Artwork, exhibit capture spirit of Polytechnic campus as it celebrates 30 years

By Aisha Kaddi, ASU News
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When Ela Chachulski set out to design a commemorative mark for Arizona State University Polytechnic campus's 30th anniversary, she faced a great challenge.

The bustling campus is home to academic communities spanning aviation, engineering, technology, business, health-related pathways, applied biological sciences and more.

With immersive labs, studios, flight training spaces, student organizations, research activity and partnerships, the campus has a distinct physical identity shaped by the East Valley landscape, notable ASU landmarks and the former Williams Air Force Base.

So when creating the mark, Chachulski, a robotics and autonomous systems engineering student in the School of Manufacturing Systems and Networks, part of the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering at ASU, focused on the key symbols that capture those ideas.

Her winning design centers the Polytechnic water tower, the Superstition Mountains and an aircraft rising across the sky, with its vapor trail forming the number 30. The image honors the campus' history while pointing toward movement, experimentation and possibility.

Reflecting on history and community

Chachulski's design was featured as part of the 30th anniversary celebration of the ASU Polytechnic campus. But the story behind the mark reaches beyond the singular event. It offers a lens into what the campus has become over three decades and where it will go next.

"My design symbolizes my time spent studying science, mathematics, physics and engineering," Chachulski says. "But testing, prototyping and problem-solving — all of these lie at the heart of every Polytechnic discipline."

ASU acquired the former Williams Air Force Base property in 1996 and transformed it into the Polytechnic campus, preserving its aviation history while adapting former military spaces for university life. Today, the campus brings together multiple ASU schools, departments and disciplines.

Its name now carries a clearer purpose.

“This campus is more than just where I am earning my degree; it is a community that is helping shape who I am,” says Nicole Irwin, a graduate student in project management in the School of Applied Professional Studies, part of the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts at ASU. “Some of my most meaningful experiences come from getting involved, serving alongside other students and building relationships with people across campus who make Poly feel like home.”

That sense of community is one of the campus’ defining strengths.

The anniversary was also marked through a retrospective on the Polytechnic campus history. As part of ASU Library Day, librarian Olivia Sparks created an exhibit featuring archival materials and images that trace the campus’ development. A companion guide extends the exhibit with historical maps and articles documenting the Polytechnic campus’ growth.

This yearlong display gives viewers a chance to see how the former U.S. Air Force base became a university campus and how much the site has changed.

ASU Library Collection Director and Associate Archivist Shannon Walker provided master planning documents and archival newspaper articles that capture the early vision for “A New Campus for a New Century” and the beginnings of the formerly titled ASU East community. An honors thesis from Barrett, The Honors College helped trace the timeline of building additions, while faculty and staff contributed ASU East memorabilia and photos from past campus activities.

“The Polytechnic campus is definitely rooted in community, and it was evident in creating the exhibit,” Sparks says. “The exhibit could not have been complete without the contributions of the Polytechnic community.”

Vanessa Fonseca-Chávez, assistant vice provost for the Polytechnic campus, says the identity of the campus spans multiple academic colleges and schools, each focusing on different key industries.

For students like Brelyn Fidler, that identity has helped turn academic interests into a path beyond graduation.

Fidler, who graduated in fall 2025 with a degree in applied biological sciences (pre-veterinary medicine) from the School of Applied Sciences and Arts, part of the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts, says her experiences on the Polytechnic campus helped connect her interests in veterinary medicine, wildlife and conservation.

“Poly gave me the opportunity to turn my passion for veterinary medicine, wildlife and conservation into hands-on experiences that helped shape the path I’m pursuing today,” Fiddler says. “I’m excited to see future students, faculty and industry partners continue building those connections and creating new opportunities for the East Valley.”

Looking to the future

Thirty years in, the campus' identity is still evolving.

A student union addition expected to open in fall 2027 is intended to create a more central gathering place for students, faculty and staff. Career services relocated and reopened on Sept. 22 with updates that improve student access. The established Polytechnic Innovation Zone aims to bring new businesses, resources and advanced technology closer to campus.

“We are shaping the Polytechnic campus as a place where ASU’s charter is fully realized — where talent, innovation and a strong sense of belonging come together to create lasting impact,” Fonseca-Chávez says. “This next chapter builds on what makes the Polytechnic campus distinctive: empowering students, bringing bold ideas to life and working with industry partners to meet emerging needs.”

The campus may no longer be new, but its founding spirit remains tied to motion, experimentation and practical problem-solving.

“The upward trajectory of the aircraft (in my design) reflects the aspirations of every student who comes to campus with a dream and leaves equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to turn that dream into reality,” Chachulski said.

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Main image



Ela Chachulski, a robotics and autonomous systems undergraduate student in the School of Manufacturing Systems and Networks, poses with Sparky and her commemorative mark design for the 30th anniversary of the Polytechnic campus. Photo by Erika Gronek/ASU

Text image(s)



The Polytechnic campus water tower at sunset. ASU photo



Vanessa Fonseca-Chávez mingles with staff members at the Polytechnic 30th anniversary celebration on ASU's Polytechnic campus in Mesa. Photo by Erika Gronek/ASU



Alex Verdin Parra and Grace Song, students in Barrett, The Honors College at ASU, walk outside of Lantana Hall on the Polytechnic campus. ASU photo