The Orfalea Effect

As you walk through the Business Building breezeway, you’ll see a plaque that commemorates a day that will go down in Cal Poly history: April 20, 2001. The inscription reads, “We hope that the Orfalea College of Business will always encourage leadership and educational inspiration, and that all who walk through these halls realize their true worth and purpose in life.”

It’s been 15 years since the day Paul and Natalie Orfalea changed Cal Poly’s business education for good through a landmark $15 million donation that named the Orfalea College of Business and set its course to become a leading business school.

Since 2001, the endowment’s impact has been nothing short of transformative, supporting everything from classroom technology and lab equipment to new faculty positions and research grants. But the Orfalea Foundation’s generosity has made the biggest impact on programs that shape the student experience and fuel Learn by Doing on campus and beyond.

The transformation enabled Orfalea Student Services to grow to provide new resources like peer mentoring and tutoring programs, which took hold using the college’s innovative peer-advising model. These programs have doubled retention rates for at-risk students and helped the Orfalea College of Business maintain the highest graduation rate at Cal Poly. The college has also established Orfalea Travel Grants that enable 200 students to study abroad and experience the global economy firsthand each year. Today, more business students study internationally than any other major at Cal Poly.

“A bias for action has always been central to the Orfaleas’ business and philanthropic ethos, making a partnership with Cal Poly and its Learn by Doing philosophy a natural fit,” according to Orfalea Foundation Vice President Catherine Brozowski.

Along with Cal Poly’s Learn by Doing philosophy, the generosity of the Orfalea Foundation has changed the lives of thousands of graduates. In no uncertain terms, the gift has helped the Orfalea College of Business realize its own purpose: becoming the leader in experiential business education.

“It is fitting that the college be named to honor the spirit of entrepreneurship and strength of character he has exhibited during his career.”

— Former Dean William Pendergast said of Paul Orfalea, founder of Kinko’s