Alumnus and commercial real estate developer Charlie King leads Orfalea’s effort to renovate the Business Building and transform the student experience.
Economics alumnus Charlie King knows more than most about the power of the right building. He has spent nearly 30 years working in Bay Area real estate development during a time when many growing businesses have reshaped the employee experience around technology and collaboration. Today, he leads King Asset Management alongside his brother Michael, a fellow Cal Poly economics alumnus and former commercial banker. Charlie’s clients in tech, retail and industrial sectors look to the firm to create environments that foster a strong company culture in Palo Alto and the San Francisco Peninsula.

“The right space sends the simple message to a team that there’s nothing more important than attracting and keeping those employees,” said King. “The better the employee feels about the company they work for, the happier and more productive they are.”

While at Cal Poly in the 1980s, King admits he didn’t get that message from the classrooms. He and his classmates sat in the historic Business Administration Building, known to many as the Clocktower Building or, more recently, the Cotchett Education Building. The structure is one of Cal Poly’s oldest, built in 1942. As King recalls, his classrooms were old and hot, with a bit of character woven into its Spanish-style architecture.

“The facilities were nothing different than what you had in grade school or high school,” he said. “Back then things were so bare bones that you couldn’t Learn by Doing until you got out of the classroom.”

King graduated five years before the existing Business Building was completed in 1992. The project created 45,000 square feet of new office space and classrooms, including tiered classrooms modeled after Harvard’s case study rooms of the 1980s. The new building served as an essential upgrade, but over the years it has not evolved with shifts in technology, instructional design or a student population that has grown by more than 30 percent.

Now, 25 years later, King sees an opportunity to bring features of the modern workplaces he helps craft to Cal Poly’s Business Building. Renovations could alleviate crowded hallways and add flexible study spaces. Orfalea’s core clubs could stay in the building for their events in rooms large enough for their thriving member base, rather than migrating to the library or University Union. Students could easily work in teams in modern classrooms built for interactive Learn by Doing projects. Faculty could move back into the building from portable offices they’re now using across campus.

“The bones of the building are great, but the floor plan is not functional,” King said. “There is so much wasted space that, if better utilized, could be converted into meeting areas, conference space and lounges. We have the opportunity to showcase the college and all it has to offer within the walls of this building.”

King sees another potential challenge: from the outside, the building is quite possibly one of the most beautiful on campus. The four-story structure rises from the lush grass of O’Neill Green with stately pillars, a massive breezeway and its signature Spanish style. Its exterior grandeur masks many of its internal challenges, including lack of space for growing numbers of students and faculty.

On any given weekday, the learning community fractures after classes conclude as individuals scatter across campus looking for meeting rooms, food and collaborative study space. King says the exodus means students lose the ability to build relationships with classmates and faculty outside the classroom — skills that will be essential for career-ready graduates in the modern workplace.

“"I wouldn’t have made the investment in this campaign unless I thought Dean Scott Dawson and the leadership team were in place to make it a reality.”

— Charlie King (Economics, ’87), partner at King Asset Management
Business with a cornerstone gift to the Building Renovation Campaign. The effort — broken down into project phases — will take a strategic approach to the building’s first major interior improvements meant to positively impact each of the college’s 3,000 students.

“We have the opportunity to create a real work environment within the college that mirrors what graduates will see in major businesses. That’s the direction all of these business schools are going today,” said King.

**Phase I: The South Tower**

At the start of another fall quarter, Dean Scott Dawson feels excited about the prospect of new construction. After consulting with students, faculty, donors and Cal Poly Facilities, he suggested that renovations begin with the construction of a new three-story tower near the south end of the existing building to add 7,000 square feet of space.

On the first floor, students will have access to a 128-seat, flexible classroom sorely needed for large club meetings and student events. The flat design, technology outfit and movable furniture will also accommodate evolving instructional design that puts the focus on teams of students learning together rather than on a lecturer.

The tower’s second and third floors will house the college’s academic area offices where students can easily find faculty and staff. Moving these high-traffic offices off of the Business Building’s fourth floor will free up space for student study lounges and faculty offices.

The new South Tower will include a green roof that will also provide a serene meeting place where students and faculty can enjoy the campus’ natural beauty and views.
The existing Business Building.

7,000
Amount of square footage the new three-story tower will add.

128
Number of seats in the new flexible classroom.

$5 million
Phase 1 fundraising goal.

2019
Construction could start as early as 2019 with donor support.

of Spanos Stadium. When finished, the project has the potential to bring a new sense of community to the college, enabling students and faculty to spend their days at the building while taking advantage of Orfalea’s full spectrum of collaborative resources.

With a Phase 1 fundraising goal of $5 million, Dean Dawson and King are rallying support from the alumni community and corporate partners to realize the vision of the South Tower. Construction could begin as early as 2019. “World class students deserve educational spaces that will maximize their learning and their ability to become future business leaders,” Dawson said. “We need more alumni to share Charlie’s passion for making the renovation and addition a reality in the near future.”

The improvements won’t stop with the new tower. According to Dean Dawson, subsequent phases will transform areas like the Breezeway, enclosing the space to create a multi-use classroom and interview rooms for employers. The college also has plans to renovate the courtyard to provide more interactive and study space to foster a more connected environment among students and faculty.

King believes the transformation will have a tangible effect on attracting new students, retaining top faculty and establishing the college as one of the best undergraduate business schools in the nation. At the conclusion of the project, he envisions the Business Building serving as an active hub for the campus community.

“I think it’s so important that every student, every parent, every professor and every prospective Mustang who walks through that building see improvement on a regular basis,” King said. “Change is not only exciting, but it also demonstrates to all that we are always trying to get better.”

THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY to leave a mark on Cal Poly’s campus by supporting the Orfalea College of Business Building Renovation Campaign.

Make a donation today via the envelope enclosed or at bit.ly/supportcalpoly.

Looking to make a bigger impact? Reach out to Assistant Dean Mary Kelting at mkelting@calpoly.edu to discuss ways you or your company can support the campaign.

The existing Business Building.

Renderings provided by ZGF Architects.