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## Foundation gives school district \$6 million endowment

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**By Linda Lou**

UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

**August 11, 2007**

SAN MARCOS – Ecstatic San Marcos school officials announced yesterday that the district has received a \$6 million gift that will help students pay for tuition and books at Cal State San Marcos.

Superintendent Kevin Holt's announcement at the district's "welcome back" meeting yesterday surprised all but a few of the approximately 1,600 employees in attendance at Mission Hills High School.

The \$6 million endowment is from the Leichtag Family Foundation. The Rancho Santa Fe-based organization is a founding contributor of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and has supported Rady Children's Hospital of San Diego, the University of California San Diego and Scripps Memorial Hospital in Encinitas.

After the announcement, district employees clapped and gave a standing ovation. "I don't know if you've heard that, but it's for \$6 million!" Holt said. The crowd burst into applause again.

The endowment will be used for the program Partners Advancing College Education Promise, or PACE Promise. It guarantees high school students, beginning with the Class of 2009 graduates, admission to the university if they satisfy academic requirements. Only students who have started out in the district as freshmen are eligible.

The program, a collaboration with California State University San Marcos, was called Partnership for Success by the district's former superintendent, Ed Brand. That has been trademarked, Holt said, so the district has renamed it.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has pledged \$1.5 million in his proposed 2007-08 budget to begin a similar pilot program for three school districts and CSU campuses to increase the number of students going to college.

Limiting the program to those who enter the district as freshmen is necessary, Holt said, because he expects it will draw more students to



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San Marcos schools. “Everyone's dying to get into our schools,” he said. “That's the best problem we could have.”

Philanthropists Toni and Lee Leichtag, who own M.D. Pharmaceutical Inc., created the foundation that made the gift. James Farley, an attorney for the couple, said they asked him to find a local program that benefits education in a meaningful way to honor the memory of their daughter, a former kindergarten teacher.

Joli Ann Leichtag died of cancer last month at age 60. The district's new elementary school, bordered by Oleander, Mimosa and Poinsettia avenues, will be named after her when it opens next year.

Farley said he works in the same suite of offices as San Elijo Hills resident Randy Walton, a lawyer and a parent in the San Marcos Unified School District, and their conversations led to the endowment.

“The possibilities for this will be truly incredible,” Farley said.

School board members also donated a total of \$1,000 to the program. The board president, Mary Borevitz, and her husband, Richard, contributed an additional \$1,000. Anyone who donates at least \$1,000 will be recognized with a plaque in the district's office.

Billy Singh, recently named the PACE Promise coordinator, said he will visit district schools in the next two months to raise awareness about the program. A golf tournament will be held in November to benefit it.

Even before the announcement of the endowment, the mood at yesterday's gathering was joyous. Union leaders delivered positive speeches, employees were recognized and at one point Holt danced on stage for a few minutes to the beat of Mission Hills' five-member drum line.

Holt reminded the crowd that part of the legacy he wants to leave behind is for graduates to someday tell their children that employees in San Marcos Unified cared about their success and made a difference in their lives. He also encouraged each person to think about their legacies.

“The stories that are told about an organization tells the truth about the organization,” Holt said.

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