

## USC Dornsife celebrates philanthropists whose major gift in 2011 named the college

*Trojans and trustees honor David and Dana Dornsife on the five-year anniversary of the largest single gift in USC's history*



USC President C. L. Max Nikias, his wife, Niki C. Nikias and USC Dornsife Dean Amber Miller with university supporters Dana and David Dornsife. *Photo by Steve Cohn*

By Darrin S. Joy

**Longtime USC supporters Dana and David** Dornsife were in attendance during the inauguration of USC President C. L. Max Nikias in the fall of 2010. As the names of each of the USC schools were announced, something caught their attention: Unlike nearly all of the others, the largest school in the university bore no namesake.

In that moment, a spark was lit within the Dornsifes, and less than six months later, the couple gave the largest single gift in USC's history to name the USC Dana

and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences.

On Nov. 3, USC Dornsife Board of Councilor members, supporters and faculty joined Nikias, Dean Amber Miller and USC trustees to recognize the Dornsifes and the milestones arising from their gift in the five years since.

### **Transforming the academic landscape**

During the event, which took place at the Four Seasons Hotel in Beverly Hills,

Nikias recalled the momentous nature of the Dornsifes' visionary act and how it has elevated the college since.

"Their remarkable gift did more than put a name on a building; it transformed USC's academic landscape," he said.

"It changed perceptions at USC, proving collaborative research can be a powerful catalyst for innovation to do social good," Nikias added. "It also allowed us to attract a world-class faculty through endowments, and world-class students

through scholarships.

“The Dornsifes’ message was clear to everyone at the college: ‘Your work matters.’”

USC Dornsife is the largest academic unit at USC, comprising about 8,500 students — a third of the university’s student body — studying 140 majors and minors among 37 departments and programs, Nikias noted, pointing out that 67 students have earned Fulbright fellowships since 2011.

USC Dornsife faculty includes four Nobel laureates, 13 National Academy of Sciences members, 23 American Academy of Arts and Sciences fellows, 35 National Endowment for the Humanities fellows and the most recent winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. The faculty has grown to 800 since 2011, with more than two dozen transformative faculty hires in that time, Nikias said.

### **Carrying the vision forward**

Miller, whom Nikias noted was among those transformative hires, took the helm of USC Dornsife earlier this year. Though she was at Columbia University when the Dornsifes made their gift, she said the importance did not escape her notice.

“At a time when many large gifts in academia were going to professional schools, athletic activities and incubators, the Dornsifes were making an extraordinary commitment to the fundamental building blocks of knowledge and discovery — the

letters, arts and sciences,” Miller said.

“The Dornsifes’ gift was a bold statement to the world that they believe there is great value in a university education that prepares students for more than a single career path; an education that prepares them to approach problems with reason and creativity; an education that prepares them to become leaders in most any endeavor.”

Miller also outlined her aim to build on the Dornsifes’ vision to advance the college as a leader among its peer institutions.

“Our aspiration in USC Dornsife is to achieve international preeminence in every one of our departments and programs. Our vision is to build a USC Dornsife that stands as a model for a 21st-century school of letters, arts and sciences.”

### **Dornsife family — Trojan Family**

The Dornsifes’ philanthropic support of USC began a generation ago. David Dornsife’s parents, Ester and Harold, were the lead donors for the Hedco Neurosciences Building, and they also gave to science education at the college.

Dana and David Dornsife have continued that tradition, endowing the Neuroscience Imaging Center and the Brain and Creativity Institute, both of which are housed in the Dornsife Neuroscience Pavilion. They also support the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West and established a fund for clinical research at the USC

Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center.

In recent years they have endowed several chairs and continued to build lasting relationships with faculty members throughout USC Dornsife.

“One of the things that has happened to us is the named chairs have not only been faculty at USC, but they’ve become Dornsife family friends,” said David Dornsife. “We look forward to coming down and visiting.”

Dana Dornsife expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to make a difference in students’ lives and prepare them for successful futures.

“How fortunate are we — how fortunate are all of us — to be so engaged with our students, to have positive influence on their extraordinary journey of discovery and to inspire them to be bold and to be self-assured as they navigate the complex labyrinth of life.

“Dave and I are so grateful and humbled to be part of this community that represents so much hope for our future. We are proud of what our name has come to signify. And let us be clear: We may have provided the spark, but all of you have carried the torch.”

She then called on USC Dornsife faculty, staff, students and supporters to continue the good works.

“Our job here is not done, and in fact, if we continue to do things right, it never should be,” she said.

“So let’s continue to fuel the fire together. Thank you. And Fight On!”