Faculty Spotlight-Chell Roberts, PhD
by Mary Levine P ‘12 and ‘14, Parents Association Board

The Engineering program has been a part of USD since the 1990's. It was previously part of the School of Business, but with a generous gift from Darlene Marcos Shiley, The Shiley-Marcos School of Engineering was established. The School, which already had a great core group of faculty and a great foundation to build upon, searched for a leader to propel the highest ranked program at USD to the top. That leader, Dean Chell Roberts, left a highly successful program at Arizona State University (ASU) to build upon that foundation. His goal is to create a top 10 program that can make the unique and rigorous dual B.A./B.S. Engineering degree USD offers, a part of these top tier programs. "There is room for us in this elite group," Roberts said. He is currently interviewing additional faculty from such prestigious universities as MIT, USC, Princeton and Purdue to become part of this groundswell of excitement that is felt throughout the Engineering School.

Roberts is a very dynamic and energetic individual who truly understands the magnitude of his task as the first Dean of the Shiley-Marcos School of Engineering at USD. At ASU, the policies and procedures were already established. At USD, he has the task of creating these. This undertaking is made easier because of the smaller size of the University. "I have rapid access to people such as the President, numerous Vice Presidents or other deans who I can get a response from almost the same day," Roberts said. He added that at ASU "there were so many layers that it was like a city," and that contact was extremely structured. At USD, he enjoys a less formal atmosphere and he is happier for it.

His first few days at USD gave him insight into what kind of atmosphere he had become a part of. He was sitting in his office and people were randomly dropping in expressing how happy they were that he was there. He was even greeted by the head of Public Safety on campus who had made it a point to tell him how happy he was that he had joined USD. "It is such a supportive and genuine community," Roberts said. "I find myself so lucky that sometimes I walk around campus and just laugh," he said.

This type of reaction may seem odd, but Roberts truly has a unique outlook on life. In researching Dean Roberts, I came across a video of a talk he gave at ASU. In it he explains that a piece of paper ripped in half 50 times would reach halfway to the sun. That was amazing enough but then he started speaking about a TWA flight he was on in 1979. A Boeing 727 went into a number of barrel rolls and was 5,000 feet from the ground before the pilots were able to get it under control. A truly life altering experience that caused him to see the world around him just a little brighter and to enjoy every day to the fullest.

His contact with the engineering students on campus has been eye opening as well. "I am surprised and impressed at the level our students are able to articulate and communicate. The liberal arts influence certainly adds a different depth and breadth to our program," he added. He sees great things ahead for the School and is excited to enrich the programs already in place. He hopes to create stronger ties with industries in and around San Diego that will enhance the "hands on" aspect of the program. He is undaunted by the huge challenges ahead and is excited for all the benefits the students will receive. The future of the Shiley-Marcos School of Engineering is indeed in good hands.