

The University of Texas at El Paso



Dee and Adair Margo

Helping Students Appreciate Their Roots through Art and Literature



Dee and Adair Margo The Tom Lea Graduate Research Fellows Program supports UTEP graduate students conducting research on Southwestern art and literary history.

From quality of life and culture to economic development, Donald “Dee” and Adair Margo consider The University of Texas at El Paso to be an important cornerstone in the success of the Paso del Norte region.

Since 1981, the Margos have generously supported UTEP colleges and programs campus-wide. In 2012, they endowed the Tom Lea Graduate Research Fellows Program to support UTEP graduate students conducting research on Southwestern art and literary history “in the spirit of Tom Lea.”

Adair Margo is passionate about the late Tom Lea—a muralist, illustrator, easel painter, war correspondent, novelist and historian whose prolific and powerful works are just now being fully appreciated around the world. In 2010, she closed the Adair Margo Gallery, which she owned for more than 20 years, to establish the Tom Lea Institute. She started the Institute to raise awareness of Lea’s immense contributions to art and literature, as well as to inventory his vast body of work, including his letters, which can be found in academic institutions, libraries, museums, and in the collections of the U.S. Army and Lea’s close friends. UTEP also proudly maintains a collection of Lea’s works.

Adair says she believes UTEP helps students understand who they are and the extraordinary city in which they live. She hopes that the Tom Lea Fellows will learn from Lea’s legacy, as well as the environment, experiences and relationships that helped shape his life.

“I want UTEP students to develop a sense of rootedness because they will be able to participate more fully in the world when they know who they are,” she said.

The Margos’ own contributions to the world have been far-reaching. Adair has played an integral role in improving the lives of women living in poverty in El Paso and the state of Chihuahua, Mexico, through the FEMAP Foundation, which she co-founded in 1992 to support health care services, as well as economic and social development. During the two-term presidency of George W. Bush, she chaired the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities.



During President George W. Bush’s Administration, Tom Lea’s painting “Rio Grande” was displayed in the Oval Office of the White House.

Dee is the former Chairman and CEO of El Paso’s JDW Insurance, one of the largest privately held insurance agencies in the United States. He served one term as Texas State Representative for District 78 and also was a civilian aide to the U.S. Secretary of the Army. He has chaired the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce, the El Paso Empowerment Zone, and served on many other area boards. He also was instrumental in bringing more than \$23 million to the Paso del Norte region through the Border Fund, which operated through the Robert R. McCormick Foundation. In May 2013, he was appointed by the Texas Education Agency to the Board of Managers for the El Paso Independent School District.

UTEP also has greatly benefitted from the Margos’ gifts of time, talent and wisdom over the years through their service on numerous boards and committees.

“This community is important to us . . . and an educated workforce drives this community. That’s why UTEP is so important,” Dee said. “Adair and I are proud to be associated with UTEP. We made a decision years ago that many of our resources would go to UTEP.”