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California Polytechnic State University

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Cal Poly Alum, Benefactor to Receive Medal
at June 11 Commencement Ceremony**

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- Cal Poly will confer the university's highest honor, the President's Medal of Excellence, upon alumnus Richard J. O'Neill during the university's morning commencement ceremony June 11.

Following the [morning commencement](#), the university will hold a brief celebration naming the three-acre rolling lawns and gardens in front of the Orfalea College of Business as the new Richard J. O'Neill Green.

O'Neill is only the third person in the university's history to receive the Cal Poly President's Medal of Excellence. The medal is awarded to individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to the university. Previous medal recipients were Albert B. Smith, who was honored in 1993, and Charles Luckman, in 1994.

"Richard O'Neill has provided five decades of faithful and generous time, expertise and wisdom in support of Cal Poly. He is a proven role model, working tirelessly to steward others into volunteer leadership capacities. For his compassion, philanthropy and meritorious service to the university, I am proud to bestow the President's Medal of Excellence upon Mr. O'Neill," said Cal Poly President Warren J. Baker.

A successful Southern California land developer, restaurateur and benefactor to education, humanitarian and conservation causes, O'Neill is a Cal Poly animal husbandry alumnus.

He has been a longtime supporter of Athletics at Cal Poly and a familiar face at Mustang games, and his advocacy became the catalyst for Cal Poly's inclusion in Division I intercollegiate athletics in 1994.

O'Neill was inducted into the Cal Poly Athletics Hall of Fame in 1987 and is one of four alumni inducted into the Cal Poly Athletics Hall of Distinction. In 2000, he received the Cal Poly Alumni Association's Distinguished Service Award.

His leadership was responsible for a fund-raising program that generates nearly \$1 million each year for student athlete scholarships. He helped generate momentum to renovate Mott Gym, build the Cal Poly Sports Complex and renovate the Alex G. Spanos Stadium.

More About Richard J. O'Neill

A sixth-generation Californian, O'Neill was born in 1923 and was raised on the 230,000-acre Rancho Santa Margarita, which spans San Diego and Orange counties. The ranch later became Camp Pendleton; on the remainder, O'Neill and his sister, Alice, founded the community of Mission Viejo. After high school, he served in World War II, traveling to North Africa, India and Burma.

While at Cal Poly, he opened the first of many successful restaurants, the Harbor Inn at Avila Beach, in the late 1940s.

O'Neill married Donna Newman of San Luis Obispo County in 1951. Together, they established the Rancho Mission Viejo Land Conservancy, saving 1,200 acres from development. In 2002, Mrs. O'Neill died after a fight

with cancer.

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