

## COLLEGE OF SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS

## KENNETH EDWARDS



Glendale, Calif.

**Education:**

'54 B.A., chemistry, Occidental College;  
'55 M.S., chemical and metallurgical  
engineering, University of Michigan

**Profession:**

CEO of Dunn-Edwards Paint Co.;  
chemist; inventor.

**How did you get into the paint business?**

I was born into it. My paternal grandfa-  
ther was trained to be a painter, and later  
my father ran my grandfather's painting  
business. In 1925 Frank W. "Bud" Dunn  
started a wallpaper and paint store in Los  
Angeles, in 1937 he started manufactur-  
ing his own paint, and in 1938 my father  
bought out Bud's three partners.

**What has been your greatest accomplishment?**

Applying my knowledge of chemistry and  
chemical engineering to research and  
manufacturing. This focus has allowed  
the corporation to become a leader in  
product and manufacturing.

**You have been instrumental in garnering support for the Western Coatings Technology Center in the university's new Center for Science and Mathematics. How will the center enhance Cal Poly's efforts in research and development, and what will be the benefit to industry?**

It will be the only school west of the  
Mississippi where students can receive  
such intense education in polymers and  
coatings, combining darn good teachers  
with hands-on training so students will  
be specialists. A master's graduate in  
polymers and coatings will have approxi-  
mately five years' advantage over non-  
specialty chemistry grads from other  
schools. Every paint company I know  
clamors for Cal Poly students.

**What are polymers and coatings and why are they such important technologies?**

If you look around your office, polymers  
and coatings are everywhere. If your



'Every paint  
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for Cal Poly  
students.'

— Kenneth Edwards

Kenneth Edwards  
Photo courtesy Ken Edwards

living room is blue and your wife wants it  
green, you'll be using a coating when you  
dip your brush into the paint can. Polymers and coatings students are  
entering one of the most complex areas  
of chemistry. They need to know organic,  
physical, surface, colloidal, and, espe-  
cially in our environmentally conscious  
time, atmospheric chemistry.

**Your company was one of the first coatings manufacturers to work with, rather than against, environmental regulators to lower the amounts of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in coatings. Why is care of the environment good for both society and private business, and how does an emphasis on good ecological practices prepare Cal Poly students for the workplace?**

We all breathe the same air and industry  
wants to produce environmentally sound  
products that people can afford. Wishful  
thinking about improving our environ-  
ment and non-scientific based  
regulation won't do the job – only  
careful analysis of the complex mix and  
interaction of man-made and naturally  
occurring chemicals will allow us to  
protect our environment.

**Although you are not an alum, you are an enthusiastic Cal Poly supporter. What is it about the school that attracted your attention?**

In the mid-'80s, the paint industry started  
looking for a place where students could  
be given experience in coatings. Two  
associates and I visited Cal Poly and liked  
what we saw. We were impressed by the  
quality of the students, the faculty  
members and the hands-on training.

**What advice would you give young people who want to enter your field?**

Polymers and coatings is a very challeng-  
ing field, and if you're good, the sky's the  
limit. I've been very lucky all my life, at  
the forefront of solving problems other  
people couldn't figure out and brought to  
me. Few people are that lucky, but Cal  
Poly students are capable and well  
educated and they can accomplish  
whatever they set their minds to.

— Nels Hanson

*Editor's note: Shortly after this interview,  
Mr. Edwards was awarded the American  
Chemical Society Award for Industrial  
Innovation, presented at the ACS regional  
meeting in Long Beach on Oct. 15.*