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Astronaut, Entrepreneur to Speak, Receive Honors at Cal Poly's Spring Commencement June 12

SAN LUIS OBISPO – Astronaut Robert L. “Hoot” Gibson and entrepreneur and San Diego Chargers owner Alex G. Spanos, both Cal Poly alumni, will receive honorary degrees and deliver keynote addresses at the university’s Spring Commencement ceremonies June 12.

Spanos, an entrepreneur and philanthropist who built a small business into a corporate giant comprising 10 companies, will be the speaker at the 9 a.m. commencement ceremony for approximately 1,280 candidates from the colleges of Agriculture, Liberal Arts, and Science and Mathematics. He will receive an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree.

Gibson, a retired U.S. Navy captain and NASA astronaut, is a member of the U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame. He will address some 1,210 eligible graduates from the College of Architecture and Environmental Design, Orfalea College of Business, and the College of Engineering at the 2:30 p.m. ceremony, where he will receive an honorary Doctor of Science degree.

Both ceremonies will be held in the university’s Mustang Stadium off California Boulevard, drawing an anticipated crowd of 15,000 family, friends and visitors to campus throughout the day.

About Alex G. Spanos
Alex G. Spanos, the chairman and owner of the A.G. Spanos Companies, has been recognized as one of the most dynamic business leaders in the nation and an outstanding philanthropist.

A son of Greek immigrants who settled in Stockton, Spanos started working at the age of eight when he and two brothers would awake before dawn to prepare food in their father’s restaurant before school.

Spanos came to Cal Poly in 1941, enrolling in the aeronautical engineering program. While at Cal Poly, Spanos was a marching band
member and drum major. He left Cal Poly to join the Army Air Corps during World War II, serving from 1942 to 1945. After the war, he attended what is now known as the University of the Pacific in Stockton.

During his career, Spanos has transformed a modest business venture into what is today a corporate construction and real estate giant comprised of 10 companies. Employing over 500 people and headquartered in Stockton, it ranks at the top of the national housing industry. It has built more than 100,000 apartment units and over three-million square feet of commercial property in 18 states.

The A.G. Spanos Companies build, market and manage multi-unit housing developments. They are also engaged in land development and the construction of master planned communities.

In addition to building his business, Spanos has owned the San Diego Chargers NFL football team since 1984.

His humanitarian awards include:
- The Horatio Alger Award from the Horatio Alger Foundation
- The Ellis Island Medal of Honor from the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation
- The Gloria Swanson Humanitarian Award from the American Cinema Awards Foundation
- The Anti-Defamation League of B’nai Brith National Distinguished Community Service Award
- Honorary Doctor of Laws degrees from the University of the Pacific and Eureka College
- Cal Poly Distinguished Alumnus.

In his autobiography, Spanos writes: “I believe I have a sacred duty to share my good fortune with my church, my community, my fellow Greek-Americans and my family, not necessarily in that order. Giving just does my heart good.”

Alex and Faye Spanos, who have been married since 1948, have four children and 15 grandchildren.

About Robert L. “Hoot” Gibson
A Cal Poly alumnus, space shuttle commander and U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame inductee, Robert L. “Hoot” Gibson is widely recognized for his distinguished career, national service and commitment to higher education.

Gibson is the first astronaut to serve as mission commander on four different shuttles. During his career with NASA, he flew five missions and logged more than 36 days in space. His missions included the first test of the Manned Maneuvering Unit during two space walks, the first shuttle landing at Kennedy Space Center, the 50th space shuttle mission, and the first mission to dock with the Russian Space Station Mir.

More recently, Gibson broke a third (unofficial) world record a few weeks ago, flying his 100-HP Cassutt plane at 238.14 mph, beating the 20-year-old record of 229.41 mph for that class of aircraft. He flew the 100-kilometer closed-circuit course from his hometown in Murfreesboro, Tenn., on April 28.
In 1991 he set a world altitude record in the airplane. "I'm just tickled," he said, "because there aren't too many airplanes in the world that have established separate altitude and speed records. I can finally relax for a little bit, now that I have this obsession with a record flight out of my way."

Gibson received an Associate Degree in Engineering Science from Suffolk County Community College in 1966, and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Aeronautical Engineering from Cal Poly in 1969. A pilot since the age of 17, Gibson entered active duty with the U.S. Navy in 1969. From 1972 to 1975, he flew combat missions in Southeast Asia, including air cover during the U.S. evacuation of Saigon. He graduated from the Naval Fighter Weapons “Topgun” School and the U.S. Naval Test Pilot School before joining NASA.

His awards and world records include:
- U.S. Astronaut Hall of Fame (2003)
- World record, "Time to Climb to 9000 Meters" (1994)
- Federation Aeronautique Internationale (FAI) "Louis Bleriot Medal" (1992)
- World record, "Altitude in Horizontal Flight," Airplane Class C1A (1991)
- Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) "Freedom of Flight” Award (1989)
- Aeronautical Engineering Medallion Award from Cal Poly's Aerospace Engineering Department
- College of Engineering Honored Alumnus

His military awards include:
- The Defense Superior Service Medal
- The Distinguished Flying Cross
- Three Air Medals
- The Navy Commendation Medal with Combat "V"
- A Navy Unit Commendation
- Meritorious Unit Commendation
- Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal
- Humanitarian Service Medal
- The Vietnam Campaign Medal

A proud graduate of Cal Poly, Gibson maintains an active interest in the university, delivering the address at the Cal Poly 1994 Spring Commencement, as well as displaying University memorabilia on each of his shuttle flights.

Gibson retired from NASA in 1995 to pursue private business interests. Currently a commercial airline pilot, he is married to Dr. M. Rhea Seddon of Murfreesboro, Tenn. The couple have four children.

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