

Names for Fame

HIST 303 Research and Writing Seminar in History: Cal Poly History Project

Presented to

the course instructor Professor Andrew Morris

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

A Course Taken in Partial Fulfillment of My Bachelor of Science Degree in History

by

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March 2016 Tamiko Cavey

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HIST 303-01

10 March 2016

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Introduction

It is a common practice to name a university's buildings, fields, and monuments after its past presidents, prominent administrators, or gracious donors. Starting from the school's earliest days as a two-year vocational institution and continuing today as a four-year state university, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo frequently named buildings after notable individuals. But what distinguishes these certain people to be recognized with their name on a lasting artifact of this prestigious school? And how does the naming process operate? This paper explores why specific administrators and faculty between 1928-1988 were commemorated with their names on buildings at Cal Poly, while the most recent name additions from 1996-2004 were all millionaire sponsors. This will lead to a discussion of how policies on the naming of buildings at Cal Poly have been altered over time. By examining the reasons for the names behind Cal Poly's edifices, I hope to expose the recent growing role of donors in financing schools. This issue is important in the overall history of why university funding has recently changed from state to private support, and how Cal Poly has survived this economic and political change.

Nonpartisan researchers of federal and state fiscal policies from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the Public Policy Institute of California have studied trends over time in state allocations towards higher education. These trends in funding were attributed to several possible factors, including slow recovery from the recessions in the early 2000s and 2007, and the increase of costs and expenditures for colleges in contrast to the decrease of proceeds for

them.¹ By studying how money issues in the state began, we can determine how other sources of revenue must rise to compensate. As Bruce Speck asserted in his 2010 article, “The Growing Role of Private Giving in Financing the Modern University,” the present challenge in higher education is to develop a new paradigm for funding — charitable donations are in this realm of other sources increasingly used.² In addition, it is valuable to investigate donors’ reasons for giving, and how these attitudes are now carefully observed by colleges. For the purpose of this paper in relation to Cal Poly’s history, we will focus more on non-alumni individuals’ motivations — rather than those of alumni, foundations, or corporations. In the *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, Ying Liu has hypothesized that determinants of nonalumni private giving stem from the amount of state appropriations to schools, and the quality of the university they may donate to.³ Similarly, Larry L. Leslie and Garey Ramey in their article from the *Journal of Higher Education* concentrated on how an institution’s quality, need rationale, and impact on its region were the most influential factors for donor contributions.⁴ Thus, through combining Cal Poly’s history of naming buildings and scholarly research on higher education financial support, I argue that policies for naming campus facilities have become increasingly stringent since the 1990s and based on private sponsors because of the emphasis on the need for continuous funding towards universities.

¹ Michael Mitchell, Vincent Palacios, and Michael Leachman, “States Are Still Funding Higher Education Below Pre-Recession Levels,” *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, May 1, 2014, accessed February 11, 2016, <http://www.cbpp.org/research/states-are-still-funding-higher-education-below-pre-recession-levels>.

² Bruce W. Speck, “The Growing Role of Private Giving in Financing the Modern University,” *New Directions for Higher Education*, no. 149, Spring 2010, accessed January 30, 2016, 7.

³ Ying Liu, “Determinants of Private Giving to Public Colleges and Universities,” *International Journal of Educational Advancement* 6, no. 2 (February 1, 2006), accessed January 31, 2016, 121.

⁴ Larry Leslie, and Garey Ramey, “Donor Behavior and Voluntary Support for Higher Education Institutions,” *The Journal of Higher Education* 59, no. 2 (March 1988), accessed January 31, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1981689>, 119.

Cal Poly Buildings Named After Influential Individuals

At Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Benjamin Crandall, Walter F. Dexter, and Robert Mott are familiar names to most students. Each of them had a building named after them on campus, they were all past leaders with instrumental roles in Cal Poly's development as a school, and finally, each one's impact was specifically why their names were chosen to be forever commemorated. One of the first buildings to be labeled at Cal Poly was Crandall Gymnasium in 1928, named after the school president at the time, Benjamin Crandall. In his short presidency from 1924-1933, Crandall was well-liked by students and staff and had a guiding presence over both Cal Poly's academics and social spirit as shown in the student run newspaper, *The Polygram*. In 1926, he attended the Conference of the Junior Colleges of California, representing Cal Poly as an important piece within a student's college journey.⁵ By joining the Junior College Division, Crandall provided opportunities for students "who were not qualified or did not intend to take academics at the university level" by offering this unique two year education in vocational training.⁶ The president also encouraged teaching styles at Cal Poly that are still practiced today, such as the discussion method and student projects. Crandall's positive outlook towards discussion-based classes was because it promoted a "better feeling between teacher and student, and between students themselves" and was ideal for small class sizes, which is something Cal Poly has always been known for advocating.⁷ In addition, Crandall broadened the curriculum through establishing required agricultural projects, which formed the basis for today's senior projects. Within social aspects, he encouraged participation in campus clubs and fostered close

⁵ "Dr. Crandall at Conference," *The Polygram* (San Luis Obispo), October 14, 1926, XII ed., sec.2, accessed February 19, 2016, Cal Poly University Archives.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

relationships with students through hosting private events such as “Get-Acquainted” parties and Thanksgiving dinners.⁸ His “penalty of being popular” allowed him to create a strong first impact on a still fairly new university.⁹ Crandall’s influence on student life in both the academic and social scope was plenty reason for faculty to give his name a permanent residence on a campus building.

Walter F. Dexter is another leader who was awarded with a building for greatly contributing to Cal Poly, though he was not immediately affiliated with the school; rather, he was state superintendent of public instruction from 1937 until his death in 1945.¹⁰ Ever since Cal Poly’s beginning, the library had always been a small space integrated into other structures, such as the Administration Building, Science Building, or Anderson Hall.¹¹ But with Dexter’s assistance to President Julian McPhee in gaining approval and state funding, Poly’s first library as its own building was constructed in 1949.¹² At the cornerstone laying ceremony, several state senators commented on how it stood as “a symbol for other schools” and served as an indispensable resource for the engineering and agriculture students.¹³ Another improvement

⁸ “Open Air Assembly,” *The Polygram* (San Luis Obispo), December 11, 1924, X ed., sec. 6, accessed February 20, 2016, Cal Poly University Archives.

⁹ “Doctor Crandall Favors Discussion Method,” *The Polygram* (San Luis Obispo), September 23, 1927, XIII ed., sec. 1, accessed February 19, 2016, Cal Poly University Archives.

¹⁰ “Cornerstone to Be Laid; State Board to Attend,” *El Mustang* (San Luis Obispo), October 8, 1948, 9th ed., sec. 4, page 2, accessed January 26, 2016. Cal Poly University Archives.

¹¹ Miguel Ortiz, “Library Has Come a Long Way from ’03,” *Mustang Daily* (San Luis Obispo), Building Data Sheets, Cal Poly University Archives.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ “‘Splendid Advancement’ Marked by Laying of Library Cornerstone,” *El Mustang* (San Luis Obispo), October 22, 1948, 9th ed., sec. 6, page 1, accessed February 23, 2016, Cal Poly University Archives.

Dexter made was gain collegiate status for Cal Poly in 1940.¹⁴ This meant that the school was no longer a Junior Technical College that only offered transfer courses to the Universities of California; it could now grant its own baccalaureate degrees, which was a significant advantage for graduates to be competitive in the job market.¹⁵ Cal Poly's growth as a higher education institution — one with better facilities and greater prestige — was made possible through Dexter's efforts. He unfortunately died before he could see a finished product, but his crucial role in establishing the desperately needed new library for the most recent upgraded four-year university would not go unacknowledged. For his contributions, President McPhee himself chose to honor him through the building's title of Walter F. Dexter Memorial Library.

A final influential figure at Cal Poly was Robert Mott, commemorated through Mott Gymnasium by the Academic Senate in 1988, due to his expansion of the Physical Education Department. As soon as he started working at Cal Poly in 1946, he created the P.E. department himself and became department head. From there, he generated fast progress and set an example for other schools. Mott instituted summer Physical Education and Coaching Workshops which brought statewide recognition to the university, and in 1987, the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports presented Cal Poly with its Distinguished Service Award.¹⁶ These summer workshops had "consistent high attendance" and spread knowledge potentially to educators all across California.¹⁷ To this day, they are still hosted by the Kinesiology Department and attract

¹⁴ *Cal Poly: The First Hundred Years* (San Luis Obispo: Robert E. Kennedy Library, California Polytechnic State University, 2001), 67.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 51.

¹⁶ Academic Senate Resolution on Renaming of Mott Gym, September 29, 1987, Robert Mott Vertical File, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA, 2.

¹⁷ Stu Chesnut to Larry Voss, September 21, 1988, Robert Mott Vertical File, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA, 1.

hundreds of teachers to participate. Thus, for laying down the foundation of Cal Poly physical education, the Academic Senate acknowledged Mott's accomplishments by constructing a new gymnasium (separate from Crandall Gym) and naming it Mott Gym. But Mott's impact was not solely confined to Cal Poly or California colleges; he was also known as a physical fitness ambassador internationally. He was involved multiple times in the U.S. State Department programs in Zambia, Uganda, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia to attend seminars with prominent sports specialists and train teachers in physical education.¹⁸ His contributions to overseas organizations was admirable in an advancing field of study and over the years, brought further recognition to Cal Poly, helping develop it into an esteemed university. The gymnasium was named for Mott as a constant and permanent way of commending him for his lasting effect on Cal Poly.

These three men are examples of people who came before the time period in higher education when money took precedence in earning someone a title on a school building. They were personable and well-known on campus, and through their own leadership had an immediate, firsthand effect on how Cal Poly advanced to be more competitive and reputable among the CSUs. Because state funding for colleges was higher before the 1990s, Cal Poly had the freedom to choose the building names out of respect for those, like Crandall, Dexter, and Mott, who devoted so much of their own time and energy to benefiting the institution. Giving building titles out of obligation to those who assisted funding only became normal when universities needed the extra help because the state retracted its support.

¹⁸ *Mott Returns to Africa as P.E. Sports Specialist*, San Luis Obispo, 1969, Cal Poly Reports, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA, 7.

Cal Poly Buildings Named After Rich Donors

Starting in the 1990s, the most common way to receive one's name on a building was to donate a large sum of money: Christopher Cohan, Paul Orfalea, and alumnus Joseph Cotchett are examples from this more recent system of naming edifices. Christopher Cohan was president of Sonic Communications and former owner of the Golden State Warriors.¹⁹ He resided in San Luis Obispo, but had no affiliation to Cal Poly until 1990, when he made a donation of \$2.1 million for the construction of the new Performing Arts Center — the largest gift out of the \$4.6 million total.²⁰ Consequently, in 1996, in appreciation for his donation, the theater was named after him as the Christopher Cohan Performing Arts Center. The same story followed the naming process for Paul Orfalea, founder of Kinko's. After a campus visit in 2000, Orfalea was so impressed by Cal Poly's unique learn-by-doing philosophy, he simply became inspired to donate, even though, like Cohan, he had no previous relationship to the university.²¹ He gave the largest gift of \$15 million securities ever made to Cal Poly.²² One year later, the business college was voted unanimously to be renamed the Orfalea College of Business in acknowledgement of his great gift.²³ Lastly, in 2004, Cal Poly alumnus Joseph Cotchett, "one of the best trial lawyers in the nation" and "defender of the less fortunate and crusader for ethics in the legal profession" was honored with the university's renaming of its landmark "clock tower" building to be called the

¹⁹ "Christopher Cohan Center," Performing Arts Center San Luis Obispo, accessed March 9, 2016, http://www.pacslo.org/calendar/venue/christopher_cohan_center.

²⁰ Cal Poly Major Buildings Named After Individuals, June 14, 1998, Building Data Sheets, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA, 1.

²¹ "Private Support for Cal Poly: Did You Know?" Giving: Supporting the Future of Learn by Doing, 2013, accessed March 11, 2016, <http://giving.calpoly.edu/student-didyouknow.html>.

²² "'Bootstrapping' Entrepreneurship at Cal Poly," *Cal Poly Magazine*, Fall 2001: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 28, 2.

²³ *Ibid.*

Cotchett Education Building.²⁴ With a long distinguished history of community and civic involvement, he donated with a goal “...to help others less fortunate in the inner cities of our state to realize their potential as productive citizens.”²⁵ Their gift of \$7 million went to support science and mathematics teacher education initiatives through the University Center for Teacher Education and the College of Science and Mathematics.²⁶ These three benefactors, whether directly related to Cal Poly or not, were key factors in the college’s expansion and deserved to be awarded with their name on a campus structure for their generosity. However, the procedures by which naming such buildings takes place have changed dramatically over time.

The Building Naming Process

Cal Poly’s administrative rules progressed over the 60 years between Crandall and Mott’s naming ceremonies. The school was at such an early stage during Crandall’s presidency, there were not any specific procedures in place for naming buildings; the small number of faculty was the body that approved names. For the gym, “Crandall Gymnasium” won with a vote of 16, compared to the other votes of 4 for “Crandall Hall,” 2 for “Polytechnic Hall,” and 1 for “Poly Gymnasium.”²⁷ The same newspaper article with Crandall’s name announcement also reported the voting results for the names of the Electrical Engineering building and a new college dorm. This naming method was very different than when Walter F. Dexter Memorial Library was labeled around the 1950s, the same time the policy for naming California State College buildings

²⁴ “Destination > Opportunity,” *Cal Poly Magazine*, July 2004: Vol. 8: Iss. 2, Article 4, 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ “New Poly Buildings Named by Faculty,” *The Polygram* (San Luis Obispo), March 23, 1928, 13 ed., sec. 14, page 1, accessed January 27, 2016, Cal Poly University Archives.

was established by the State Board of Education.²⁸ The Board's guidelines limited building identification to either honor a deceased person, designate the function of the facility, reflect natural and geographical features, or display a traditional theme of a college.²⁹ Before the name verdict went to the Board however, the Campus Planning Committee, consisting of students, faculty, staff, and administrative representatives, decided Cal Poly's final recommendation.³⁰ From the 1950s onwards, there was a clear and organized system in place for how names should be decided, which led to a huge reorganization of the relationship between school and state. When universities just started emerging, they had a lot of independence in decision-making, but as more were established, a governing body was necessary to manage their affairs. The local democratic system was replaced by one that was more bureaucratic — one that standardized methods for administrative tasks, such as naming buildings, and was comprised of different levels of powers. The bureaucracy generally made procedures more complicated because the process of getting a building named took longer due to more people being involved and measures requiring approval multiple times — faculty input no longer decided immediately. This created a disconnection between the decision-makers and the school because a Board of officials was not necessarily “in-touch” with Cal Poly's position in the matter nor did it understand the unique significance a certain name may hold for the individual university.

By the time Mott Athletic Center was finished in 1988, the system was even more formalized. Correspondences in 1942 between President McPhee and administrators years before a conclusion was met showed their opinions of possible people to name the gym after and the

²⁸ “Kennedy Explains Naming Policy, Computers,” *Mustang Daily* (San Luis Obispo), January 9, 1970, 32 ed., sec. 22, page 3, accessed January 26, 2016, Cal Poly University Archives.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

careful consideration it would require to choose “without stirring up a lot of trouble.”³¹ In 1976, there was a short document expressing the need for consultation on the naming of buildings which resolved that “the President be urged to consult with the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate before the selection of any such name.”³² So, when the Physical Education and Recreational Administration Department submitted their resolution, which listed all of Mott’s qualifications and accomplishments as the reasons for their choice for Mott to be the honoree, the Academic Senate of Cal Poly approved it unanimously.³³ Soon after Mott was honored, more distinct rules were established in the 1990 Campus Administrative Manual under “Memorials and Naming of Buildings,” this time containing notes on instances that include gifts of money given — a turning point in college finances.³⁴ Presently, Cal Poly publicizes its University Advancement organization in its Interim and Final Policies online. It details all kinds of rules from the types of buildings and spaces to be named, alumni outreach, annual giving, and criteria for acceptance of different types of gifts from cash to securities to real estate.³⁵ The 1990s was the start of stricter policies for naming campus facilities and reflected the new need for affluent supporters.

³¹ George P. Couper to Julian A. McPhee, August 10, 1942, Robert Mott Vertical File, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA.

³² Academic Senate Resolution on the Naming of Buildings, April 27, 1976, Building Data Sheets, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA.

³³ Academic Senate Resolution on Renaming of Mott Gym, September 29, 1987, Robert Mott Vertical File, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA.

³⁴ Memorials and Naming of Buildings, *Campus Administrative Manual*, August 1990, University Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, CA, 237.

³⁵ “Interim and Final Policies,” Campus Administrative Policies, November 6, 2015, accessed March 11, 2016, <http://policy.calpoly.edu/cap/finalTOC.htm>.

This revision of rules to include monetary gifts can be linked to how universities' general attitude towards donors have changed. Soliciting private funds has become more aggressive and insistent. The official CSU mandates outline the universities' present expectations by dividing the instructions of gift acceptance for "when a donor gift is involved" and "in a rare instance, when no donor gift is involved."³⁶ The language used is indicative of the stance towards how monetary donations are presumed to be received in every situation, and when they are not, how it appears to be disapproved of. It even suggests that no gift is of no use — a reflection of the universities' money-centric view. Policies for all the state colleges revolve around firm administration and procedures to approach naming facilities, properties, academic entities, and related areas.³⁷ They expect nothing less than an amount in millions to warrant a thank you in the form of a commemorated building. Thus, regardless of a donor's relation to the school, higher education institutions quickly changed to prioritizing those who reflected big money instead of naming buildings after a person's qualifications.

One cause for the different outlook on patron support was the financial problems put upon California schools. After recessions in the 1990s and 2000s, the state and federal governments had a slow recovery in maintaining higher education. Their reduced support left UCs and CSUs with two options to make up the deficit: cutting expenses and/or finding additional funding — the latter of which this essay is focused on.³⁸ Most sources agreed that the easiest way to raise additional funding was to increase student tuition: nationally, in 1988, public colleges received 3.2 times as much in revenue from state and local governments as they did from students, but

³⁶ "Policy and Procedures on Naming California State University Facilities and Properties," ICSUAM 9019, July 7, 1999, accessed February 22, 2016, <http://www.calstate.edu/cpdc/executive/PolNameFac.pdf>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Johnson, Cook, Murphy, and Weston, "Higher Education in California," http://www.ppic.org/main/publication_quick.asp?i=1119.

now receive about 1.1 times as much.³⁹ Besides unpopular tuition spikes, the crucial need for money put more emphasis on collecting donations to raise funds for a university's budget — donations particularly for facilities. Donors began to fuel construction for buildings, and in turn, the desire to receive recognition for buildings fueled donations. This new relationship between schools and possible benefactors took shape.

By learning the main determinant of private giving, university policies shifted to accommodate donors' individual preferences. The primary motive behind what school non-alumni donate to depends on how they view an institution's overall quality. In one study, it was suggested that “most donors like to give to thriving institutions that already are targets of public philanthropy” — rather than not as popular, lesser-known schools — based on how institutional quality was defined as expenditures per student and past fund-raising success as shown in endowment.⁴⁰ Essentially, a university's quality is found in its ability to convert contributions into educational benefits.⁴¹ When someone donates to improve the quality of education students receive, they help produce better-quality education for society as a whole, thus maximizing the donor's own well-being too. This is why some benefactors prefer donating locally to improve the area they actually live in, like Christopher Cohan. As a resident of San Luis Obispo for a long time, his money went to a Performing Arts Center — a campus facility that the whole community could also utilize. The overall scale of the institutional impact on the region effects contributor behavior. Donors want to give to places that show they are producing results with the money they have been handed. Colleges use these studied trends on private giving to do

³⁹ Mitchell, Palacios, and Leachman, “States Are Still Funding,” <http://www.cbpp.org/research/states-are-still-funding-higher-education-below-pre-recession-levels>.

⁴⁰ Liu, “Determinants of Private Giving,” 124.

⁴¹ Leslie and Ramey, “Donor Behavior and Voluntary Support,” 119.

everything in their power to appeal to potential sponsors as money continuously stays in high demand.

Cal Poly has some of its own tactics for bringing in donors through a Department of Advancement that handles all gifts to the university. It motivates giving through advertising student successes to boost prestige and allowing many different options in donating. As previously stated, non-alumni are more likely to give to colleges that prove their money is put to good use. Cal Poly emphasizes this point through showcasing student achievements in professional competitions and using particular language to describe the students such as “academically motivated” and “innovative leaders” to prompt donations.⁴² Simple instructions and easy access to staff who will “help find the best fit for you” makes the process straightforward to either give a little online, or make long-term investments through estates, endowed gifts, or wills and bequests.⁴³ The system tries to make people feel valued and important, however I believe it sounds more like propaganda than anything. A pamphlet titled “Visions We Share” looks innocent enough advising estate planning: why it is important and how to set goals. But slyly, on the back of the document, after teaching the general information, it incorporates the section “How to include Cal Poly in Your Will.” While the necessity of donations is clearly important, the way they are solicited has become overbearing, and can even appear distasteful. Persistent desperate times in educational funding show the extreme lengths schools will go to get every dollar.

⁴² “Keep Cal Poly Ahead of the Curve,” Why Give, 2013, accessed March 11, 2016, <http://giving.calpoly.edu/why.html>.

⁴³ “Ways to Give,” Giving: Supporting the Future of Learn by Doing, 2013, accessed March 11, 2016, <http://giving.calpoly.edu/waystogive.html>.

Conclusion

Cal Poly following these trends of modified rules and means of raising money reflects the overall transformation of the CSU network. Back in 1960, when control of state colleges was transferred from the State Board of Education to the Board of Trustees — which later became the CSU system — President Robert E. Kennedy expressed his concerns in becoming just a small component of a broad powerhouse stating: “I still do not trust the Trustees nor a governor’s office to give the kind of independence to one campus that we had enjoyed in the past.”⁴⁴ For the most part, Kennedy’s worries met expectation; schools did lose their power and uniqueness. It was the uniformity that constricted previously independent practices, like naming buildings, and gave much more decision-making duties to the many committees of the state education administration. This systematization caused universities to adhere to stricter policies and a more rigorous process for naming campus facilities and forced them to focus on rewarding donors.

Moreover, with little chance that the shift on the CSUs’ need for constant funding will lessen, there is always a question of how future facilities and renovated ones will be named. Currently, Cal Poly is in the process of constructing new dormitories and upgrading the Julian McPhee University Union. Any donations to either of these projects could easily affect how they are named: the dorms may not necessarily follow the existing theme of geographical features if there is an important sponsor involved, and the past president the UU was named for originally could be replaced by whoever provides the money for the renovations. Alternatively, another possibility for deciding the names may be how the newest building — the Warren J. Baker Center for Science and Mathematics, finished in 2013 — combined the old and new methods.

⁴⁴ Robert E. Kennedy, *Learn By Doing: Memoirs of a University President: A Personal Journey with the Seventh President of California Polytechnic State University*, San Luis Obispo: California Polytechnic State University, 2001, 306.

The Baker Center, envisioned and produced by the Dean of the College of Science and Mathematics, Phil Bailey, was titled after Cal Poly's eighth president and made possible by \$19 million in private donations.⁴⁵ With the case of this building, honoring significant members of the Cal Poly community without the pressure of crediting donors for their assistance was an ideal resolution. Future name decisions may hold more instances like this if the complex relationship between an individual school, the donor(s), and the CSU hierarchy is not dominated by one voice.

⁴⁵ Laura Pezzini, "Inside Area 52," *Mustang News*, January 29, 2013, accessed January 25, 2016, <http://mustangnews.net/area-52-to-open-in-fall/>.

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