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Downings bring ideas to life with bequest

By *Liz Lent*, contributing writer

David Downing knows what can happen when good ideas come to fruition. In his 27 years at Oakland University, the **College of Arts and Sciences** dean has seen faculty and staff initiatives inspire everything from English as a second language programs to sign language interpretations of theatre. Helping great ideas grow into great programs was his prime motivation behind creating the Jane and David Downing Distinguished Program Funds Endowment.

"The faculty always come forward with really wonderful initiatives," Downing said. "We thought it would be great to have the resources available to fund these ideas."

He cites the Hispanic Outreach Program as one of those ideas. Established through CAS' existing Distinguished Programs Fund, the program offers free English as a second language training for Hispanic residents of nearby Pontiac, providing immigrants with the educational resources necessary to find jobs and flourish in the community.

Another initiative explored the power of language by bringing United States Poet Laureate Billy Collins to campus in 2002. Language also held center stage, literally, with an initiative that provided sign language performances of **Music, Theatre and Dance Department** performances.

The Downings wanted to establish a permanent endowment to support and expand what the Distinguished Programs Fund had started.

"We wanted to help fill in the gaps between finding an initiative and being able to make it happen," Downing said.

Once Downing and his wife made their decision to give, they moved quickly, hoping to perhaps inspire others to give.

"As we go into the capital campaign, it seemed important for leadership and faculty to visibly show support and make a gift," Downing said.

The process, he said, was an easy one. "We worked with development and legal and it was very easy to do."

The Downings hope that this fund will help bring good ideas to life for many years to come. And they hope other people will join in and support projects and programs that are important to them.

"It's very gratifying to know that future generations of faculty and students will have the resources available to them to do what they want to do," Downing said. "It's a really good feeling."

SUMMARY

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