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## Letter - Viewpoints: Scholarships, through generous donors, help young people realize their dreams

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## Viewpoints: Scholarships, through generous donors, help young people realize their dreams

October 18, 2013

Special to *The Sacramento Bee*

A Central Valley teen working with his migrant farmworker parents in a field one day heard something on his transistor radio that transformed his life.

It was the news that a Hispanic American had been named to an elite team of explorers. That ignited in the teen a desire to one day become an explorer himself.

He worked hard and graduated from Franklin High School in Stockton. A university education might seem out of reach to many in his circumstances, but he was able to enter University of the Pacific through a Pacific scholarship program for talented Stockton youths.

After earning a bachelor's degree in engineering from Pacific, he received a master's at UC Santa Barbara and went to work as a research scientist at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. All the while, he persevered in his dream.

Jose Hernandez, who did not learn to speak English until he was 12, became a NASA astronaut and among the first Hispanic Americans in space. Now a member of Pacific's Board of Regents, he runs a foundation that prepares talented K-12 students for careers in science, technology, engineering and math. He is just one of our many students whose lives have been changed by scholarships.

This week, University of the Pacific received a \$125 million gift from the late Robert and Jeannette Powell of Gold River, a bequest that will give generations of students this same opportunity. Most of their gift will be used for endowments to support scholarships and academic programs.

The Powells, who had no children of their own and did not graduate from college themselves, believed that a Pacific education should be accessible to all academically talented students. They believed their money would make the biggest difference if it went directly to students to help them get a start in life.

I can imagine no more meaningful endorsement of the unique learning environment that Pacific - the first chartered institution of higher education in California - has provided since 1851.

Because of the Powells, this education will be available to many more students, for generations to come.

Students like Jenny Kuan of Stockton, who, overwhelmed with the responsibility of raising her younger siblings during the years that her mother was gravely ill with cancer, had decided to drop out of high school. Thanks to an insistent high school mentor and the same scholarship program that Hernandez benefited from, Kuan - who was homeless during part of her childhood - today is thriving as a sophomore at Pacific, intent on a career in social work or psychology. Her dream is to give back to the Stockton community.

Or Jackson Campbell, a junior majoring in biological sciences. Campbell, who graduated from Sequoia High School in Redwood City - the same high school that Bob Powell attended, and where he and Jeannette first met - is among the recipients of Pacific's most prestigious academic scholarship, established in 2008 by Mrs. Powell. Like Hernandez, Campbell also aspires to be an explorer, blazing new trails in immunology.

One of the last times that Jeannette visited our campus, she met with 40 of the students who had benefited from one of the early scholarships she endowed. She posed the same challenging question to each - what are you going to do with your life?

As Pacific enters the next chapter of its proud history, with a stronger presence as a three-city university and rigorous new programs that will reach students how and where they want to learn, our job will be to strive to honor the Powells' memory and their faith in us.

We will do so by ensuring that the Powells' legacy has an impact not only in the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys, but throughout California, giving as many students as possible the chance to explore and achieve their dreams.