

THE HOUSE OF MOUSE HELPING PAINT IT GREEN

BY LEAH KOLT



Photo courtesy of The Walt Disney Company

ONCE UPON A TIME, a mouse and a cricket were worried about what would happen to all the creatures if the forest disappeared.

So they turned to an old friend for help. The kind and gentle man built a beautiful castle in a Magic Kingdom for Mickey and Jiminy to live in.

Then he made sure that many of America's forests and streams were preserved as wildlife habitat, because he loved real animals, too. This part of the story is not a fairy tale.

Although most people think of Walt Disney as a pioneer in the entertainment industry, he was also an early environmentalist. In 1950 he launched a life-long campaign to help Americans understand how "the natural resources of our vast continent are not inexhaustible" – six years ahead of Rachel Carson's seminal book *Silent Spring*.

Conservation isn't just the business of a few people, Walt explained then, expressing a sentiment that was years ahead of its time. "If we will protect our wildlife and preserve our lakes and streams, these things will last us for generations to come," he said 58 years ago.

Walt did more than just wish upon a star, as attested by the many honors he received for his lifetime commitment to the environment from such groups as the National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club, and the American Humane Association.

Walt's love of nature still infuses the company today. One example, The Jiminy Cricket Environmental™ Challenge, encourages students to tackle real-world environmental challenges. To date, more than 680,000 fifth graders have responded, with projects that range from writing letters to U. S. senators about illegal bush-meat trade to helping victims of the December 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia.

Last year, Disney formed an environmental council of senior executives to identify ways to minimize Disney's impact on the environment. The council, which includes scientists and engineers, frequently seeks expert external advice as part of the policy-making process.

This is where Cal Poly enters the picture.

Disney CIO Richard Taggart, whose daughter Chris is a Cal Poly freshman majoring in art and design, is working with University Advancement and the College of Liberal Arts to start a dialog between the campus and the company.

"There are so many possibilities for collaboration between Cal Poly and Disney," he said. "Take sustainability. We are very interested in what your architecture and other professors are doing in this area. We're building a new gym at Disney headquarters and we hope to attain a LEEDS certification."

Business is another area for potential collaboration. Taggart met recently with College of Business Professor Kathryn Lancaster to discuss her work in sustainable business practices. "We are searching hard for ways to reduce both energy and paper use in our information technology and other areas," he said. "We're interested in new ideas on how we can become

greener. For example, we are setting the default on all our copiers to two-sided copying.”

Another exciting area of prospective partnering is media arts, an interdisciplinary field where art, science and engineering intersect. At Disney a group called Imagineering incorporates these disciplines and more. And one of the Imagineers is College of Architecture and Environmental Design alum **Jeff Webb (CM '80)**, vice president for estimating.

“I very much take that learn-by-doing philosophy at Cal Poly and carry it through to the things I do every day. You don't get better by doing the same things over and over again. You get better by stretching yourself,” said Webb, whose stretches often start from sketches, including one roughed onto a tablecloth which eventually was incorporated into a major project.

In April, several Cal Poly representatives lunched with Webb and a group of some 30 other Cal Poly alumni at Disney offices in Burbank. Representing degrees in majors from almost every college at Cal Poly, the alumni are creating a new version of mustang magic, across an array of Disney companies and groups.

At the meeting, College of Liberal Arts Professor David Gillette – who holds degrees in creative writing and film/broadcast – talked shop with the Cal Poly alumni. He explained his involvement in a project called “Intimate Transactions,” a futuristic interactive electronic art work that will be the only exhibit of its kind featured at the Beijing Olympics this summer.

In return, Gillette was invited to attend a sneak preview of Disney's new Blu-Ray version of Sleeping Beauty in Los Angeles to mark the 50th Anniversary of the classic Disney film. He is getting a first-hand look at this revolutionary technology before it comes onto the market in October. The new BD Live technology will enable viewers to chat, video stream, shop online, play



Jeff Webb (Photo Courtesy of Walt Disney Imagineering)

games and more from the comfort of their living rooms.

The bond between Disney and Cal Poly was further strengthened with the appointment of alum **Lisa Haines (POLS '89)** as vice president for communications in the Worldwide Public Affairs Department for Walt Disney Parks and Resorts. In this role, she works with Disney parks around the world – from Anaheim and Orlando to Tokyo and Paris – as well as with the cruise line and vacation club businesses.

A political science major at Cal Poly, Haines worked for a Congressman after graduation, which led to an opportunity with a PR agency several years later. “I essentially learned by doing and moved up in my career. I worked hard, made a good name for myself in the communications field, and eventually landed at Disney,” she explained.

With so many alumni and interns working at Disney, as well as numerous areas of mutual interest, the potential for teaming up is limited only by imagination. Who knows, maybe there's even an honorary degree in Mickey Mouse's future. □

YOUR DREAMS COME TRUE

DOZENS OF CAL POLY ALUMNI are enjoying a career with Disney. Cal Poly Magazine recently asked how their learn-by-doing education prepared them for career challenges and success, what they enjoy about their jobs, and – in a lighter vein – what their favorite Disney attractions are or what characters they would like to be. Here are reflections on Cal Poly and Disney from some of them:

Eric Merz (ARCE '97) Project Manager, New Technology Group/Disney Cruise Line: ...learned how to roll up my sleeves at Cal Poly ... love coming up with exciting new ideas to wow our guests...Disney has the most talented, intelligent, can-do people...only other place I've been

*Like a bolt out of the blue
Fate steps in and sees you through
When you wish upon a star
Your dreams come true.*

— “When You Wish Upon A Star,” *Pinocchio*, 1940

with that kind of spirit is Cal Poly ...The Haunted Mansion, as a kid, I never understood how all that stuff fit into that little house ... now I know how it all works and it's even more impressive.

Janet T. Trumbo (REC '93) Project Coordinator, Walt Disney Imagineering Resort Development: ...all the hands-on courses and all the speaking/presentations gave me the wherewithal to jump right into any role ...being the VIP/Executive manager for Disneyland's 50th Anniversary Celebration was my toughest challenge and my most memorable experience ... probably Maleficent (evil fairy from Sleeping Beauty), you need people like me to make other people look good.



(R-L) Richard Taggart with wife Sophie and daughter Christina

Andrew A. Sanchez (ARCH '94), Principal Show Set Designer, Walt Disney Imagineering: ...best preparation came from group projects at Cal Poly ... learning to work in groups is tantamount to success here at Imagineering ...what makes my job so memorable is seeing my sons' expressions after they have been on an attraction I worked on.

Kree Lindsay (REC '94) Stage manager, Guest Talent Programs, Entertainment Operations: ... creating a vision and taking it one step beyond, looking for that extra mile ... served on the Dream Squad, picking up complete strangers at the gate and helping them experience magic ... "driving" the Mark Twain riverboat ... Walt Disney sometimes slept in the Captain's Quarters on the boat when he had a late night ...I feel his presence there and love it ... I must have Pixie Dust in my head.

Greg S. Kadorian (EL '75) Technical Director of Audio/Video Engineering, Walt Disney Imagineering: ... had no idea what I wanted to do until I learned about the Audio Engineering Society at Cal Poly ... reward now is seeing families enjoy the results of our hard work, smiling ear to ear... Donald Duck, that way people would expect tirades.

Andrea M. Rivas (CM '07) Associate Project Manager, Facility Asset Management, Disneyland Resort: ...so many opportunities at Cal Poly to develop leadership skills...now I manage a small number of capital improvement projects throughout the resort ... assist seasoned project managers but also enjoy running my own projects...Disney has given me a huge amount of responsibility, rare for a recent grad ... always wanted to be Ariel (The Little Mermaid), not just because she has red hair like me but she is curious, independent and a little rebellious.

James Klepper (EE '03) Electronics Engineer, Walt Disney Imagineering: ... learn by doing and the confidence you get from actually accomplishing something, like the Cal Poly Rose Parade Float ... applying technical expertise to the pursuit of making people happy ... Enchanted Tiki Room because it paved the way for our more ambitious Audio-Animatronics shows.

Jill Crothers (BUS '78) Director, HR Business Partner, Disney ABC Media

Networks: ... had a well-rounded business education at Cal Poly ...small classroom environment, senior project, management club activities ... most memorable challenge was a Disney enterprise-wide project to convert our finance/payroll/hr systems, which gave me broad exposure to businesses and people I would not have met otherwise ... Soarin' Over California in Disney's California Adventure Park is a great escape.

Eric L. Jost (ET '90) Project Planner, Walt Disney Imagineering: ...Cal Poly drilled problem solving as the engineering fundamental ...planning theme parks is a continuous problem-solving exercise ...most memorable opportunity was living and working in Hong Kong during development of Hong Kong Disneyland.

Kara Honeycutt (BUS '05) Senior Financial Analyst, Walt Disney Imagineering: ... as a business major, I had a lot of group projects which required me to work with people of all backgrounds and work styles, exactly what I do every day now ... I lead the intern recruitment process and always come to Cal Poly ... manager of our internal Web site and captain of our softball team ... Flk from a bug's life because he has such a positive attitude and pushes for change.

Steven Dahl (IE '92) Process Integration, Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment: ... the most valuable skill learned at Cal Poly was problem solving ... now heavily focused on business transformation efforts associated with consolidating our North American and international home entertainment divisions ... never a dull day, great people, dynamic market to be in right now ... most memorable experience was when another employee was killed in a car accident ... funeral was incredibly moving, with perhaps 2,000 people, many dressed in their backstage uniforms, as a show of friendship to his family since he was such a well-liked cast member.

Julie M. Bush (NRM '80) Principal Landscape Architect, Walt Disney Imagineering: ... my Cal Poly Natural Resource Management degree gave me a great background working with the environment... later did landscape architecture program at UC Irvine but the NRM makes me a better landscape architect ... challenging work now because of the fast pace of our projects ... often we build in record time, during nights, when the park is closed ... the thing I love most is seeing how the guests love the work ... very rewarding to see my designs built and appreciated.

Tony Colon (ART '94) Manager, Disney Consumer Products-Branding: ... learned by doing at Cal Poly drawing for the Mustang Daily, getting involved in I Madonnari, essentially getting my hands onto any local design projects ... toughest challenge now is working shoulder to shoulder with the most talented and fun group of people in the world and trying to call it work ...most memorable moment was sitting in the same room with John Lasseter (the chief creative officer at Pixar and Walt Disney Animation Studios, and Principal Creative Advisor for Walt Disney Imagineering) talking about products for an upcoming Disney/Pixar film ...Luigi from Cars because of the passion he has for his craft.