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Orinda Resident Receives UC Berkeley's Top Honor

By Cathy Dausman



Barclay Simpson, of Orinda, was the 45th recipient of the Berkeley Medal. His award was presented by UC Berkeley Chancellor Robert Birgeneau during a Dec. 13 celebration for the new UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Photo Cathy Dausman

"Life is good," said Simpson. It's nice to know the faithful donor has gotten something back in return.

A list of previous Berkeley Medal recipients can be found online at: http://awards.berkeley.edu/pdf/Berkeley_Medal.pdf.

"I really don't think I deserved it," said long-time Orinda resident Barclay Simpson, of the Berkeley Medal he was awarded Dec. 13 during a celebration for the new UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. Yet among Simpson's many contributions to UC Berkeley was his chairmanship of the campaign to build that very museum.

According to the UC Berkeley website, the Berkeley Medal was established in 1981 as the university's top honor to be bestowed on individuals "of exceptionally distinguished achievements."

Simpson admitted he was at first bewildered by the reception given in his honor, but added it was kind of fun to see the list of those who had received the medal before him, including what he wryly calls his "rather distinguished predecessors."

The owner and founder of Simpson Strong-Tie, who turns 92 in May, is as much known for his philanthropy as for his company.

"In everything he does, Barc has a positive effect on the lives around him," UC Berkeley Chancellor Robert Birgeneau said when presenting Simpson with the medal.

Friend Ellen Dale called Simpson's philanthropic work "legendary" and said both Simpson and his wife are "a local treasure." In addition to supporting the Berkeley Art Museum with print donations which included a work by Whistler, Simpson and his wife, Sharon, have a close involvement with the Cal library, the University Press, the Haas School of Business and the UC Foundation, where Simpson is still on its board of directors. The new Simpson Student Athlete High Performance Center on the Berkeley campus is named after him.

Simpson spent a dozen years on the Bay Area Rapid Transit board of directors and raves about results from those mentored by Girls, Inc. in Oakland. Even the family trust name (Simpson PSB Fund) reflects his philosophy of "putting something back."

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