

Rose Float Alumna at the Helm of 'Aquatic Aspirations'



As a student involved in Rose Float, **Heather Hanson** balanced the books, procured much-needed materials and decorated the university's latest parade entry.

Even after she graduated and began a career in the corporate world, Hanson ('94, marketing

management) continued to volunteer and served as president of the Rose Float Alumni Chapter from 2007 to 2018.

As the interim Rose Float director, Hanson will oversee the creation of the 2020 float, "Aquatic Aspirations."

"I know it's going to be a lot of work, but it's also going to be a lot of fun," Hanson says. "Students who have come through the program are sharp and smart. They want to learn. I'm looking forward to the opportunity to mentor them and share what I've learned in my 20-plus years of experience in the business world. I am happy to help and give back."

She also learned some important skills from Rose Float that she has applied during her career as a supply chain and operations executive for e-commerce companies - how to run a business, how to work with people and resolve issues on the job, and how to get things done with a tight deadline and budget.

"I managed the Rose Float budget and worked directly with suppliers for two years," she says. "It was a tremendous learning experience. You can't get that kind of practical experience just going to school."

— **Melanie Johnson**

ROSE FLOAT LAB *Continued from page 10*

to them has helped him grow as the president and in his work as an engineer for a satellite development center.

Hanson says Rose Float experience educates student volunteers in all facets of their professional careers.

"This work helps so much with management, budgeting, processes, practical experiences," she says. And then there is the important social component.

"You can't work on something of that scope and scale without having relationships. There's a bond you get that you just don't get from going to class."

That may be why saying goodbye to the old shed will be tough for many of the veterans. Simons says he spent both his 18th and 70th birthdays at the lab, but he's not sorry to see it replaced.

"We've been talking about a new lab for 30 years, and now the students are getting one," Simons says. "They will be able to better spend their time coming up with new ideas and initiatives because they won't be dealing with weather or equipment problems."

McDowell served as director of Rose Float operations for four years and recently turned over her duties to Hanson, a former president of the Rose Float alumni chapter, and has become the university's director of first-year and transition experiences. Even with the new job, she will remain involved.

"I love it," McDowell says. "It's a family."

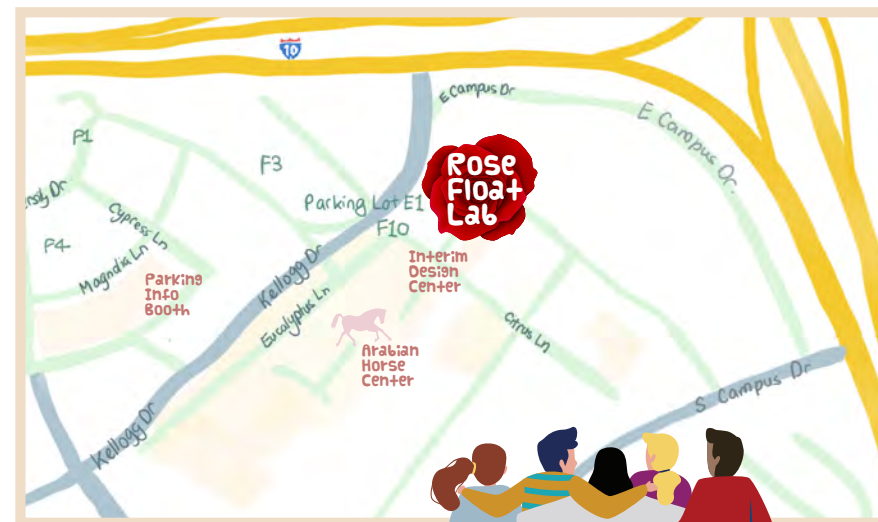
Support the Rose Float Lab and Design Complex

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A Family Legacy CONTINUES

By Shelley Levitt

When **Mitch Hill** attended Cal Poly Pomona in the late 1970s, like a lot of students then and now, he needed to work to support himself. He hoisted tires during the graveyard shift at a Pep Boys auto shop, bagged groceries at a local supermarket, and found jobs in computer programming as he gained knowledge as a computer information systems minor.

In 2000, Hill launched **Avanade**, a Seattle-based technology services company. Under Hill's leadership, Avanade grew to a billion-dollar company with nearly 10,000 employees worldwide. Today, it's the leading digital innovator on the Microsoft ecosystem.

Hill ('80, economics) died in 2013 at the age of 55 from pancreatic cancer. But his ties to Cal Poly Pomona — "a place he loved," as his widow, **Cherie Hill**, says — endure. In his honor, Avanade created the **Mitchell C. Hill Memorial Endowment** in 2014.

The endowment helps fund the **Mitchell C. Hill Center for Digital Innovation** within the College

of Business Administration and houses the pioneering student-run data center. Embodying CPP's polytechnic ethos, "the data center allows students to work in a state-of-the-art tech environment, developing and implementing their own cloud solutions and cybersecurity operations," says Professor **Ron Pike**, director of the Mitchell C. Hill Center.

What's more, in 2015 Avanade named Cal Poly Pomona one of nine universities around the world to participate in their STEM scholarship program. Designed to encourage more women to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and math, the program names five CPP STEM Scholars each year who receive annual grants of \$15,000 for up to five years. With a new grant of \$270,000 from Avanade, the scholarship program at Cal Poly Pomona will be extended for an additional three years through 2023.



Next Generation PHILANTHROPY

Cherie Hill and her family are committed to supporting digital innovation at Cal Poly Pomona in memory of her husband Mitch Hill.

The Hill family – Cherie and the couple’s sons **Matthew** and **Mitchell** – have always been involved with the endowment. This year they’re deepening their engagement.

“We’ve seen generosity in action,” Cherie says. “It’s been inspiring to watch how well Avanade’s support has worked out in creating the data center and all these student programs, which also include student competitions like CyberPatriot and other events. Avanade has kept upping their commitment, and all this is being done to honor Mitch. I felt it was time for my family to have a role.”

The Hills’ generous support includes a blended gift with an estate designation of \$500,000 to the endowment in addition to the funding of three Hill Family Fellowships. Two of the fellowships will support paid student staff positions for the data center. The third will be a Family Fellow for Technical Project Management (TPM) and will work alongside faculty to design and develop a new certificate program in technical project management.

Beginning this year as a volunteer, Matthew will serve as an executive-in-residence to the new program in the College of Business Administration. As a consultant for Avanade for eight years and now a technical program manager with Amazon Web Services, he’s seen firsthand the pressing need for people who have both technical prowess and the essential skills of management, such as communication, teamwork and organization.

“In our industry we still don’t really have a way to train people to be technical project managers, which is ironic because it’s such a critical role. But it’s a challenging one,” Matthew says, “You have to understand technology very well so you can communicate with a variety of developers who all have different technology focuses and you also need to communicate with business headquarters.”

Matthew says he’ll work with Pike on enhancing the curriculum and adding additional activities that will prepare graduates to become a technical project manager as soon as they enter the workforce.

“The soul of being a good technical project manager is being able to deal with all the changes that are being thrown at you and come out successful at the end. Ron and I have a lot of fun ideas on how we can immerse students in that kind of controlled chaos,” Matthew says.

Though Matthew hadn’t known much about Cal Poly Pomona before his father’s death, he’s now certain it’s the right place to create an innovative program in training technical program managers.

“When I had the opportunity to walk around the campus and start meeting faculty members, including Ron Pike, I was blown away by their passion and the connection to their students,” he says. “They’re always so excited about their work, and it’s been thrilling to let myself get swept up in that.”

As Cherie listens to her son speak, she thinks about her late husband.

“Mitch would have been immensely proud of his son. Matt has had an admirable career in technology and has been instrumental in sharing his knowledge and expertise with the faculty and students to aid in furthering the success of the program. Matt’s respect for his father and that he has chosen to support his father’s legacy at his alma mater would have deeply affected Mitch.”



A Pathway to Student SUCCESS

The family gift will enable Cal Poly Pomona students to carry on that legacy.

“We are immensely thankful for the tremendous generosity of the Hill Family. The gift to the endowment and the paid student positions are helping us create and maintain leading-edge facilities in which our students work and learn,” Dean **Erik Rolland** says. “In addition, the gift allows our students to focus on developing their career on campus and therefore gain valuable experience within their field of expertise, further setting them apart from graduates at other institutions.”

The hands-on experience that the student data center instills is so sought after, he adds, that students are being recruited for positions – often with six-figure salaries – from companies such as Google, Amazon and Protiviti.

Computer information systems senior **Judith Cruz**, who will be the first member of her family to earn a college degree, credits her two years of working in the student data center in helping her land a tech job at Raytheon, a defense and aerospace company.

“I gained so much knowledge working at the data center,” says Cruz, who will graduate in December. “I was able to put everything we learn in class into real-world situations working with real industry hardware. Explaining these technical processes to students really helped strengthen my confidence and communication skills. Everything I learned I was able to put on my resume, and I think that went a long way in helping me land my job.”

It’s this kind of student success that Cherie is excited to support.

“Education was so valued by Mitch and by his family,” she says.

“He grew up in a family of seven kids. His mom always stressed the importance and value of college, but his parents were divorced and they didn’t have the means to provide for that education, so the kids had to figure out on their own how to make college work. And they did, every single one of them.

“Mitchell, Matt and I always ask ourselves, ‘What would dad think of this? Would he approve?’ And we know he would absolutely, 100 percent approve of our gifts to Cal Poly Pomona that will enable students who may not otherwise have the means to get an education at the school that he loved and pursue a career in the industry that he loved.”



The student-run data center allows students to apply their technical, leadership and communication skills.

Support the Mitchell C. Hill
Center for Digital Innovation

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