Alex G. Spanos' life might be summed up in one word: dedication.

Throughout his life, on whatever path he embarked, he has demonstrated remarkable dedication. Dedication to his profession and principles. Dedication to charitable and humanitarian causes. Fierce dedication to his family. And dedication to his alma mater.

Alex Spanos, aerospace engineering alum, entrepreneur and San Diego Chargers owner, and his wife, Faye, have given generously to support the arts and athletics at Cal Poly.

One of their first major gifts - a $100,000 contribution in 2003 - created the Harold P. and Rosalie Davidson scholarship endowment in memory of the beloved former music professor and his wife, both now deceased. (See story, page 6.) Then came a $1.5-million donation to help fund the renovation of the Davidson Music Center and the Cal Poly Theatre, now named the Alex and Faye Spanos Theatre.

Most recently, the Spanoses pledged $4 million toward the first phase of the Mustang Stadium renovation. The same stadium that Alex and his brother Danny played in as drum majors in the 1941 marching band led by Davidson.

During a recent trip to campus, Spanos paid a nostalgic visit to the stadium. "I was more than a little surprised to see it hadn't changed at all in all that time. I thought after 63 years, it could use a little sprucing up." (See story, page 44.)

Cal Poly President Warren J. Baker expressed his gratitude for the generosity and dedication shown by Alex and Faye Spanos. "They have again demonstrated their selfless commitment, a commitment rooted in their hearts. They follow their hearts, and in so doing, demonstrate the good that comes from such action. Their gifts will help transform the arts, student scholarships and athletics at Cal Poly," Baker said.

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In 1941, at the age of 17, he moved from his hometown of Stockton and enrolled in Cal Poly's aeronautical engineering program. He and his brother Danny successfully auditioned for drum major positions in the marching band.

Just a year later, though, Alex Spanos enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps, serving until the war ended in 1945. But that year at Cal Poly left a lasting impression and plenty of fond memories, especially of Harold and Rosalie Davidson.

"I'm sure that most everyone has had a teacher who made a lasting impression," Spanos says. "Someone who not only gave you the best of his or her knowledge and experience, but also someone who nurtured you and supported you. For me, that was Harold Davidson, my music teacher.

"Hal Davidson was not only a great teacher and a skilled musician, but he was also a rare human being. He was the kind of man who cared about his students and embraced every member of his band as his family. He gave us a feeling of pride, of belonging, of acceptance and of courage. He and his wife would invite us all for dinner, and Rosalie would treat us as if we were her children. She was as much a part of the band as he was.

"When I think of Cal Poly, I think of Hal and Rosalie Davidson and their dedication to their students and the way they nurtured them," Spanos recalls.

During his career Spanos distinguished himself in the business world, transforming a small company into a corporate giant comprising 10 companies with more than 500 employees. The companies have built more than 100,000 apartment units in 18 states, ranking at the top of the national housing industry. A.G. Spanos
Cos. is one of the few family-owned Fortune 500 companies.

Family owned. That’s fairly typical for Alex Spanos. Born to Greek immigrants whom he describes as affectionate, stern and devoted, he credits his parents with instilling in him the passionate belief that “family is everything.”

He drove that point home during the morning Spring Commencement ceremony last June, when he was honored with a Doctor of Humane Letters degree and delivered the keynote address.

“Your family is your rock, your base and your rudder,” Spanos said in his remarks. “Family will give you peace of mind and the courage to explore.”

He also stressed the importance of keeping a positive attitude, setting reasonable goals, accepting and taking risks, and believing in oneself.

“Don’t be defeated by failure,” Spanos said. “Did you know that Babe Ruth held not only the world’s record for home runs, he also held the record for strikeouts?”

“I’ve always tried to be the best at what I do,” Spanos said. “For example, when I was 32, I took up golf. Six years later, I was one of 10 U.S. golfers chosen to compete in the British Amateur.”

In 1984, Spanos assumed ownership of the San Diego Chargers, realizing a lifelong dream to own a National Football League team. Another dream came true in 1995, when the Chargers made it to the Super Bowl, eventually losing to the San...
The late Harold P. Davidson, who served as Music Department head, leader of the Mustang Marching Band, and conductor of the university’s choral groups and dance band, touched many lives during his years at Cal Poly. His wife, Rosalie, also a familiar face around campus, was an accompanist who arranged music for some of the university’s choral groups.

Below, a former student, who knew “Hal” early in his career, and a former faculty member, who was acquainted with him at the end of it, reminisce about the Davidsons.

“Hal Davidson and his wonderful wife, Rosalie, made such a difference in my life,” recalls Alex Spanos (AERO), who, together with his wife, Faye, donated $100,000 in 2003 to establish the Harold P. and Rosalie Davidson scholarship endowment in memory of the former music professor and his wife.

“My brother Danny and I were drum majors in the marching band in 1941,” Spanos says. “Rosalie Davidson was as much a part of the band as Hal was. They were both uncommon people, each exceptional in their own way and yet so much alike.

“When I think of Cal Poly, I think of Hal and Rosalie Davidson and their dedication to its students and the way they nurtured them. That affection, those warm feelings, prompted Faye and I to give a second donation to Cal Poly.”

That $1.5-million gift is helping fund the renovation of the H.P. Davidson Music Center and the Cal Poly Theatre, named the Alex and Faye Spanos Theatre at a special dedication ceremony last spring. At the event, Clifton Swanson, longtime Music Department head, now retired, also recalled the Davidsons with affection.

“Alex and I had the good fortune to know Davy and Rosalie Davidson, and if I might reminisce for a moment, I think I can identify why Alex Spanos remembers his time at Cal Poly and his relationship with Harold Davidson so fondly,” Swanson said.

“Davy was a unique man: the right man, in the right place, at the right time. He built a program and established a legacy that continues to this day. He was able to bring students together to make music. Cal Poly was for men only when he came, and you can imagine the challenge of getting a bunch of guys together to make music.

“It was remarkable that Davy got large numbers of men up on stage to sing in a choir. He had the admiration of all of his students, and they were proud of what they were able to accomplish in the course of a year.

“I can say with utmost confidence that Davy would be very pleased to see the Cal Poly Music Department and all that it does. Davy’s determination to involve as many students as possible from throughout the campus is as true today as it was then. We have honored Davy’s wishes, and while music majors comprise the nucleus of each of our groups, the majority of the members are from throughout the campus.”