What’s your favorite Cal Poly Pomona memory? Maybe it’s the first day you stepped on campus. Or was it when you walked across the stage at commencement to receive your diploma? Perhaps it was a hike up Colt Hill with friends to view campus from the iconic “CPP,” or meeting for the first time a student whose scholarship you helped fund. Undoubtedly for many, that favorite memory was made while building one of the 71 Rose Float entries to carry the name of the Cal Poly Universities.

Whatever your favorite memory, the common thread connecting them all is the shared understanding that Cal Poly Pomona changes lives. This annual philanthropy edition of CPP Magazine is a tribute to that shared understanding and to all those who help make our university an epicenter for creativity, discovery, and innovation.

As you will read in the pages of this magazine, there are myriad ways to support Cal Poly Pomona, from sponsoring scholarships and campus initiatives to serving as volunteers and mentors. Truly, an investment in Cal Poly Pomona makes a unique difference. Your support fuels an engine of social mobility and ensures that the nation’s most diverse polytechnic university continues to be a bastion of opportunity for students across California and beyond.

For all the ways you support Cal Poly Pomona, thank you!

Sincerely,

Soraya M. Coley, Ph.D.
President

A Community of Giving

As many community college transfer students at Cal Poly Pomona, Janetta McDowell was looking to connect quickly with her new university in a meaningful way.

She already had one on-campus family — McDowell was an elite track-and-field athlete — but she wanted to feel a part of the wider school community and meet students from different colleges. That’s when she decided to volunteer to help decorate the 1995 Rose Float, and to bring along her parents and brother so they’d feel a part of it too.

“I wanted to get involved my first quarter and it sounded like fun. I wasn’t even part of the club,” says McDowell (’97, liberal studies). “It was fun. And it really made me and my family feel very connected to Cal Poly Pomona.”

Building the New Rose Float Lab is a Community Effort

By Melissa McCoy

After months of construction, the Rose Float family celebrates the 2018 float moving out to Pasadena.
Little did McDowell know that she was about to gain yet another, much bigger, family — her Rose Float Family — and that the connection would lead her to serve as senior coordinator of Rose Float and, later, director of operations.

Since 1948, thousands of students like McDowell have enjoyed that same feeling of belonging as they worked toward a shared goal of launching yet another float down Colorado Boulevard on New Year’s Day, picking up invaluable skills along the way.

In addition to fun and friendship, there has always been a rich history of celebration. The all-volunteer floats, built in conjunction with Cal Poly SLO, have won 59 awards in the Rose Parade, pioneering the use of such features as hydraulics for animation (1968), the first to use computer-controlled animation (1978) and the introduction of fiber optics (1982).

Now the Rose Float family is celebrating another first: Construction has finally begun on a Rose Float Lab and Design Complex that is expected to be completed by early 2021.

It takes a big family to build the float annually, so it’s little wonder it took an even bigger one to raise the money for a lab that has loosely been in the works for well over 25 years.

The commitment and passion of hundreds of donors, as well as the campus community and the university, all contributed to the funding success of the first phase of this project, bringing in more than $4.7 million.

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A layer of foam protects the float, offering protection from rain and the occasional mud torrent, and, as Hanson points out, security that will help ensure expensive and vital tools and electronics are kept safe.

“Donors have a variety of goals they have come together to make this much-needed lab a reality. We are grateful for the unique dedication of our Rose Float family for meeting our challenge and championing this unique learning lab in support of our students,” says Krista Voorhis, vice president of student affairs.

“The engineers got hornswogglled into doing some work too!”

The New Rose Float Lab, initially envisioned as having 5,700-square-feet of enclosed space, is now expected to be completed by early 2021.

Construction has begun on the new lab, which will be located at Kellogg Drive and the 10 freeway off-ramp. The complex will include a legacy fence featuring 120 stainless steel tiles, each with the name and year of past and future floats.

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A Labor of Love

The original campus lab may be well loved, carrying decades of memories and the sweat and tears of many an undergrad, but the new lab and complex will offer protection from rain and the occasional mud torrent, and, as Hanson points out, security that will help ensure expensive and vital tools and electronics are kept safe.

“The new lab is going to be a great place,” says Bill Jacobson (’61, animal husbandry), co-chairman of two early floats and a member of the rose float alumni chapter. “It’s a long, long time coming.”

In fact, it’s been coming since Don Miller of Pasadena, who believed the Big Cal Poly Floats (they were still one school back then) deserved a shot at entering a float, got his chance only 90 days before the 1949 parade, and with some student, faculty and staff help and $250 cut from the first Cal Poly Float, winning the Award of Merit. When “operations” moved from the university’s original Voorhis campus in San Dimas to the new campus (then known as the Kellogg campus in Pomona), cement was being poured for buildings, so the early students (Jacobson says it was five or six agricultural majors) simply asked the crew to pour some for them.

“The engineers got hornswogglled into doing some work too!”

Ron Simons remembers.

Dale Wong (’78, engineering technology), director-at-large on the Rose Float alumni chapter and part of the steering committee, says that in the summer of 1979, there was still no cover for the float-building area and a lot of materials were being damaged.

“We needed to do something to get it covered,” he says. “A lot of the time we just worked out in the rain. If it was really bad, we towed the float down to the old engineering building and found some shelter to keep working. It was definitely a labor of love.”

Some students from electrical design, with the help of donations and a local cement company, enlarged the concrete pallet, Wong says.

“We would go for anything. Whatever it took, we’d go after it, including food,” Wong says, recounting a year when the team secured two landing gear from an F-4 Phantom jet for use as the wheels on their roller-skating elephant float.

Mechanical engineering alumnus Thomas Mutch created YouTube videos to highlight every Cal Poly Universities’ Rose Float, and he’s interviewed dozens of alumni at least once from every float in the program’s 72-year history.

“Everyone’s learning new skills, thinking from a different point of view and respecting the diversity of the team.”

Simons, who says the test-stand model gears were donated by a local Pomona manufacturing company, adds that Southern California businesses large and small always wanted to help, and still do.

Those unique college experiences (including “borrowing” flowers from neighbors’ gardens) have blossomed into lifelong friendships. Rose Floaters keep in touch, vacation together, and about 20 couples have married, with the occasional union between the two Cal Poly campuses.

Younger graduates add to the growing family, including Thomas Mutch (’16, mechanical engineering), who enjoys the multigenerational camaraderie. “There’s a lot of us out there with knowledge, so we want to help the current students,” says Mutch, who was the animatronics and electronics lead student. “We don’t want to do it all for them, but we want to be there when they need us.”

The Rose Float Advantage

Rose Float has always been a prime example of the Cal Poly Pomona’s polytechnic approach – students learning from each other in a hands-on environment. “The engineering student learns from the marketing student who learns from the designer,” Spangler says. “Everyone’s learning new skills, thinking from a different point of view and respecting the diversity of the team. Students are learning to communicate more effectively, manage and motivate teams, and solve complex problems.”

Many Rose Float alumni, including Mutch and Wong, say their hands-on float work directly transferred to technical tasks in their professional careers.

Mutch, the alumni chapter’s unofficial historian, parlayed his Rose Float experience to land his “dream job” with Artistic Entertainment Services, and he recently designed and animated props for “It’s a Small World” in Tokyo.

Alumni also learned to hone their communication skills. Matthew Yeseta (’16, electronics and computer engineering technology), the current Rose Float alumni president, says that working closely with non-technical volunteers and explaining issues

Why the Rose Float Program Means So Much to Alumni

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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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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.


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.