

JAN & ESTHER STEARNS CREATE A NEW HOME FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

Photo by Esteban Robinson



"We are moved and humbled to be part of this innovative program. We think of all of the ACE Scholars as part of our family, and we are thrilled to partner with CSUSM to ensure that this good work continues for many generations to come."

- ESTHER STEARNS

Home to a one-of-a-kind program that provides comprehensive support to former foster youth pursuing their college degree, the new Jan and Esther Stearns Center for ACE Scholars officially opened its doors at a grand opening celebration on Feb. 10. In the fall, the Stearns gifted \$1 million to ACE Scholars Services—the largest donation in the program's history—to establish the center, as well as an endowment that will provide ongoing support.

"Very few people really understand the circumstances of young people who have been in foster care—but CSUSM gets it," said Esther Stearns, who became involved in the program five years ago after reading a news article about ACE in *U-T San Diego*. Stearns and her wife are longtime advocates for foster youth and have three adopted foster children.

A New Home and a Stronger Future

Located off Tukwut Courtyard in Craven Hall, the new center features a large study area outfitted with new computers, a state-of-the-art training room, program offices and a community resource office, as well as a spacious student lounge furnished by Jerome's Furniture. With the Stearns gift, CSUSM will have the capacity to grow the program to twice its current size, serving up to 100 students.

As more than 200 guests gathered for the dedication of the new center, the occasion was an emotional moment for President Haynes, who fought back tears twice as she thanked the Stearns for their generosity and shared commitment to former foster youth.

"Cal State San Marcos is fortunate to have two community-minded heroes that share our appreciation for our ACE Scholars," said Haynes. "We are so very proud to place their names on the

Center's wall and dedicate this new space in their honor."

Founded in 2007, ACE Scholars Services serves more former foster youth per capita than any other university in the U.S. and has an 80 percent student retention rate that exceeds the national average by 30 points. This May, the program will have 37 alumni.

"From our hearts, we want to thank Jan and Esther Stearns for what they have done to build our new home on campus," said ACE Scholar Karen Lopez, on behalf of her fellow scholars. "Without your help, devotion and support, many of us would not be in these promising places in our lives that we are today."

