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Cal Poly College of Engineering Names Building for Refrigeration Pioneer, Alum

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- It was a family affair Monday, Nov. 14, when Cal Poly dedicated the Grant M. Brown Engineering Building in honor of a distinguished alumnus and in gratitude to his generous family.

Nearly three dozen Brown family members came to campus for the dedication, including five-year-old Grant Brown who, with the help of his dad, Andy, unveiled a plaque honoring the memory his grandfather.

A 1960 College of Engineering alumnus, Brown pioneered the development of highly efficient commercial refrigeration systems. Attending Cal Poly was the “seminal event” of his brother’s life, said Ross M. Brown. His brother came out of the Army and immediately entered Cal Poly where he thrived on the hands-on learning experience, Ross Brown said. “He would be proud of what this school is and what it is becoming.”

Cal Poly Interim Provost Bob Detweiler expressed the university’s gratitude to Brown family members for their generosity to the College of Engineering. Gifts from the Ross M. Brown Family Foundation include $200,000 for student scholarships and $300,000 for equipment. “This day initiates untold opportunities for our students in the years ahead,” Detweiler said.

In addition, the foundation gift provides $2 million to endow the James L. Bartlett, Jr. Professorship to promote multi-disciplinary, project-based learning. Bartlett, an engineer and entrepreneur is acknowledged by Ross Brown as his mentor. Bartlett worked more than six decades to manufacture equipment for handling and storing liquefied gas, offshore drilling rigs, shipyards and reverse osmosis desalination systems.

Bartlett earned his bachelor’s degree from Worcester Polytechnic Institute. He said he had only visited Cal Poly a couple of times and was “flattered and honored” to have the professorship named after him. “I’m impressed by Cal Poly’s ‘learn-by-doing.’ I certainly learned that way, so it must be good.”

Students, faculty and staff are enjoying the chance to discover “this amazing new building,” said graduate student Amanda Ruciman. “The new rooms, labs and programs make this a better place to learn. We are finding all different ways to utilize what we have been given.”