THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWELL GIFT
ANNOUNCING THE $125 MILLION POWELL FUND

A TREMENDOUS BEQUEST FROM THE LATE REGENTS ROBERT AND JEANNETTE POWELL WILL PROPEL PACIFIC TO A NEW LEVEL AS IT FULFILLS A DREAM THE POWELLS HELD DEAR:

Giving students a springboard to successful careers and lives through a superior education

The gift, received and celebrated in recent months, is the largest in Pacific’s history—and it ranks among the largest single gifts to any institution of higher education in the U.S.

The Powell Fund will allow Pacific to enlarge its premier academic award, the Powell Scholars Program; inspire others to create endowments to enhance academic programs; and spur the creation of endowed student scholarships, enabling even more deserving young people to earn an education at Pacific.

Simply put, the Powells’ generosity will be truly transformational at an institution like Pacific, a place they never attended but in which they wholeheartedly believed.

“This gift means the world to University of the Pacific.”

— President Pamela A. Eibeck

President Eibeck and Board of Regents Chair Kathleen Lagorio Janssen celebrate with Jeannette Powell (center) the remodeling of Callison Hall in January 2012.
Robert and Jeannette Powell came from humble beginnings. The son of a small business owner, Mr. Powell attended Sequoia High School in Redwood City. He met his future wife at a roller-skating competition when she was also a high school student in the Bay Area. Mr. Powell left school in 1949 to begin a career in construction as a drywall installer.

The couple never graduated from college, but by no means would that limit their success—or their continuing belief in the value of higher education.

In 1955, the Powells moved to Sacramento, where Mr. Powell established the Robert C. Powell Development Co. He became a visionary developer and entrepreneur, his work transforming the Sacramento area through landmark developments such as the Gold River, Campus Commons and Selby Ranch residential communities, as well as the Pavilions shopping center, Sacramento’s premier retail center.

Mrs. Powell, an interior designer, added her professional touch to projects built by her husband. An article in SACRAMENTO magazine described how she “brought her talents to the enterprise by creating the light and lovely garden lifestyle portrayed in model homes for Powell communities.”

She became an influential patron of the arts and, with her husband, generously supported the Sacramento Ballet, Sacramento Philharmonic Orchestra, Crocker Art Museum and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

While managing their successful development business, the Gold River couple had also become some of the most generous philanthropists in the Sacramento region. And they did so quietly; the intensely private Powells did not give of their time and money for publicity’s sake.

The Powells were introduced to Pacific by their friends Edward and Joan Westgate. Mr. Westgate, a successful developer in his own right, served on the University’s Board of Regents and encouraged Mr. Powell to join the governing body in 1989.

Mr. Powell left the board in 1993, but not before forging a friendship with then-President Donald V. DeRosa. In the years that followed, the connection between Pacific and the Powells only grew stronger.

“He was very interested in Pacific and became more and more so,” said DeRosa, now President Emeritus, in a Sacramento Bee story after the gift and the Powells were celebrated in October. “He had an interest—they both did—in supporting students who had need, particularly middle-income students.”

Mr. Powell was awarded an honorary doctor of letters degree from the University in 1996. In 1999, Mrs. Powell joined the Board of Regents. The couple gave $1.5 million in 2000 to create the Visual Arts Center, which is named for Jeannette Powell.

With no children, the Powells wanted to leave their estate to the place where they felt it could have the biggest impact.

“They saw the magic of this University and they saw what a difference a gift of this magnitude would make for our institution and for our students,” said President Eibeck.

So on April 20, 2007, Mr. Powell invited DeRosa to his office in Gold River, where he told him that the Powells would bequeath their estate to the school.

At that time, the University believed the value of the estate to be about $100 million.

“I had tears in my eyes,” DeRosa recalled in the Sacramento Bee. He said he told Mr. Powell: “You will change the lives of young people in perpetuity.”
A few weeks after that April meeting, the momentous gift was revealed to the University community. As the magnitude of the announcement sank in, Regent Robert J. Corkern said he saw tears flowing down the faces of the shocked and elated crowd. “What an honor for this University,” he remembered.

Dianne Philibosian, then chair of the Board of Regents, remarked that the Powell gift would “catapult University of the Pacific into a new context in higher education. We can become not just a school that develops leaders, but a leadership institution itself—one that sets the standards for higher education.”

Mr. Powell passed away in 2007 at the age of 76, six months after the gift was announced.

An initial payment from the bequest allowed for the prestigious Powell Scholars Program to begin that year, bringing together an exceptional group of students to become leaders who excel academically and take initiative to serve the University and local and global communities.

The Powell Scholars will now receive an annual $35,000 scholarship and additional funding to conduct research and study abroad. Since it began, more than 75 students have benefited from the program and have been able to travel throughout the world and work closely with faculty on research.

Cynthia Wagner Weick, the director of the Powell Scholars Program, had known Mrs. Powell well. Wagner Weick knew her as a straightforward and sometimes shy person. She knew her tastes in art and décor (at Callison Hall, the home of the Powell Scholars, Mrs. Powell’s influence is seen in the color of the paint and chairs, in the artwork and in the furniture, which came from Mr. Powell’s office). And Wagner Weick also knew how much the students meant to her.

“In large groups, Jeannette Powell was very shy,” Wagner Weick said. “But when she saw the students, she just lit up. She would urge them, ‘find and follow your passions’.”

Lucinda Kasser, a visual arts professor who worked with Mrs. Powell since the 1990s when she first developed an interest in the art department, saw Mrs. Powell’s dedication to the students as well. “She championed students’ work whenever possible,” she said.

Mrs. Powell, who was the only Regent to have been granted lifetime Regent status, passed away in December 2012 at the age of 80.
Madelaine Matej ’16 came to Pacific with a passion she had held for eight years: opera singing. The Powell Program and its scholarship has allowed her to pursue classical singing at a place where her professors work tirelessly to ensure that their students have exactly what they need to succeed, she said.

“At Pacific, music students can find so many more performance opportunities than at better-known music schools,” she said. “We really can follow our passions, rather than observing while graduate students follow their passions.”

The Powell Program has opened up opportunities beyond the stage for Matej. One such experience took her and six other Powell Scholars to the rural Chinese village of Dimen as part of a project to teach English as a second language to the villagers—using a curriculum they designed specifically for that population.

Matej has found that the Powell Program fosters an environment where the scholars learn from one another and can broaden their perspectives. “The Powell Program has given me opportunities to share my passion with students from other disciplines and to explore my other interests. It makes me more than just a vocal performance major,” she said.

Sarah Wong ’14, a biological science and pre-dentistry major, was accepted at Stanford, UCLA and Berkeley, among other institutions, but chose to come to Pacific. Chief among her reasons: It possessed all the best qualities of being a small institution while maintaining an array of academic and research possibilities.

But receiving the Powell scholarship was the final factor that clinched her decision to attend Pacific.

“I knew it would provide me with unexpected opportunities. However, it was impossible for me to predict all that it has given me,” she said.

Wong participated in the same project as Matej to develop and teach an English-as-a-second-language curriculum in Dimen.

The Powell Program also motivated Wong to attend national neuroscience conferences and to apply for national scholarships that she didn’t know existed. That effort has paid off as Wong has earned a prestigious Goldwater Award for her scientific work and was inducted into Phi Kappa Phi and Phi Beta Kappa, two of the nation’s oldest and most prestigious honor societies.

Recently she has been accepted into all three graduate programs she applied to—a highly selective dual PhD and DDS program at UC San Francisco; a DDS at the Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry; and a DDS at UCLA.

During an October event to honor the Powells and their gift, Wong told the crowd about how she had been privileged to meet Mrs. Powell: “I am sad that I and many of the Powell Scholars did not get to know her more, but we can all attest to the impact her philanthropy has had on our education and, consequently, on our future.”

“My story is but a glimpse of the impact the Powells have, and continue to make, on the education of students at University of the Pacific. We owe them so much,” said Wong.

“President Eibeck and Powell Scholar Sarah Wong ’14, after an October celebration of the Powells and their gift

IF YOU LOOK AT ANY OF THE POWELL SCHOLARS, IT’S EVIDENT THEY LISTENED TO MRS. POWELL’S ADVICE

Powell Scholar Madelaine Matej ’16 is following her passion at Pacific.
The Powell Fund will endow scholarships to help generations of students attend Pacific and will support academic programs across the University and its nine schools. Its impact will be felt at all three campuses—in Stockton, Sacramento and San Francisco.

“Pacific embodies every value that the Powells held dear,” said John P. Donovan, trustee of the Powell Family Trust. “They would be especially delighted to know that the University plans to use $60 million from their estate gift to inspire matching funds that will help even more deserving students earn an education at Pacific, and $25 million to inspire new endowments that will enhance academics.”

“There is an old proverb that says ‘A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children,’ so all the more can be said about Bob and Jeannette Powell’s legacy encompassing the children’s children of our community,” Donovan said during the University’s celebration in October.

Gifts of this size are rare in higher education. According to the Chronicle of Philanthropy, only 15 other private colleges and universities in the United States have received gifts of $125 million or more since 2005.

Other than Pacific, Stanford University, the University of Southern California and Claremont McKenna College are the only private colleges and universities in California to be on that list.

“A single gift of this magnitude would be significant to any institution, but for a small private university with a modest endowment, it is truly transformational,” said Kristen Soares, president of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities.

“This gift ensures that Pacific will build on its rich history and contributions to California for generations to come, and secures its legacy of leadership among California institutions of higher education,” she said.