The Value of Education

Richard Leza’s mother, Corina, treasured education, and her legacy to her 10 children was an opportunity to pursue higher education.

“The values that my mother instilled in me are what inspired me to establish four endowments at New Mexico State to benefit the College of Engineering,” Richard says.

“During my time at NMSU, financial assistance was not readily available to students,” he says. “I now want to relieve this financial burden from future students so they can concentrate on learning and, yes, have some social time, too.”

Richard, who graduated with a bachelor’s degree in civil engineering in 1973, grew up in Placitas, a colonia in Hatch, New Mexico. While attending NMSU, he worked a graveyard shift at White Sands Missile Range to support his wife, Cindy, and their son, Richard Jr.

“From a Latino who was dirt poor and learned in high school that he was gifted in math,” Leza said of himself, “I am now planning to make additional gifts to NMSU in honor of my wife, Cindy, and my mother, Corina, through my estate planning.”

Richard met Cindy after he moved to Los Angeles following his high school graduation. The couple married in 1967, and she has been by his side for more than 50 years. They will leave a legacy bound to impact many lives.

“NMSU is family,” he says. “I believe that endowments are a wonderful way to remember someone special while making sure your generosity will benefit NMSU students for years to come.” As a result of documenting their estate gift with the NMSU Foundation, the Lezas recently became members of The 1888 Society.

Now retired, Richard spent more than 40 years in public, private and nonprofit organizations and as an entrepreneur and a venture capitalist.

“Being able to leave an estate gift is very important to me,” he says. “I want to assist future students by continuing financial aid for students willing to achieve the impossible. I had to constantly worry about income while at NMSU, but I want students to concentrate on their education and not financial worries.”
The Value of Education

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In the fall of 2017, Richard established the Richard and Cynthia Leza Endowed Scholarship Honoring John Hernandez, former dean of the College of Engineering. Richard’s previous commitment to NMSU also includes the Richard L. Leza Endowment, Kenneth White Endowed Scholarship Fund and the Richard & Cindy Leza Library Acquisitions at NMSU.

“I strongly believe that NMSU gave me a strong foundation,” he says. “My professors, especially John Hernandez and Ken White, were always willing to listen to me and encourage me to accomplish my goals. In addition, I want to be known as the alumnus who dedicated his life to encouraging and supporting Latinos in STEM degrees.”

Let’s Have an Aggie Fireside Chat

Warm greetings from NMSU. With our global community affected by the specter of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are all doing our best to ensure our collective safety by following strict precautions, as directed by our health officials. Please know that our thoughts are with you and your families—and that the Aggie spirit is among us. My wife, Thelma, is a fourth-grade science teacher in Sunland Park, New Mexico, and we are both currently working out of our home here in El Paso, Texas.

I want you to know what I am seeing—from a safe distance—that’s happening in our Aggie community. Chancellor Arvizu and President Floros have worked tirelessly and boldly forged public-private partnerships to keep our students, faculty and staff safe at NMSU. During an extended two-week Spring Break, our faculty worked quickly and collaboratively to move all learning to online delivery, amazingly, so that our academic progress will continue. Indeed, the NMSU Foundation’s scholarships, professorships and chairs, funded by donors from all walks of life, continue to help the dreams of Aggies come true during times of greatest need.

What I have witnessed at NMSU and beyond is Aggies and friends of the university giving of their experience, strength and hope. Students with nowhere else to go are well cared for in their homes and dorms on campus. I heard about a professor who stopped her Jeep to give a ride to a single mom who was struggling during her long walk to buy food for her three children. Here in the Borderland, our first responders, health care providers and supply chain workers continue to show they are real heroes—and for their dedicated service, we are deeply grateful.

Perhaps a silver lining in these historic, uncertain times, is our Aggie family’s resolve to take courageous actions, as well as to perform untold simple acts of kindness. Life is slowing down, crowds are disappearing and we are hunkering down at home with our loved ones. Yet, in the humble spaces in between, we find time to ponder our humanity, focus on what really matters and create precious moments.

This spring, I had planned to be on the road to visit Aggies in the Heart of Texas. Instead, I’m following the example of President Roosevelt’s fireside radio chats during the Great Depression and WWII. I have had the pleasure of great conversations with folks by phone and email to check in on their well-being and to share Aggie stories new and old. I would be honored to have such a “Aggie Fireside Chat” with you!

Please take care,

Robert D. Peterson
Gift Planning Director, NMSU Foundation
plannedgiving@nmsu.edu | (800) 342-6678

For more information about how the NMSU Foundation is navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, visit support.nmsu.edu/covid-19

SUPPORT WHAT MATTERS MOST TO YOU

Like the Lezas, your future gift to the NMSU Foundation can be a meaningful way to show your gratitude for the education you received. Contact Robert Peterson at (800) 342-6678 or plannedgiving@nmsu.edu to learn about your giving options.
Breaking Down Barriers

Maria Guadalupe Carmona-Montalvo, a senior at New Mexico State University and a recipient of the Richard and Cynthia Leza Endowed Scholarship Honoring John Hernandez, began her formal education in South-Central Los Angeles. She is the fourth of five children and her family plays a huge role in her life. One of her earliest memories is sneaking away from home to go to her sister’s classroom.

“The teacher thought that it was cute that I, too, wanted to go to school, and he let me stay,” Maria says. “I was about three years old. I did not know then what I wanted to study, but I knew that I wanted to learn.”

Her lifelong desire for education is what led her to the NMSU community, where she is double-majoring in chemical engineering and biology with a minor in biomedical engineering.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic forced the New Mexico State University system to move classes online for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester, Maria commuted from Deming, New Mexico, to the Las Cruces campus every day—approximately 120 miles roundtrip. Deming is a city known to have one of the highest rates of homelessness among K-12 students in the nation. As a long-time displaced worker, Maria, too, faces housing insecurity and believes that, with a good education, she can transcend the environmental obstacles and challenges that she has faced.

“I want to give back to NMSU and all of the scholarship committees that continue to pull me back from homelessness,” she says. “The Richard and Cynthia Leza Endowed Scholarship Honoring John Hernandez allows me to continue on this journey. There is no other place that I would rather be than in a classroom or study room getting that much closer to graduation.”

Last year, Maria joined the American Institute of Chemical Engineers Executive Student Committee to ensure that all chemical engineering students get a quality and equitable education. She is also working on an inclusion program to open access to laboratory research for special needs students.
### Planned Giving:

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The 1888 Society recognizes individuals who have notified us that New Mexico State University is included in their estate plan as the beneficiary of a will, trust, life income gift, life insurance policy, retirement plan or other planned gifts.