The Caltech Associates Making Science More Accessible

The members of the Caltech Associates have played a vital role in the life of the Institute since the organization's founding 92 years ago. Their annual membership dollars provide unrestricted support for faculty, students, and researchers to create new knowledge, lead innovation, and shape a better future for us all.

The past few years have been transformative for the Associates. ENGenious sat down with Executive Director Catherine Reeves and Associate Director Nicola Wilkins-Miller to better understand where the organization has been and where it's going.

The story of the Caltech Associates began when cofounders George Ellery Hale, Robert Millikan, and Arthur Noves wanted to build an academic institution to rival prominent East Coast universities such as MIT. Millikan, with the help of Caltech Trustee Henry Robinson, sought 100 members of the greater Pasadena community to pledge \$1,000 a year for 10 years to build this emerging scientific center. "As a thank-you to these investors," explains Reeves, "a series of Associates dinners that featured distinguished scientists and cultural leaders were organized. In just a year, the goal of 100 Associates was reached, and Henry Huntington, who was one of them, invited the Associates to hold their first meeting at his home-the now-famous Huntington Library. A few years later, thanks to two of the Associates' founding members, Mr. and Mrs. Allan C. Balch, the ornate Athenaeum was built to create a gathering place for Caltech faculty and Associates members. The first speaker in the Athenaeum's Hall of

Associates was visiting professor Albert Einstein. Today, Millikan and Einstein are memorialized at the Athenaeum with guest rooms named in their honor."

The Associates program continues to use the same basic model. In recent years, however, events organized by the Associates have expanded from individual faculty presentations to panels that may also include students and/or alumni with expertise in particular fields. For example, Associates recently heard from EAS faculty members Aaron Ames, Anima Anandkumar, Soon-Jo Chung, and Yisong Yue-who are making technological leaps and shaping our autonomous future—at a panel discussion called "Robots, Drones, and Machine Learning."

Approximately 25 percent of Associates members are alumni, while the remaining 75 percent are primarily non-alumni who live in the greater Pasadena region. Wilkins-Miller notes that being part of the Associates is a unique experience, one that offers a combination of travel, networking, mentorship, and the opportunity to connect on a deeper level with Caltech's dynamic, multifaceted community. Associates events and activities cover a range of regions and relevant topics, from finance and gene editing for East Coast members to



Left to right: Jessica Lee, Lelia Marshall, Nicola Wilkins-Miller, Catherine Reeves, and Cathy Axibal-Cordero

startups, technology, and Mars 2020 for those in Northern California. There are chapters in New York City, Northern California, West L.A., and Orange County in addition to the Pasadena campus. The level of engagement varies in these chapters; alumni members, alongside members of the community, can serve on the Associates board and influence program development and travel ideas.

The Associates partnered with the Alumni Association on a recent trip to the Galápagos Islands—a prime example

of how the organization integrates faculty, alumni, and the broader community. Rob Phillips, Caltech's Fred and Nancy Morris Professor of Biophysics, Biology, and Physics, accompanied the group to illuminate the untouched landscapes and habitats of this legendary volcanic archipelago and share his expertise on island biogeography and paradoxes in animal evolution.

aims is to encourage lifelong learning in the Caltech community and to serve, as Wilkins-Miller put it, "as a portal for



Caltech Associates group at Bartolome, Galápagos Islands, August 2018

Among the organization's

the community to connect with the Institute"-especially since Caltech's small size allows for intimate interactions and an unusual degree of access to all Caltech offers. Membership isn't just for those who attended Caltech; it's open to anyone. "If you join the Associates, you become a donor," Reeves says. "You are investing in the future of the Institute." The Associates' philanthropic mission includes an increasing emphasis on funding student scholarships and graduate fellowships. They encourage the kind of interaction between faculty, students,



Panel discussion including Caltech professors Aaron Ames, Soon-Jo Chung, Yisong Yue, and Anima Anandkumar

alumni, and non-academic community members that can lead to interesting collaborations and research support.

The Associates' efforts are guided by the goal of making science more accessible through the discussions, networking events, and travel opportunities they organize for their members. Upcoming programs include a panel on what the future holds for Earth's climate with Tapio Schneider, Theodore Y. Wu Professor of Environmental Science and Engineering; as well as a dinner event with Yu-Chong Tai, Anna L. Rosen Professor of Electrical and Medical Engineering, which focuses on how Caltech's Andrew and Peggy Cherng Department of Medical Engineering is leading the way in designing systems for translational medicines, technology, and devices to be used now or in the near future by patients and doctors.

"Caltech has a Nobel Prizewinning history of leading at the forefront of scientific inquiry, from how atoms bond to advances in human genomics to detection of gravitational waves," says Associates board president Stephen Rogers. "Being a member of the Associates brings a person closer to those achievements. It promotes access to learning more about how science can positively affect the human condition. My family and I have been members for almost 30 years, and we continue to be impressed and amazed at the incredible research taking place here in Pasadena."

The Associates continue to create two-way opportunities for their members to play a vital role in the life of the Institute and for Caltech faculty and students to share their innovative work. "It's such a privilege to be able to give our faculty the opportunity to showcase

their research, their divisions, and the future as they see it," says Reeves, "and this kind of intimate conversation with our community often yields great benefits for all involved." Wilkins-Miller explains that "it is not unusual for an Associates member to attend a faculty talk, a lab tour, or an event and be inspired to give of their own time and resources." One such example is the support of mechanical engineering undergraduate student Hana Keller, who has received an Associatesfunded scholarship to work in the Advanced Mechanical Bipedal Experimental Robotics Laboratory with Professor Aaron Ames.

Top priorities for the Associates as the organization looks ahead to the next few years include improving and deepening the experience of members and amplifying efforts to showcase the transformative research being done at Caltech, such as work in EAS to make megacities more resilient.

Cathy Axibal-Cordero and Marisa Demers are Assistant Directors. Jessica Lee is Program Support and Production Coordinator. Lelia Marshall is Membership and Services Coordinator. Catherine Reeves is Executive Director. Nicola Wilkins-Miller is Associate Director.

Visit associates.caltech.edu to learn more, or email caltechassociates@caltech.edu to subscribe to the Associates mailing list.

Caltech's newest undergraduate residence, the Bechtel Residencenamed for Caltech life trustee Stephen D. Bechtel Jr. – officially opened its doors to students on Monday, September 17, 2018. Bechtel is a 211bed multi-use residence that houses undergraduates from all class levels along with two faculty-in-residence, a half-dozen graduate resident associates, and a residential life coordinator. This 95,000-square-foot residence has six distinct but interconnected structures arranged around an expansive interior courtyard that is designed to promote serendipitous interactions. The number of beds in Bechtel have made it possible for Caltech to offer all of its undergraduate students the opportunity to live on campus throughout all four years of their education.

For more information, visit www.studaff.caltech.edu/bechtel.





