A Living SYMBOL

Cal Poly’s new live mascot program combines Mustang pride with hands-on learning

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Since 1924, the mustang has been a symbol for Cal Poly. During a weekend football game against the university’s then-archrival Fresno College (now Fresno State University), the Cal Poly student body selected this quintessential American animal as its mascot.

It was a fitting choice. Horses have been a presence on campus and a part of the university’s curriculum since the first classes were offered in 1903. But a real, live mustang has never served as the university’s mascot – until now.

In a video shown at a men’s soccer match this fall against Cal Poly’s current archrival, the UCSB Gauchos, the university unveiled a mascot program featuring live mustangs that will make appearances on campus and at Mustang Athletics games. The program’s official debut is planned for the beginning of the 2014 football season.

The live mascot is intended to supplement, not replace, Musty, the costumed character that has served the university as a spirit symbol for years.

The program began with a gift. Last summer alumnus Robin Baggett (B.S., Business Administration, 1973) and his wife, Michelle, donated Moonstar, a mustang gelding, for the purpose of boosting school spirit on campus.

“We’re proud to have given him to Cal Poly,” Robin Baggett said. “It’s going to be very special.”

Cal Poly Athletics Director Don Oberhelman looks forward to having the mascot leading the band, cheerleaders and fans into the stadium and the teams onto the field on game days, and encouraging interactions with students and alumni.

“A symbol like this will naturally enhance school spirit,” he says. “I want our student-athletes and our fans to love being Mustangs and all that Mustangs stand for, and having a live mustang at our events will be a reminder.”

The mustang will be more than a mascot, however. The university is developing plans to select a team of outstanding students to train and care for the animal, plan his appearances, and serve as ambassadors for Cal Poly.

“Over and above the idea of developing school spirit, he can play an in-
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integral role in our hands-on, Learn by Doing program,” said interim Animal Science Department Head Jaymie Noland, who will lead the new program. “The students at the horse unit are already very excited about him.”

Noland envisions that students from every college will have a hand in the program. “I think it would be great if students from the liberal arts could handle the communication work or the art and design, and students from the College of Science and Mathematics could assist with the wellness protocols,” she says. “These students are also representing the university, so they have to exemplify all the best that Cal Poly has to offer.”

Noland and President Jeffrey D. Armstrong plan to expand the program by adopting several more animals to share mascot duties.

Noland has an eye on adopting future members of the mascot herd directly from the federal Bureau of Land Management, which removes mustangs from western rangelands to prevent overpopulation. The idea is to eventually have students take a hand in the entire process of taming and training a young mustang straight from the wild.

All this will take funding, and the university is planning to expand and maintain the mustang mascot program with the help of private supporters who want to follow in the Baggetts’ footsteps.

“Robin and Michelle Baggett’s sense of school spirit is another wonderful example of how generous and intensely loyal our alumni are,” Armstrong said. “I’ve always thought that Cal Poly chose a perfect mascot, because mustangs are living symbols of the spirit of the West.”

Naming the MASCOT

While each individual mustang in the mascot program will retain its own name, Cal Poly is looking for a ceremonial name that will be used by the mustang program as a whole.

What would you call the official Cal Poly Mustang? Watch for an announcement on the start of the naming contest this winter. The winner will meet the mustang in person for a special photo session!
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