simple elegance creates a moving tribute to the team, while capturing the spirit and passion of the mustang that is the symbol of Cal Poly athletics.

The 15,000-square-foot plaza is rich in symbolism. It is anchored by a striking bronze sculpture of a mustang created by Roy Harris -- aptly titled “Unbridled Spirit” -- which stands at the center of a ‘team huddle’ created by a circle of 18 pillars, each of which represents one of the 16 players, the Mustang booster and the team manager who perished in the crash.

The pillars are faced in copper, a metal that grows more beautiful with time. Each of the 18 pillars stands at the same height as that of its honoree. Soft beams of light glow from the tops of the pillars, permanent beacons that serve to guide those who wish to honor the memory of the team.

Each pillar displays a granite plaque engraved with the 1960 yearbook photo of the honored individual, statistics for that player, and personal information. And so, in very few words, their stories are told.

An examination of the plaques reveals that a number of players were older students, many married and with small
children. In addition to the families who lost beloved brothers, sons, grandsons, uncles and cousins on Oct. 29, nine children lost their fathers. One player was the oldest of twelve children; another father to four.

The football complex, including Mustang Memorial Field, will be a place of perpetual honor for the entire 1960 Mustang team and the legions who share in the pride and power of the Mustang spirit. As one family member wrote in tribute to its lost loved one, “Always loved. Never forgotten.”

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