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UC San Diego Nobel Laureate in Chemistry Named to California Hall of Fame

State Governor Edmund G. “Jerry” Brown and First Lady Anne Gust Brown, in partnership with the California Museum, recently announced inductees of the 11th Class of the California Hall of Fame. Among the new members is Mario Molina, the University of California San Diego’s Distinguished Professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, who won the 1995 Nobel Prize in Chemistry along with Scripps Institution of Oceanography Emeritus Professor Paul Crutzen, for research on the formation and decomposition of ozone. Molina and eight others will be inducted into the state’s hall of fame during an official ceremony in Sacramento at the California Museum, Tuesday, Dec. 5, at 7 p.m.



Mario Molina (right) receiving the UC San Diego Medal from Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla in 2014. Photo by Erik Jepsen, UC San Diego Publications

“It is extremely rewarding for me to be named to the California Hall of Fame among famous and notable individuals,” Molina said. “I will always remain very proud of receiving such an honor.”

Along with Molina, other inductees include: Steven Spielberg, filmmaker; Mabel McKay, artist-activist; Jim Plunkett, NFL quarterback; the late Lucille Ball, entertainer; Susan Desmond-Hellman, bioscientist; Gary Snyder, poet; Michael Tilson Thomas, musician and vintner Warren Winiarski. An exhibition featuring the lives and legacies of each new member will open Dec. 6 at the museum.

“These Californians represent the dynamic spirit and imagination that is the hallmark of the Golden State,” said Gov. Brown in a prepared statement. “Their exceptional skill and craft enrich our culture and inspire us all.”

Recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2013 under Barack Obama, Molina is regarded as a visionary chemist and environmental scientist. He came to the U.S. from Mexico to pursue his graduate degree, and he was a professor at MIT before joining UC San Diego in 2004. In 2014, Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla presented Molina with the UC San Diego Medal, the highest honor the university bestows. Molina's research topics include gas phase chemical kinetics and photochemistry, chemistry of atmospheric aerosols and air pollution in megacities of the developing world. He considers his signature work to be the development of the science that predicted the threat to the ozone layer by human activities. He currently is on the research team at the Center for Aerosol Impacts on Climate and the Environment (CAICE), a National Science Foundation-supported center on campus.

According to Kim Prather, CAICE director and distinguished chair in atmospheric chemistry at UC San Diego, Molina is an inspiration who has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to finding fundamental solutions to fix environmental problems.

"After addressing issues related to the stratospheric ozone hole in the first part of his career, he is now working hard to tackle issues related to air pollution and climate change," said Prather. "Mother Earth could not have a stronger supporter. We are all lucky to have someone like him to interact with and learn from at UC San Diego."

As an educator, now in the Division of Physical Sciences at UC San Diego, Molina has advised many Hispanic undergraduate and graduate students regarding their academic goals, as well as their options for future studies and employment. He is a member in the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science, and he has presented lectures to groups consisting mainly of underrepresented students. He has also participated in various events involving academic honors and recognitions specifically awarded to members of minority groups.

Molina also serves as honorary co-chair of the American Chemical Society (ACS) Scholar Program, which awards scholarships and identifies mentors for thousands of highly motivated students in chemistry from underrepresented groups.

In line with UC San Diego goals, Molina said, "I hope I will be remembered as a scientist whose discoveries helped improve the quality of life of human beings."

MEDIA CONTACT

Cynthia Dillon, 858-822-6673, cdillon@ucsd.edu

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