



THE
POWER
OF THE **POWELLS**

Several years after Robert and Jeannette Powell made their record-breaking \$125-million gift to University of the Pacific, the gift's impact is felt throughout its three campuses and in the hearts of those who knew the couple.



JEANNETTE POWELL

*Meeting with Powell Scholar
Jason Campbell and President
Pamela Eibeck at Callison Hall,
home of the Powell Scholars
program*

Robert Powell: The Bright and Brilliant Businessman

Robert Powell made a fortune as a developer and was responsible for the Pavilions shopping center in Sacramento, the University of the Pacific Campus Commons and the Gold River community, where he and his wife Jeannette lived. Jeannette, an interior designer, worked alongside him on many of his projects.

The Powells upon their deaths made a groundbreaking \$125 million bequest, cementing their legacy to the university they loved. Robert Powell died just a few months after the gift was announced, and Jeannette died in December 2012.

Not only was the donation the largest in UOP's 162-year history — the previous record was \$13 million — it's among the largest donations to a private university in the United States.

The Powells were major supporters of the arts, donating to The Sacramento Ballet, the philharmonic orchestra and the Crocker Art Museum. But in the last two decades of their lives, they became increasingly devoted to Pacific, even though neither attended the 6,400-student university.

Robert Powell was a high school dropout from the Bay Area whose higher education consisted of some



Robert and Jeannette Powell

night classes at San Mateo Junior College. His wife didn't attend college, according to John Donovan, a Roseville accountant who served as trustee of the Powell Family Trust.

Why the attraction to UOP? Donovan said it grew in part from Robert Powell's realization that it was becoming harder for young people to follow his path of building a successful career without a college degree. The couple wanted their money to support students in perpetuity.

A Life of Art and Beauty

Jeannette Powell established the Powell Scholars in 2009 and credited husband Robert for being the visionary and major force behind the gift. Still, to the scholars themselves, Jeannette became their inspiration. She believed that the Powell Scholars program was about helping students find and follow their passions.

"Jeannette was gracious and grateful. She taught us what we eventually termed 'the infinite regress of thanks,'" notes Cynthia Wagner Weick, recently retired director of the Powell Scholars Program. "Whenever students would use Powell funds to travel overseas or undertake a major research project, they would send her handwritten thank-you notes.

Without fail, we would then receive a thank you back from her — a 'thank-you' for the 'thank-you.' Sometimes her notes would be accompanied by a bouquet of flowers."

Sometimes she would send a fresh bouquet, and other times it would be a picture of a bouquet she'd clipped from a magazine, Weick explains. Framed examples of her thank-you notes for students' thank-yous are hanging in Callison Hall, home to the Powell Scholars.

In 2011 Jeannette decided that the students needed a space to call their own where they could study, collaborate and create. She chose Callison Hall, which was filled with many small offices

and showed the wear of repurposing. She worked with an architect to gut and open the space, choosing paint for the walls, ceilings and exposed beams and furnished it primarily with pieces from the Powells' real estate office. With a keen eye for art and beauty, Jeannette chose a terra cotta sculpture by well-regarded artist Ruth Rippon as the centerpiece of the building's greenhouse/art gallery.

"We all deeply appreciate and acknowledge how Pacific has benefitted from [Bob Powell's] tremendous success," Weick notes. "However, it is also evident that Jeannette's artistic contributions to their business over the years made for a truly dynamic duo. And I think by the time she died she came to realize

Remembering the Landmark Gift

Dianne Philibosian '68 served on the University of the Pacific Board of Regents alongside Jeannette Powell for 10 years. Philibosian, a past dean, chair and professor in the College of Human Development at Cal State Northridge, recalls Jeannette as humble and modest, but filled with a passion for Pacific and its students.

"The Powells were pleased they were able to make the [landmark \$125 million] gift to Pacific," says Philibosian, a former Alumni Association board member and now a retired consultant and member of the Board of Regents. "It was a transformative gift in so many ways and gave Pacific tremendous recognition."

"It also was a very tangible representation of a powerful, successful couple who never had the benefit of a college education," Philibosian says, "and had enough faith in Pacific to give a legacy gift providing students with the opportunities they never had."

Jeannette was an excellent role model for students, Philibosian notes. "She was such a beautiful example of civil discourse based on key values cherished by the university, such as integrity and respect for others. The Powell Scholars were a way for her to be connected to Pacific."

Philibosian considered Jeannette a treasured friend. She misses Jeannette's "warmth toward other people, her appreciation and flair for the artistic, her joy in Pacific students and her quiet way of always upholding excellence and elegance."



Dianne Philibosian '68



that, because Bob passed away before he could engage with the students who benefitted from the program they endowed, the Powell Scholars saw her as their inspiration and the symbol of what was expected of them.”

As she aged and became less mobile, the Powell Scholars — who traveled far and wide — became Jeannette's window to the world, Weick recalls. "Each year she received a photobook with the picture, name, hometown and academic major of each student. She coveted those. She was the perfect benefactor — interested yet not intrusive. She never tried to interfere with the program, but relished knowing what the Powell Scholars were doing and where they went after graduating."

More than 100 Powell Scholars have benefitted from the program, Weick says. "The Powell Scholars program demonstrates unequivocally that Pacific can attract, engage and retain students who are among the top in the nation, and prepare them to take next steps at top-notch graduate and professional schools and careers."



Top and Bottom: Powell Scholars with professor and program director Dr. Courtney Lehmann, 2017

A Remarkable Relationship

From the time they met until past regent Robert Powell's death 12 years later, Pacific President Emeritus Donald V. DeRosa treasured their friendship. "I found Bob very interesting, a self-made man," DeRosa recalls.

"Around 1950 or so, he went to work as a drywaller on the peninsula of the Bay Area. He went from there to constructing apartments, residential communities and shopping centers." With Robert's real estate acumen and his wife Jeannette's landscaping and interior design skills, they made a formidable team.

They built a personal relationship, DeRosa says, and he often exchanged notes with Robert and sent him books he knew he would enjoy. "Our wives became friends and we did things socially. He continued to express an interest in the university, particularly the Art Department."

When DeRosa proposed building a new home for the department, Robert Powell made a major gift to establish the Jeannette Powell Art Center — moving the arts from their Quonset-hut home. Powell joined the Board of Regents in 1989, serving until 1993 alongside his friend Ed Westgate '33.

"Ed told me that Stanford had courted Bob," DeRosa remembers. "Yet in the end he left the overwhelming majority of his fortune to Pacific. He decided it would do much more good at Pacific."

The Powells were very private, modest people. Upon their transformative decision to give \$125 million to the university, they wanted to remain anonymous, DeRosa says, adding that he finally convinced Robert that the couple deserved recognition.

The Powell gift remains the largest gift in the university's history and among the biggest single gifts to any institution in the United States. The Powells had no children and did not graduate from college themselves.

"A lasting part of their legacy is the Powell Scholars program, which will last in perpetuity because of their generosity," DeRosa notes.

Years of Discussion Yielded a Framework for the Powell Gift

Retired attorney, past Pacific Regent and alumnus Hayne Moyer '75, chuckles a bit when asked about the negotiations that led to the colossal Powell gift in 2013.

"It only took 20 years," Moyer says smiling. "The gift itself was marvelously simple, but the years leading up to it were experimental," he explains. "The Powell Advisors met once a month and looked at various areas for Bob [Powell] to support. Bob didn't want a memorial and he didn't want new buildings, because they never met his standards."

THE POWELL GIFT REMAINS THE LARGEST GIFT IN THE UNIVERSITY'S HISTORY AND AMONG THE BIGGEST SINGLE GIFTS TO ANY INSTITUTION IN THE UNITED STATES.

"He wanted to benefit the students, as he always had done, and to build academic programs," Moyer continues. "We were prepared to fund the entire Powell Scholarship Fund, but Bob wanted to provide matching funds which, when fully realized, will result in \$190 million of endowed scholarships at Pacific."

Robert Powell loved matching funds, Moyer added, because such gifts magnify when fundraisers work to attract funds to match the gift. "Bob and Jeannette were very interested in Pacific and ultimately wanted their money to support scholarships."



Powell Scholars, 2017, with professor and program director Dr. Courtney Lehmann, far right.

POWER OF THE POWELLS

Moyer says the Powells appreciated the friendships they built with Pacific leaders and students. “If you look at the specifics of the Powell gift — it was Don DeRosa’s personal relationship with Bob and Karen [DeRosa]’s relationship with Jeannette that sealed the gift. Had it not been for those personal relationships, it never would have happened.”

He recalls that he and DeRosa worked for many years learning about what the Powells wanted and making sure Pacific could provide it before coming to the final agreement. “A lot of programs were put together and Don would say, ‘Bob, what do you think?’ and Bob would say, ‘I think it stinks.’ One idea that was dumped immediately: architectural plans for a grand gate and entrance to the campus. That didn’t go over well.”

When the Powell gift was announced, then-President DeRosa said it would be a transformative gift, Moyer remembers. “At the time I thought it was hyperbole, but he was right. It has encouraged so many people to donate more than they would have. It has given the university the opportunity to expand the numbers of people who get scholarships and number of dollars they receive.”

Moyer, too, is inspired to give back to University of the Pacific and to the McGeorge School of Law, which he attended after spending years working in a foundry. “If it hadn’t been for [then-dean] Gordon Schaber and the law school, I might still be swinging a sledgehammer.”

He and his wife Sue meet with their scholars annually. “We talk with them about their goals and thoughts — they are brilliant people — it’s astonishing how smart they are. It’s almost scary.”



Professor Dan Kasser instructs photography students

What the Powell Gift Means to Faculty

For professor Dan Kasser and his colleagues in the Art and Graphic Department, the Jeannette Powell Art Center provides students and faculty members with extraordinary facilities.

“It is so much easier now to teach and do our daily work,” says Kasser, professor of Art and Co-chair of the Art and Graphic Design Department. “We have a great place for the faculty to work and the students to learn.”

Kasser knew Jeannette Powell well. “I spent a lot of time with her at her home and on campus,” he recalls. “She was the kind of person who would step forward to inspire others to give to the university. Everything I knew about her was just wonderful, especially her belief in young people and Pacific.”

Jeannette knew that the university would use her gift responsibly. She chose paintings and sculpture herself and gave the Powell Art Collection a personality, Kasser says. “I believe that you have to have well-crafted pieces by artists that tell about our times and have the power to slow you down.”

“They are provocative and innovative and transport people, enriching the texture of the university.”

Kasser recalls visiting the Powells’ home, which was filled with well-chosen art. “Their home was where they did business and entertained people from all over the world,” he remembers. “Artists would be there. Their home exemplified who Jeannette and Bob were, intellectually and spiritually.”