



THE LANES

A FAMILY TRADITION OF SUPPORT

LONGTIME SUNSET MAGAZINE publisher and former United States Ambassador William “Bill” Lane and his wife, Jean, have spent their lives showcasing and preserving the best in the west.

Supporting Cal Poly was a natural choice.

The couple put down roots at Cal Poly when their daughter, Brenda Lane Munks, came to campus as a freshman – with her horse in tow. She graduated in 1986 with a degree in recreation administration from what is now the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences. Brenda’s step-daughter, Cristina Munks, is also a Cal Poly graduate.

In 1980, Jean Lane agreed to serve on the Cal Poly President’s Cabinet, the year it was founded. The 45-member body is an advisory board to President Warren J. Baker. Jean Lane went on to serve in the cabinet for 26 years until stepping down in 2007.

Bill and Jean Lane also played pivotal roles in the creation of the Baker Forum in 2002. Held every other year, the Baker Forum gathers top international science and technology leaders from universities and industry to tackle issues and develop creative solutions. The event is financed by the Baker Forum Endowment, created by leaders such as the Lanes.

“It was Warren Baker who really inspired me to get involved at Cal Poly,” said Jean Lane. “He and Carly have done so much at Cal Poly to get the community and students involved. I thought his idea of having an advisory President’s Cabinet was great.”

Jean and Bill Lane have taken a particular interest in the Cabinet’s support for Cal Poly initiatives on behalf of science and mathematics education in elementary, middle and high schools across the state. “It is absolutely necessary in order to keep up in this technological world we’re living in, and I think the President’s Cabinet has been instrumental in working for that change,” Jean Lane said.

To highlight their outstanding service to Cal Poly, California and the nation, Cal Poly and the CSU recognized Bill and Jean with honorary Doctor of Human Letters degrees at this year’s commencement.

“Bill and Jean Lane are truly without peers in the leadership they have provided in public service, and especially on behalf of environmental awareness and conservation. Cal Poly and the CSU are honored to be able to recognize them for this work as well as their support for education and the arts,” Baker said.

The couple is credited with an almost unending list of public service, business and philanthropic accomplishments.

Their service to country includes Bill Lane’s time in the U.S.

Navy and his appointments as the U.S. Ambassador to Australia and Nauru from 1985-1989, and as ambassador-at-large and commissioner general at the world’s first international ocean exposition held in Japan in 1975. Bill has served with both political parties, “walking both sides of the aisle,” and was elected the first mayor of their home town of Portola Valley.

With his late brother, Mel, Bill Lane shepherded Sunset, “The Magazine of Western Living,” and Sunset Books to immense popularity and profitability. The brothers sold the magazine, and the family publishing company, to Time Warner in 1990.

Bill Lane has served on many boards or advisory councils for such organizations as the National Park Conservation Association, the Yosemite Fund, the California State Park Foundation, Stanford University’s Hoover Institution, California Water Service Company, and PG&E.

Jean Lane has served on the boards of the Smithsonian’s Museum of Natural History, the National Tropical Botanical Garden, and the Filoli Center, a Natural Trust for Historic Preservation site, in addition to the Cal Poly President’s Cabinet. They are both active supporters of Stanford University, Northwestern University, and the Peninsula Open Space Trust.

Among the places they hold most special is Cal Poly’s Leaning Pine Arboretum. The quiet five-acre spot includes gardens reflecting the five natural Mediterranean climate zones from across the globe. The Lanes have given generously to the Leaning Pine Arboretum over the years.

To Jean Lane, a woman who is able to identify hundreds of plants by both their botanical and common names at a glance, the arboretum exemplifies the best aspects of Cal Poly.

“It really is an example of learn-by-doing at Cal Poly. The students get hands-on experience there, and they learn so much,” she stressed. “With all the new planting they do, it improves every year. And, many of the drought resistant plants of the southern hemisphere help to conserve water here in the West.”

The Lanes’ interests also extend to the arts and they gave generously to the construction of the Performing Arts Center on the Cal Poly campus. An accomplished musician, Jean has played harpsichord in the baroque Portola Trio since 1976. Their philanthropic support for the arts includes establishment of the Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in Piano Performance at Northwestern University’s School of Music. In 1997, Northwestern University created the Jean Gimbel Lane Humanities Professorship at Northwestern University. □