

Arthur Wagner Theatre Named in Honor of UC San Diego's Theatre and Dance Department Founder and Long-time Supporter

Nov. 21 campus reception will recognize the service and support, including \$500,000 for graduate fellowships, given by the department's founder Arthur Wagner and his wife, Molli

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"If science and engineering are the head of our society, then the arts are the heart and soul," notes Arthur Wagner, founder and emeritus faculty of the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of California, San Diego. "It's crucial to support the arts in this country at this time."

Wagner will be honored by UC San Diego for his longtime service and support of the arts at a 4:00 p.m. reception on Nov. 21 at Galbraith Hall, Room 157 on the UC San Diego campus. The event will also celebrate the dedication of the 99-seat Arthur Wagner Theatre which features a full sound/light/stage management booth and dressing rooms. A performing arts venue for the Department of Theatre and Dance, the space is used nearly every weekend for graduate and undergraduate projects as well as for classes and rehearsals. The theatre is also one of the venues for the annual Baldwin New Play Festival, which showcases plays written by students in UC San Diego's MFA playwriting program.

Always passionate about the theatre, Wagner, although professionally trained as an actor, chose to pursue an academic career and earned a Ph.D. in Drama from Stanford University. Having founded professional actor training programs at Tulane, Ohio and Temple Universities, he arrived at UC San Diego as the first chair of the department and, along with the founding faculty, developed undergraduate and graduate programs from the ground up.

Today, UC San Diego's Department of Theatre and Dance is considered one of the top three graduate theatre training programs in the country, offering MFA degrees in acting, design, directing, playwriting, stage management and the new areas of dance theatre and sound design, as well as a Ph.D. in theatre. Members of the professional resident faculty in Theatre and Dance have repeatedly garnered impressive awards, including Tony Awards, OBIE awards, Drama Desk awards, Jefferson awards, L.A. Critics Circle, L.A. Ovation awards and the Olivier Award for Excellence in Theatre. Their extensive credits include professional work in over 100 theatres in 14 countries.

Even after retirement, Wagner continues to devote time and resources to the department he founded. He and his wife, Molli, have funded *The Arthur and Molli Wagner Chair in Acting* and *The Molli and Arthur Wagner Dance Building*. Most recently, they pledged \$500,000 to fund graduate fellowships in acting to support deserving young artists and help the department attract talented students.

At UC San Diego, graduate fellowships are a fundraising priority. The department's graduate programs compete with top programs throughout the country, such as Yale and New York University, to recruit serious, stellar students. Fellowships-scholarships for graduate students-help support these students so they can commit their time and energy to learning their craft.

Adds Wagner, "UC San Diego is ranked as one of the top three leading programs in theatre. The other two are in the east-one in New York City and the other in New Haven, Conn. (near New York City)-yet we run a program where the closest large city is Tijuana! So it's amazing that we're able to be part of that grouping. When we present our graduating actors to agents and directors in New York and Los Angeles, we do it with Yale and NYU."

One of the many students molded and moved by Wagner's passion for the arts is Yareli Arizmendi, an actress, writer and producer who earned an undergraduate degree and MFA at UC San Diego. Her work includes the feature films "A Day Without a Mexican" and "Like Water for Chocolate."

"Where does one dream, try out and ultimately become what one is today?" asks Arizmendi. "Arthur Wagner was the professor who guided my first steps, and will be forever part of my professional DNA. He built the foundation that has allowed me to go confidently into that empty space, create and come out full. I thank him for his wisdom and generosity."

The UC San Diego Department of Theatre and Dance is transforming theatre with one of the most renowned training programs in the country. A sampling of alumni includes:

Ricardo Chavira, who plays Carlos Solis on ABC's highly-rated "Desperate Housewives";

Danny Burstein, double Tony nominee, currently playing the mischievous Seabee Luther Billis in "South Pacific" on Broadway in New York;

Jefferson Mays, who won the 2004 Tony for Best Actor in a lead role for his performance in "I Am My Own Wife";

Neil Patel, prolific, award-winning scenic designer for theatre, opera and dance on Broadway, London's West End, the Kennedy Center and other venues;

Monica Bill Barnes, a New York-based choreographer who was described by *The Village Voice* as "one of the wittiest young choreographers around"; and

Naomi Iizuka, nationally acclaimed playwright and head of the playwriting program at UC San Diego.

For information about supporting UC San Diego's Department of Theatre and Dance, or attending the Nov. 21 reception in honor of Arthur Wagner, please contact Frank Teplin at fteplin@ucsd.edu or (858) 534-9050.

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