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CONTACT:

Brenda Ortiz, University Communications

Office: 209-228-4203 | Cell: 209-628-8263 | Email: bortiz@ucmerced.edu

Local Businesswoman Donates to Shape Student Leaders

Margo Souza makes \$1 million gift to campus to motivate students to take initiative and become civic-minded leaders

MERCED, Calif. — Spurred by a gift from a prominent dairy woman, the University of California, Merced, announced plans today for a center to promote leadership qualities among its diverse student population.

Margo Souza, former president and CEO of Turlock's Circle H Dairy Ranch Inc., has pledged \$1 million to establish The Margo F. Souza Leadership Center — a multi-faceted leadership program — housed within UC Merced's Office of Student Life.

Quick Facts

- A \$1 million gift will help UC Merced produce ethical civic leaders of tomorrow.
- The Margo F. Souza Leadership Center offers a wide-range of leadership initiatives, including conferences and guest-speaker events.
- Margo Souza owned a 304-acre dairy ranch with more than 1,000 cows.

Souza, an alumna of Seattle University, said graduating from college has enriched her life immensely. Her passion for leadership and desire to help youth led her to donate to the newest UC campus. She believes the leadership center will be the catalyst to guide students — more than 60 percent who are the first in the family to earn a college degree — to become strong leaders and contributing members of society.

“We need to reinvent our future through the eyes of our youth,” said Souza. “Over time, this university will enhance and change many lives in the Central Valley.”

The leadership center will encompass a wide-range of campus leadership initiatives, including the Margo Souza Entrepreneur-in-Training Track, and the Mentorship and Celebration Lunch.

Programing will include conferences to foster the entrepreneurial spirit that is already embedded in the campus culture, including the Bobcat Leadership Series, the You See Leaders high school leadership program, and the campus's annual Student Leadership Conference, and the annual Leadership Awards Banquet.

"Ms. Souza's generous gift epitomizes her commitment to supporting and empowering students to become the next generation of leaders," Chancellor Dorothy Leland said.

"Serving as a business owner for nearly 30 years in a male-dominated industry, she exemplifies the true qualities of a leader. Her vision to help students discover and hone their entrepreneurial spirit will be carried out through this important center."

Although she lived on her family's dairy as a child, she was not involved in the business until she returned to California in 1984 after 24 years of nursing.

During her nearly 30 years in the dairy industry, Souza became a leader among entrepreneurs. In 2004, she was honored as an Outstanding Woman in Agriculture by the California Agricultural Leadership Foundation. She contributed to the book, "Million Dollar Conversations" and served on the California Milk Advisory Board. She is also known for her community involvement.

"I am extremely impressed with the positive attitude and entrepreneurial spirit that exists at UC Merced," Souza said. "I am deeply honored to be part of the UC Merced family."

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UC Merced opened Sept. 5, 2005, as the 10th campus in the University of California system and the first American doctoral research university of the 21st century. Situated near Yosemite National Park, the campus significantly expands access to the UC system for students throughout the state, with a special mission to increase college-going rates among students in the San Joaquin Valley. It also serves as a major base of advanced research, a model of sustainable design and construction, and a stimulus to economic growth and diversification throughout the region.

