When Cal Poly asks alumni to give back, they do, particularly when they're asked to help students. One recent example is Mustang Mentoring day.

Piloted as a partnership with the Cal Poly alumni association and the College of Engineering, nearly 100 students participated in Mustang Mentoring day in November. Alumni were asked to volunteer and share with current students the things they have learned in the workforce.

Alumni and students were designated into groups for some team-building exercises and general conversation about careers, career preparation, and questions about life after Cal Poly. Students and alumni then rotated through one-on-one meetings to meet as many other individuals as possible within a short timeframe. After lunch, students were given more time to talk with those with whom they'd felt strong connections.

Follow-up after the day was left to students. According to alumni feedback, students are keeping in touch. The event drew alumni from all generations. One participant said it was the first time he had been back on campus since graduating. Most agreed to attend because they saw it as a great way to give back and help current students.

"Students are courteous and eager to learn," one mentor said. "I enjoyed helping them and sharing my experience." Students who participated raved about how the experience allowed them to meet alumni and ask general work questions and queries related to specific programs and career paths.

Although the first Mustang Mentoring day was targeted for engineers, participants from all colleges and majors were welcome. Plans are under way for more Mentoring days, so watch your e-mail for announcements.

By Kim Gannon

Mechanical engineering student David Hohn speaks with a mentor.

In support of LEARN BY DOING

For all the Cal Poly students who wished they could have spent just a little more time on the Cal Poly campus, President Warren J. Baker has lived their dream.

"I'm often asked what has kept me in this job for 31 years," Baker told us recently. "It's simple. It's the joy that comes from being part of transforming lives. That's fundamentally what we do at Cal Poly; we transform lives. We help academically motivated students become resourceful professionals, and what a privilege it has been to be part of that process for literally tens of thousands of students.

"If I could, I would do it another 31 years."

In preparing this special section, we had the pleasure of asking President Baker and his wife Carly Fitzsimmons Baker to reflect on their 31 years of service to Cal Poly.

We also enjoyed combing through the archives to present some of the facts and figures that show just how remarkable President Baker's tenure has been.

Here's the number that impresses us the most – 102,237. That's the number of bachelor's and master's degrees awarded since Warren Baker became president of Cal Poly in 1979. That's 102,237 lives transformed.

And next month we can add the Class of 2010.

— Matt Lauer, editor

President Baker (center) talks with Chemistry senior Mika Elfan (at the microscope), Microbiology senior Fady Ghali (blue shirt) and Microbiology senior James Chen at Cal Poly's Environmental Biotechnology Institute. (Photos by Aaron Lambert) (Timeline photos - University Archives and Cal Poly Magazine staff)
WARREN J. BAKER became the eighth president in Cal Poly’s history in August 1979. Three decades later, there has yet to be a ninth.

It has been three decades of remarkable growth for Cal Poly, during which time Baker has presided over the graduation of more than 100,000 students, overseen dramatic expansion and improvement of campus facilities to nurture learn-by-doing programs, and led the university as it gained a national reputation for excellence, reaping innumerable honors and recognitions, including an ongoing streak of 17 years as U.S. News & World Report’s best public master’s-level university in the west.

And Baker steered Cal Poly toward greater support from industry, alumni, and friends, leading what became a record-breaking $264 million Centennial Campaign.

What Baker says makes him most proud is that throughout his tenure, whatever the issue, he stayed focused on preserving and enriching the learn-by-doing educational model that is Cal Poly’s beating heart.

As Baker prepares to retire, Cal Poly Magazine sat with him for a discussion of his time here and what he sees as the university’s future challenges.

WHAT FIRST ATTRACTED YOU TO CAL POLY IN 1979?

It appeared to me that Cal Poly was a university in transition – expanding on its agricultural roots to become a true poly-
technical campus, and with tremendous potential and the very realistic goal of becoming a nationally recognized polytechnic institution.

WHEN YOU BECAME THE PRESIDENT, WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST GOALS? HOW DID YOU SET ABOUT IMPLEMENTING THEM?

We needed more resources — more support for learn-by-doing, new programs and new buildings to support student success. But I wasn’t sure how that was going to occur.

For the physical campus, we first looked primarily to the state. I spent a lot of time getting to know people in Sacramento and making our case with legislative leaders from places outside San Luis Obispo. Because we had so many students from other legislative districts, we were able to get those legislators to testify on behalf of Cal Poly. Success came quickly for us in the capital programs, and we’ve been able to continue that.

Later, we realized there was tremendous advantage in leveraging private funds to get state money for campus projects. We did it the other way as well, where state funds helped us leverage private money.

I knew we would succeed, but if you had told me that we would add close to 81 billion dollars in facilities over three decades, I would have said, “That’s not possible.” But when students, alumni, faculty and staff pull together, almost anything is possible.

There also was opportunity for development of academic programs. We were growing, hiring new faculty. That presented opportunities to introduce new majors that fit the polytechnic mission and ensured that students would have a broad education preparing them to compete in scientific and technical fields and also be well versed in the humanities and social sciences. We’ve added 20 new undergraduate majors, 72 minors and 15 new master’s degree programs over the years.

I believe that’s helped make it possible for us to graduate so many resourceful professionals who go on to successfully enrich their professions and their communities.

WHAT DO YOU THINK HAS BEEN YOUR GREATEST SUCCESS AT CAL POLY, AND WHY?

We’ve done well at maintaining the focus on the learn-by-doing education model and garnering the support to enhance the opportunities for our students around that philosophy. I think we’ve even an even better institution today than we were 30 years ago, and we have stayed true to the mission established by Cal Poly’s founders in 1901.

When I first met Al Smith, he told about how the learn-by-doing education he received at Cal Poly influenced his life and his career. He wanted to explore with me how he might give something back to the university to help preserve learn-by-doing. Over the next few years we put in place a program that gave students and faculty an opportunity to use his wonderful 3,200-acre ranch, Swanton Pacific, to practice what they learned in the classroom. The experiment was very successful, and today Cal Poly owns Swanton Pacific Ranch, supported by a generous multi-million dollar endowment provided by Al Smith. His dream lives on.

LEON PANETTA

CIA director and former 16th Congressional District representative

“Warren Baker has demonstrated both courage and wisdom in his leadership and has stayed true to his principles. He has provided a steady hand and needed stability for Cal Poly during dire times of budgetary turmoil, resulting in consistent and far-sighted improvements in both curriculum and facilities. His achievements have positively impacted the lives of thousands of students in California and across the nation.”
In recent years, our learn-by-doing model has been enriched with greater emphasis on project-based learning. Projects that engage teams of students, faculty and advisers from outside the university add a terrific dimension to learn-by-doing. Paul Bonderson, who credits his success as an entrepreneur to the hands-on education he received at Cal Poly, saw the importance of on campus facilities to support project based learning. He created the magnificent Bonderson Projects Center on campus and gave it to the university.

The learn-by-doing focus gave us direction in every initiative, whether it was raising money for facilities, putting together a capital campaign and a structure to raise private funds, or seeking support from the legislature for the polytechnic mission.

**WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACING CAL POLY RIGHT NOW?**

In many ways the challenges are similar to what I faced when I became president: how to preserve and enrich the quality of our learn-by-doing and project-based education. Bluntly, how do you pay for it?

The world and the problems we face are increasingly complex, and California’s industries need resourceful professionals who can address problems in a strategic, whole-system way. That’s the kind of innovative leader we are successful at educating. But to educate people across multiple disciplines requires new ways of teaching and learning that extend our basic model of learning-by-doing. Certainly we have opportunities today to use technology to make us more efficient. However, to sustain and enhance the quality of a Cal Poly education the university will have to continue to seek more support from sources other than the state.

Bear in mind that 30 years ago, the state paid 90 percent of the cost of educating a student. Today at Cal Poly, the state provides 50 percent. Students, their parents, and private support must make up the difference.

Because of our polytechnic mission, Cal Poly has an even more difficult challenge. We have the highest proportion of higher-cost programs of any CSU campus. To maintain our learn-by-doing focus, it’s a fact of life that it costs more to educate students in agriculture, architecture, engineering and science than it does in the liberal arts. Yet Cal Poly’s per-student contribution to on-campus facilities to support project based education is at the average of all the CSU campuses. Meanwhile, the state has steadily been reducing its support for public higher education.

We have to continue to make our case for state support. We need to continue to grow our private support. And we need to continue to nurture the relationships and partnerships we have with the students that support the Cal Poly Plan.

Going forward, the Cal Poly Plan – the willingness of students and their parents to pay for the exceptional quality that our learn-by-doing philosophy provides – will allow Cal Poly a level of independence from the natural tendency of large bureaucratic systems to normalize the way in which campuses operate. There are both advantages and disadvantages to being in a large system. Cal Poly will need to continue to navigate...
through these, and a strong partnership with the students, alumni and faculty is essential to success.

Today Cal Poly is one of the best values in the nation. As I see the competing demands for tax dollars in California and look to the future, it’s clear Cal Poly will need to be successful at raising private support for endowments that will match the commitments of our students.

THIRTY-ONE YEARS IS A LONG TIME ON ANY JOB. WHAT KEPT YOU MOTIVATED IN THIS ONE?
It never became routine. There were always new challenges, new things to accomplish. The university has been growing, which presented exciting opportunities and created an immense appeal. The students, faculty, staff, deans and administration were all growing and learning together.

And the campus is a very cooperative place to work. From the beginning, it was easy to engage the faculty, staff and students with a focused mission and a set of goals for the institution. Clearly we had bad instances of differences of opinion in 31 years. But the campus is one that really works together. People are engaged, and their views are heard.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE YOUR TIME AT THE HELM OF CAL POLY TO BE REMEMBERED?
As being open and cooperative – that I helped create a spirit of cooperation on the campus and that we were able to work together to get things done. When we wanted to achieve something, we could overcome the barriers and do it.

I also hope I’m remembered for doing what I could to help garner the resources and support necessary to help students and faculty achieve their aspirations. I think of the presidency as more of a servant and facilitator role. It’s a very simple thing we do here: We put good faculty together with good students, and good things happen. My role has been to try to support that.

REP. LOIS CAPP
U.S. 23rd Congressional District
“President Warren Baker has been an exceptional leader for Cal Poly and our community over the past three decades. I have watched with admiration as President Baker has guided the university to national recognition as an institution of higher learning and excellence. His tireless efforts have helped the university grow and become an invaluable source of innovative and well-rounded graduates that are vital to the future of California’s most important industries. It has been a pleasure working with him and his talented staff over the years, and I know he will be sorely missed by the entire Cal Poly family.”
CARLY FITZSIMONS BAKER is an elegant force of nature who has worked tirelessly on behalf of Cal Poly for more than three decades.

She has served as a confidante to the president, ambassador for the university, scholar in its classrooms, and hospitality coordinator for some of the most significant social events in Cal Poly’s history.

Her efforts prompted Congresswoman Lois Capps to read a letter into the congressional record in April 2001: “Carly’s grace, good humor and attention to detail have been evident in every event for visiting dignitaries, university board members, community leaders, donors and the President’s Cabinet,” Capps wrote. “The welcoming environment she has created has nourished an expanding circle of university friendships, critical to Cal Poly’s future.”

Baker’s renowned sense of style can be seen across the university — in the bright, modern Cal Poly entry banners, the colorful landscaping around the Performing Arts Center, the symbolically rich campus seal, and many other features that enrich campus daily life and add a touch of elegance to university ceremonial occasions.

And she raised four college graduates while managing a home that was open to visitors from around the world.

IMMEDIATE NEED

Baker remembers when she and her family arrived on campus in August 1979. She was raising four children, ages 3 to 16 and was suddenly thrust into the role of campus ambassador.

“We immediately had all the initial meet-and-greet events, as well as the regular fall events that happen when school starts up every year,” she said. “I really had to work to get things in shape.”

Warren Baker said he had an immediate and pressing need for his wife’s support as he assumed the Cal Poly presidency.

“When we came here, we made it a priority to ensure that members of the Central Coast community felt welcome on campus,” he said. “What Carly worked hard to do was to find some early opportunities to connect with the community.”
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, COMMUNITY OUTREACH

As the Bakers settled in, Carly Baker decided to continue her education – earning a master’s degree in education at Cal Poly in 1985. She worked on several local and statewide boards and commissions relating to social issues, including the Children’s Center Task Force, Children’s Protective Services Task Force, Women’s Shelter Board of Directors, and Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention commissions.

After earning her degree, she did an internship with Atascadero State Hospital, an institution that houses the criminally insane about 20 miles north of the Cal Poly campus.

“I had always worked with victims of crime,” Baker said. “I wasn’t sure whether I could work with the perpetrators, so I took this internship.”

The work was initially frightening and somber, Baker said. Eventually, though, she could get past the patient’s crimes and learn their stories — many of them heart-wrenching.

After her internship, Baker served on the statewide advisory board for Atascadero State Hospital (more than once as chairwoman) and then on the statewide Organization of State Hospital Advisory Boards.

Her involvement reflected a personal and professional commitment and an understanding that the health of California citizens was a critical precondition for making progress on education issues.

“DO WHAT FEELS RIGHT”

More directly related to Cal Poly was her work with the Foundation for the Performing Arts Center and the effort to build the PAC – which she cites as one of her proudest accomplishments.

The foundation – a partnership between the university, the city and the private sector – launched in 1986; the gleaming Performing Arts Center opened a decade later. Many involved in the effort say Baker played a key role in its success.

“She has a passion for the arts and for the Performing Arts Center was always front and center,” said Warren Sinzheimer, the first president of the PAC foundation board. “Carly offered insights that were often keenly important; she recruited other volunteers; she raised money; she planned events and dove in and made sure they succeeded.”

Today, Baker and others continue to raise money for ongoing maintenance and upgrades.

Baker brought the same work ethic to planning campus events, such as the opening and closing celebrations of the Centennial Fundraising Campaign. In organizing those events, she was never afraid to roll up her sleeves and do the work — moving tables, putting out linen and decorating.

“I only like small committees — a few people who are there ready to work,” Baker said. “You’ve got to be ready to get your hands dirty, if you want it to be the way you want it to be.”

The way she has always wanted it is elegant and stylish, with no detail overlooked in pursuit of helping the university put its best foot forward.

“If you’re going to do it, it should be nice,” Baker said. “You should do the best job you can.”

After implementing her vision so successfully over the years, does she have any advice for the next president’s partner?

“It would be pretentious of me to offer any, because it’s a very personal thing,” she said. “It’s important that they be their own person — approach the role the way they see fit and do what feels right to them.”

WILLIAM H. SWANSON
Chairman and CEO, Raytheon Company

“As an alum and member of the President’s Cabinet, I have witnessed firsthand the tremendous impact Warren Baker has had on the future of so many students and members of the faculty. His dedicated leadership has contributed immeasurably to Cal Poly’s world-class educational reputation and to its distinctive learn-by-doing approach. His work has nourished a culture where it is safe to dream and where challenges are regarded as opportunities for development and success. He has challenged all of us to make it better for those who follow us.”

2001-02 marking the Cal Poly celebrates a slate of events in March 8, 2001

Cal Poly launches its Centennial April 21, 2001

Women’s Shelter Board of directors, and Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention commissions.

2000 Enrollment is 16,877; Fall quarter 2000 applications jump

Warren Baker said he had an immediate and pressing need for some of the most significant social events in Cal Poly’s history.

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6 – Number of U.S. Presidents occupying the White House since Warren Baker assumed the Cal Poly presidency in 1978.

102,237 – Total number of bachelor's and master's degrees Cal Poly has awarded since Baker assumed presidency (excluding the upcoming Class of 2010).

17 – Number of consecutive years (including 2009-10) that U.S. News & World Report has rated Cal Poly as the best public-master's university in the West.

1 – Current ranking of Cal Poly's endowment among the CSU's 23 campuses ($131 million in 2009).

14,684 – Cal Poly's student enrollment in Fall 1979, when Baker took the helm.

19,325 – Cal Poly's student enrollment Fall 2009.

3,91 – Average grade-point average for first-time Cal Poly freshmen for Fall 2010.

14,000 – Approximate number of applicants to Cal Poly in Fall 2010, competing for about 3,900 spaces.

15 – Number of new master's degree programs introduced during Baker's tenure.

19 – Number of centers and institutes established during Baker's tenure.

20 – Number of new majors introduced for undergraduates during Baker's tenure.

68 – Number of bachelor's degree programs offered at Cal Poly as of 2010.

89 – Percentage of 2007-08 grad who were employed full time or enrolled in graduate school one year of graduating from Cal Poly.

3,200 – Number of new buildings/facilities added to campus during Baker's tenure, including construction projects now under way.

74 – Percentage of the 3,011 Cal Poly students who enrolled in 2003 and who graduated within six years — a record high for Cal Poly and the best graduation rate in the California State University System.

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