

August 18, 2020 | By Amanda Rubalcava

Paying It Forward, the Ong Family Gives \$2M Gift to the UC San Diego School of Medicine

University of California San Diego alumni Linda Tseng-Ong '87 and James J. Ong, M.D. '89 know firsthand the importance of paving the path for the next generation. Having both immigrated with their families to the United States from Taiwan, the couple is grateful for the predecessors who worked hard to help them get to where they are today.

“As first-generation immigrants, we feel like there is a lot we have received, having spent most of our lives in this country,” said James Ong, a cardiologist who graduated from the UC San Diego School of Medicine. “We came here as teenagers and have benefited from standing on the shoulders of giants—our parents—upon whose sacrifices we were able to achieve our dreams. In a similar way, as students of medicine, we have benefited from standing on the shoulders of giants—our teachers—upon whose dedicated work we have learned to practice the art of medicine.”

Inspired by a commitment to ‘paying it forward,’ the Ong Family has made a gift of \$2 million to support the educational needs and priorities of UC San Diego’s School of Medicine. In honor of their generosity, the auditorium in the T. Denny Sanford Medical Education and Telemedicine Center has been named the Linda & James Ong Family Auditorium. This gift, the largest from alumni in the history of the School of Medicine, contributes to the Campaign for UC San Diego.

“In the face of the COVID-19 public health crisis, the need to prepare and train future physicians has never been as critical as it is now. The generosity of James and Linda Ong will allow UC San Diego to continue fostering students that push the boundaries of medicine and health care,” said Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. “Their support will help empower the next generation of medical students, providing them with the opportunities needed to excel on their path toward becoming innovative and compassionate physicians.”



The Ong Family pose in front of the Linda & James Ong Family Auditorium. Photo Credit: Sandy Dempsey.

Linda and James Ong both credit the university as a vital starting point in their professional journey—she as an undergraduate, he as a medical student—where they were provided the environment, nurturing relationships, experiences and challenges needed to prosper in life.

“When I started at UC San Diego, I felt like I was given the space, opportunity and hope to grow into the best version of myself,” said Linda Tseng-Ong, a pediatric neurologist who studied bioengineering at the Jacobs School of Engineering before attending Loma Linda University for her medical degree. “We hope that our support will inspire students in doing the same and that they will grow into pillars of goodness and strength for our country and our world. We also hope that the auditorium can serve as a space of connection with their classmates and with the rest of humanity, as we all strive to become the best versions of ourselves.”

Through their support to the university, Linda and James Ong are honored to be able to elevate the status of the UC San Diego School of Medicine and provide future medical students with formative educational experiences. The generous gift will be used to create the School of Medicine Medical Student Educational Opportunities Fund. The fund is intended to help students to the greatest extent, and the Ong Family has entrusted leadership to determine the most pressing medical educational needs of its students. A sampling of these needs includes: scholarship support; expanding diversity, equity and inclusion programs; enhancing hands-on educational experiences such as the School of Medicine simulation center; and recently, determining how to instruct virtually and developing best practices to return to learning safely amid COVID-19.

Ensuring all students have the opportunities to succeed is something very close to heart for the Ong Family. “When we first came to this country, the abundance of opportunities in America opened our eyes to all that we could achieve. My family to this day still jokes that had I remained in Taiwan and not immigrated here, I might be a chicken farmer today,” said James Ong, whose father ran chicken farms in Taiwan before immigrating to the U.S and beginning a successful high-tech startup company alongside three partners — all first-generation immigrants. “Instead, I’m doing heart surgery and Linda is helping children as a neurologist. We have to remember where we came from. Being thankful [for the opportunities given to us by attending UC San Diego] is really the impetus of why we wanted to dedicate a gift to the university.”

Linda Tseng-Ong also credits UC San Diego as the place where she learned the importance of having a strong support network. As an undergraduate, she worked with the campus’s early academic outreach program to teach high school students about UC San Diego. “I saw firsthand how UC San Diego cared about students even before they came to campus, and that was comforting for me. They were also invested in my success and my growth, and that made me want to meet the challenges that I had when I was a student.”

In addition to their gift toward the School of Medicine, the Ong Family has named the university in their estate plans. Further, James Ong recently became a trustee on the UC San Diego Foundation Board of Directors.

When sharing his thoughts on what he considers the most rewarding part about giving back to the university, James Ong said, “In my opinion, the purpose of life can be distilled down to a simple concept of ‘doing good’ for others, whether it comes in the form of making a useful invention or performing a life-saving surgery. The desire to contribute to society is innately human. In a way, our gift to the school is emblematic of our desire to make such a contribution.”

Linda Tseng-Ong added, “Hopefully, we can be the support for other people so that in the future, they can be a support for the rest.”

The Ong Family’s gift contributes to the [Campaign for UC San Diego](#)—a university-wide comprehensive fundraising effort concluding in 2022. Together with philanthropic partners, UC San Diego will continue its nontraditional path toward revolutionary ideas, unexpected answers, lifesaving discoveries and planet-changing impact. For more information, visit [campaign.ucsd.edu](#).

MEDIA CONTACT

Amanda Rubalcava, 858-534-3121, arubalcava@ucsd.edu

UC San Diego’s [Studio Ten 300](#) offers radio and television connections for media interviews with our faculty, which can be coordinated via studio@ucsd.edu. To connect with a UC San Diego faculty expert on relevant issues and trending news stories, visit <https://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/media-resources/faculty-experts>.

The Campaign For
UC San Diego

Continue the
nontradition
