

July 18, 2018 | By Judy Piercey

Charles Lee Powell Foundation: Three Decades of Giving to UC San Diego Jacobs School of Engineering



From left to right: Charles Rees, Jr., Director, Charles Lee Powell Foundation; William Holliday, Director, Charles Lee Powell Foundation; Mary Berglund, Director and Treasurer, Charles Lee Powell Foundation; Albert Pisano, Dean, Jacobs School of Engineering; Joel Holliday, Director, President and CEO, Charles Lee Powell Foundation; and William Low, Director, Charles Lee Powell Foundation. (Photo: Melissa Jacobs)

“It may not be easy to run an engineering school, but it’s impossible without your friends,” said Jacobs School of Engineering Dean Albert P. Pisano at the annual Charles Lee Powell Foundation graduate fellowship luncheon. “To the ladies and gentlemen of the Powell Board—I am grateful for that friendship which was paid forward through other deans and other times. I, too, am standing on the shoulders of all the previous investment, and I do really appreciate all of that.”

“All of that” totals more than \$35 million in support during the past three decades to the Jacobs School of Engineering at the University of California San Diego. The generous San Diego-based foundation has funded research in

the Department of Structural Engineering and the Charles Lee Powell Laboratories, a relationship that has been essential to the existence of these research laboratories. In addition, the foundation has established the Powell Fellows program for doctoral students, the H. Kunzel Endowed Scholarship/Fellowship Fund and endowed faculty chairs to help recruit and retain stellar scholars.

Thanks to the support of the foundation, the work of our university impacts the San Diego region and beyond. When you drive across a highway bridge in California, there is a good chance that your safety depends on a piece of technology that has been developed and tested at UC San Diego. More specifically, many of the advances making California roads and bridges safer during earthquakes were tested at the Charles Lee Powell Structural Engineering Laboratories on campus. One of the laboratories’ many landmark contributions is the assessment of key structural elements for the new San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. The iconic bridge’s eastern span needed to be replaced after being damaged during the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

Charles Lee Powell (1863- 1959), third cousin to General Robert E. Lee, was a pioneering, self-taught engineer who invented and patented new methods for building concrete structures underground. He is credited with building much of Los Angeles' early infrastructure, including the Second and Third Street Tunnels, the Angels Flight funicular railway in the Bunker Hill district, and downtown sewerage systems. Powell remained committed to a strong work ethic throughout his life, working until his death at age 96.

As he had only distant relatives, Powell had made provisions in his will for a charitable foundation that would carry forward his legacy of innovation and entrepreneurial spirit.

Joel O. Holliday, president and CEO of the Charles Lee Powell Foundation, said "The leaders of the foundation decided since he was an engineer, their thought was that engineering would be an appropriate area of focus for the foundation."

Established in 1954, the foundation is currently directing its support to the engineering schools or departments at four universities in California: California Institute of Technology, Stanford University, University of California San Diego and University of Southern California.

The first gift from the Powell Foundation to UC San Diego was made in 1982. "It was a very natural thing to support a university like UCSD," said Holliday. "UC San Diego enriches the cultural and intellectual environment of the entire community, so that benefits all of us who live in the community."

The Jacobs School of Engineering ranks 7th in the U.S. among public universities and 12th among the nation's top engineering schools according to the 2018 U.S. News and World Report ranking of graduate schools.

Holliday added that the foundation has provided funding for the "education of a large number of engineers that improved our infrastructure and worked toward the public good. We are proud to be part of these achievements."

Shehzeen Samarah Hussain is a 2017-2018 Powell Fellow. The first year Ph.D. student in the Electrical and Computer Engineering department said, "I am very honored to be the recipient of this award. Receiving this scholarship motivates me to continue my research and complete my degree. I look forward to being able to give back to the community through my work."



This neon sign – part of the Stuart Collection “Vices and Virtues” artwork by Bruce Nauman – adorns the top of the original Powell Laboratories Building at UC San Diego. (Photo by Philipp Scholz Rittermann)



Powell Fellow Shehzeen Samarah Hussain presented her research at the annual Charles Lee Powell Foundation graduate fellowship luncheon. (Photo: Melissa Jacobs)

The Charles Lee Powell Foundation remains a loyal supporter of the Jacobs School of Engineering each year. “There is excellent leadership. We feel very confident that the money is being well spent,” explained Holliday. “We have now a long history and relationship with UC San Diego that makes us feel like it’s a great place to give money.”

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