

ATHLETICS



The Thoma family, from left: Ed, Bill, Pearl and Bud

Photo courtesy Athletics

BILL THOMA — A FAMILY AFFAIR



San Luis Obispo businessman Bill Thoma (EE '77) recalls a long family history with Cal Poly, a history that stretches back to the 1930s and continues to this day.

Thoma's grandfather, Chris Jespersen, while serving as the state senator representing San Luis Obispo and chair of the Education and the House Ways and Means committees, lobbied for funding for the Cal Poly campus during Julian McPhee's presidency. Jespersen's name is also well known on campus. Jespersen Hall, current home to football coaches and the university's Continuing Education office, is named in his honor.

Thoma's father, Clarence "Bud" Thoma (EE '50), was the first in a long line of family members to graduate from Cal Poly. The list includes all four of his and his wife Pearl's children: Jean (Thoma) Usilton (CFD '72), Sheryl (Thoma) O'Neill (MATH '74), Bill, and Ed (IT '83) Thoma.

Thoma met his wife, Jennifer (Armstrong) Thoma (HE '77), while

attending Cal Poly. They have been married 24 years.

In 1995, as president of the company his father founded, Thoma Electric Inc., Thoma became involved in Cal Poly Athletics, both personally and professionally. At the time, he was serving as president of the San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce.

"One of my goals was to improve the 'town-gown' relationship between the city of San Luis Obispo and Cal Poly," Thoma recalls. "I thought that the external nature of athletics could be used to foster improved relations. Athletic events bring the community to the Cal Poly campus and allow the community to enjoy what the university has to offer. As a result of this exposure, the university benefits from the community in many other ways."

With that connection in mind, Thoma joined the Mustang Athletic Fund board of directors, a group responsible for raising funds and creating enthusiasm for Cal Poly sports.

Since then, Thoma and Thoma Electric Inc. have been heavily involved in Cal Poly Athletics. Thoma served two years as president of the Mustang Athletic Fund board of directors and was a member of the "Building the Advantage" Capital Campaign steering committee and President Warren J. Baker's Centennial Campaign steering committee. Today Thoma continues as a board member for the Mustang Athletic Fund and is the Central Coast regional vice president of the Cal Poly Alumni Association.

Thoma Electric Inc. has contributed financially and through in-kind donations to many athletic projects, such as the Sports Complex (including the press boxes at Baggett Stadium and Janssen Field), the weight room, the Academic Resource Center and the tennis courts.

"Without Bill Thoma and Thoma Electric Inc.," says Athletics Director John McCutcheon, "Cal Poly Athletics would not shine nearly as bright."

— Michael LaPlante