

Entrepreneur makes investment in **FRESNO STATE STUDENTS**

by Kathleen R. Schock

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When most donors establish a scholarship they consider it philanthropy. But when entrepreneur Claude Laval III established a new scholarship fund for Fresno State students, he considered it a sound investment.

The Fresno-based businessman recently pledged \$125,000 to support the Entrepreneur Mentor Program at the Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Fresno State.

"I am very impressed with the impact the Lyles Center has had on the students in the mentorship program," Laval says. "I view it as a good investment. I have hired four of the students who have been in the program and found them very well prepared to succeed in business. You can be just as entrepreneurial in a larger company as you can starting your own."

The majority of Laval's donation will establish the Betty Lou Laval Scholarship, available to students who participate in the Entrepreneur Mentor Program. Two students per year will be chosen to receive \$2,500 based on commitment and dedication to the principles of the program.

Laval has been involved with the program since its inception in 2005, first as co-founder and now as a mentor to burgeoning entrepreneurs.

This new scholarship replaces the Betty Lou Laval Entrepreneur Mentor Award, named for and given as a tribute to Laval's late wife Betty Lou.

"I met both Claude and Betty Lou not long after my arrival in Fresno," says Dr. Timothy Stearns, executive director of the Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship. "They shared a deep desire to see greater awareness and activity in entrepreneurship at Fresno State. Across the campus it is clear the commitment they've had to this community, which is especially evident in this gift for students who have a passion for entrepreneurship."

Laval married Betty Lou in 1958. The two met in kindergarten and began dating when he returned to the Valley after studying at Stanford University. They have two daughters, Luann Laval Williams and Melinda "Mendy" Laval Alkotob.

Laval is chairman of LAKOS Separators and Filtration Solutions, a company he created in 1972. The business produces equipment used to remove solids from liquids. Products are made for a multitude of uses, including irrigation, industry and household. Alkotob serves as chief executive officer for the company.

"Claude Laval has been supporting entrepreneurship at Fresno State for over 35 years through a scholarship honoring his father, who was an entrepreneur like Claude," says Riley Walter, a close friend of Laval's and co-founder of the Entrepreneur Mentor Program. "This most recent fabulous gift will allow the Lyles Center to dramatically boost its mentorship program, which is already one of the best in the nation, in large part due to the fact that Claude is one of the longest-serving mentors."

The Entrepreneur Mentor Program is designed to give students from any discipline the opportunity to learn from and build relationships with some of the most distinguished Central Valley leaders and entrepreneurs. Students are matched one-on-one with a mentor who best suits their area of interest. Students also have access to all mentors in the program and often continue to engage with mentors for years after completing the program.

This gift expands Laval's legacy of supporting Fresno State, which includes a gift of \$300,000 in 2011 to support cross-departmental water research. His support for and advice to Fresno State on water and irrigation was recognized by the naming of the Claude Laval Water and Energy Technology Incubator (WET Center) on campus in partnership with the Central Valley Business Incubator.

Laval places importance on volunteering and giving back, something he says he learned from watching his parents' example. In addition to his support of and work with the Entrepreneur Mentor Program, he chairs the Governance Committee of Foundation Financial Services at Fresno State. Laval is also one of the founders of the Fresno Business Council and has been an active participant in the Rotary Club for more than 50 years.

— Kathleen R. Schock is the director of media and development communications at Fresno State.