

Fresno State gets \$1 million donation for deaf program

By Hannah
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Fresno State gateway sign on the corner of the main campus at Cedar and Shaw avenues.

CRAIG KOHLRUSS — THE FRESNO BEE [Buy Photo](#)

Fresno State is getting \$1 million to ramp up resources for families with deaf or hard-of-hearing children who have other special needs, like autism or blindness.

The gift from an anonymous donor will bring national experts to Fresno State to provide free training and services to parents and professionals, Fresno State President Joseph Castro announced Friday morning.

The funds will be used through the university's existing Silent Garden program, which was established by deaf studies professor emeritus Paul Ogden in 2008 as a way to make connections and build awareness among Fresno's deaf community. Ogden has written several papers and a book that share the Silent Garden name.

University officials said in a statement that once it's established, the new program, called Scarlett's Park, will be the first of its kind in California.

It's unique because the program aims to improve awareness about the special needs of deaf children who face additional challenges, Castro said in an interview Friday.

Castro said the dollars will help bring experts to speak at conferences and workshops — and to train school teachers and other educators who work with deaf children.

The gift is just the latest in a string of donations to help the university build its deaf services.

Two years ago, a \$1.5 million donation was made by Ogden's good friend Joseph Slotnick, a Harvard University graduate who lost his hearing at age 3. Robert Duncan Nicol, a retired architect, vineyard owner and piano player who is deaf, donated \$2 million in 2012.

In 2014, the university's department of communicative disorders and deaf studies was awarded a \$1.2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

Castro said Fresno State's program is "getting the recognition it deserves" for the distinctive services and training it offers.

"I believe nationally we are emerging as a leader in this area," he said. "There's a leadership group nationally that sees this, and those who have the ability to support us financially are stepping forward as this anonymous person has done."

Castro revealed little about the donor, but said the person "cares deeply and understands very clearly what the challenges are" for deaf children and families.

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