WE RECENTLY SURVEYED several hundred alumni at random about their experience at Cal Poly, and they expressed a nearly unanimous sentiment: Cal Poly’s learn by doing educational experience was crucial to their professional success. As Honored Alumnus Darran Littlefield said, “After being hired by a large consulting company, I was placed in an intensive training course with 250 new hires from around the world. I was one of two Cal Poly graduates that finished the class in the top 5 percent. This didn’t happen because we were smarter or worked harder; it was simply because Cal Poly’s incredible educational experience translated so well to the working world. It was easy for us to excel.”

Learn by doing was a core value for Cal Poly when it was founded, and it has been sustained and enriched for more than a century. The essence of that philosophy is the act of questioning why things are the way they are—and whether we can make them better. That comes to life in Cal Poly’s laboratories and in the field, where our students and faculty work every day to examine real-world problems, question assumptions and find practical solutions.

In this edition of Cal Poly Magazine, we present to you many examples of students, faculty and alumni embracing the learn by doing methodology and finding ways to improve the world through applied research.

Natural Resources Management students and professors are turning burned areas of Cal Poly’s Swanton Pacific Ranch near Santa Cruz into a living laboratory. A Cal Poly alumnus is developing a new gadget that could help children be more active and healthy—and that caught the attention of President Barack Obama this summer. And see our cover story for a look at cutting-edge research projects happening in each of Cal Poly’s six colleges.

In spite of cutbacks in state funding and the tough economic times we face, the heartbeat that drives Cal Poly—our learn-by-doing philosophy—is still very much alive. We trust you will take great pride as you read about it in our Winter 2009 edition of Cal Poly Magazine.

Please let us know. You can e-mail us your comments at mlazier@calpoly.edu.