

\$1 million gift supports Summer Search scholarships

Gilardi established the scholarship in 2007 to honor Peeples, a college and financial aid advisor for Summer Search. Summer Search provides summer experiences, college advising, and mentoring to low-income and at-risk high school students. Peeples died on November 25, 2012 after a lengthy battle with cancer.

“Sandy’s passion was to encourage young people to pursue their dreams and make a mark on the world,” Gilardi said. “Sandy truly inspired those who knew her with her zest for life, her practical wisdom, her humor, and her generosity of time and spirit. She changed lives.”

The Sandy Peeples Endowed Scholarship supports female Summer Search graduates from the Bay Area who are the first in their family to attend college. Recipients demonstrate both an ability to overcome adversity and a desire to use their education to make a positive difference through giving back and helping others.

Dominican University of California President Mary B. Marcy noted that Gilardi’s gift to her *alma mater* is both a tribute to Peeples’ legacy and Gilardi’s understanding of the transformative power of education as a pathway to a life of meaning.

“Susan Gilardi has made a most profound gift – a gift of education,” President Marcy said. “Education truly has the power to transform lives. Susan Gilardi’s generosity will ensure that generations of deserving young women will benefit from a Dominican education.”

To date, seven Summer Search graduates have received financial assistance from the scholarship fund. Two scholarship recipients graduated from Dominican in spring 2012. Both Gilardi and Peeples were in the audience.

“We could not have been prouder of these two young women,” Gilardi recalled. “To see the huge, beaming smiles and tears of happiness on their faces, to learn subsequently over lunch of their new jobs, to appreciate how much these women have grown, overcome and accomplished, to listen to their aspirations for the future filled my heart with such joy and satisfaction.”

“I will treasure the experience always. They are the future. They will make a positive difference long after I am gone.”

Erica Gonzalez Martinez received a double bachelor’s degree - a BA in [Humanities and Cultural Studies](#) and a BS in [Psychology](#) - at the commencement ceremony attended by Gilardi and Peeples. Gonzalez Martinez now works as an operations assistant for Roots of Peace, the Marin-based humanitarian non-profit organization.

Support from the fund enabled Gonzalez Martinez to graduate from Dominican. Encouragement from both Peeples and Gilardi enabled her to overcome challenges she encountered along the way.

“Sandy had a great impact on me, especially while I was in college,” Gonzalez Martinez said. “Going through so many transitions in my personal life sometimes made it difficult for me as I was continuing my studies. Sandy told me to take things step-by-step. She gave me the motivation to continue.”

Faatuaaitau Tunai calls Peeples her “guardian angel sent from heaven.”

“I was so lucky to have Sandy in my life, she was my biggest motivator, she always saw something in me which made me believe I was capable of doing anything,” Tunai says.

“Throughout the years I've known her, she was constantly pushing me to reach my highest potential. If it was not for Sandy, I wouldn't have made it this far. Because of her I have graduated Dominican with a BSN and for this I am forever grateful. She takes up a huge space in my heart and she will always be a part of me.”

Several times a year, Gilardi would join Peeples and the girls in order to catch up on their progress and hear about career goals.

“Susan would be very sweet in giving us that extra support,” Gonzalez Martinez says. “She would tell us that we can make it – that we could finish college. She told us that she supported our career goals.”

Sandy Peeples graduated from Columbia University with a degree in Occupational Therapy. She joined the Adolescent Treatment Team at McAuley Institute at St. Mary's Medical Center and remained there for eight years. She then worked with adolescents at Sunny Hills Children's Center in San Anselmo. She became involved with career counseling and mentoring at the Marin Education Fund (now 10,000 Degrees) and most recently college counseling and financial aid assistance with Summer Search.

Susan Gilardi attended Dominican from 1964-1968. It was at Dominican that she gained her great appreciation for teaching. During her junior year, Gilardi worked as a lunchtime supervisor at Terra Linda High School. As a senior, she worked as a tutor at nearby St. Vincent's School for Boys. After earning her bachelor's degree in English, she taught at San Francisco's Mission High School for several years before enrolling at Western State University College of Law in San Diego.

Gilardi later moved to Sacramento to work as an attorney for the California Department of Transportation. In 1984 Gilardi and her husband, Dennis, founded Gilardi & Co., which grew over the years to become one of the country's largest full-service mass/class action notice and claims administrators.

An active philanthropist in Marin, Gilardi has spent more than 20 years volunteering in local schools and supporting causes focused on education, the arts, healthcare, and college access.

“I know that what matters in the long run is not what you have but what you have done with it,” Gilardi said.

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