DONOR PROFILE

Boundless Possibilities

IN SUPPORTING CASTILLEJA, **YIDRIENNE LAI AND CHRISTOPHER CHANG P'26 '28 '31** HOPE TO HELP STUDENTS BECOME THE BEST VERSION OF THEMSELVES

Having built her career in male-dominated industries and served on Stanford's Clayman Institute for Gender Research, **Yidrienne Lai P'26 '28 '31** has long reflected on what it takes for women to lead and thrive. Yet even with that perspective, the sense of empowerment and boundless possibility Yidrienne felt at her first Tie Ceremony still took her by surprise. "I remember looking around at all of the girls and the shared sense of joy and community," she says. "Then a banner caught my eye that said, 'Women Learning, Women Leading,' and it was sort of breathtaking. I just realized, yes, this is amazing and what a privilege it is for our daughter to be here." Since that day, Yidrienne and her husband **Christopher Chang** have only become more invested as their oldest, **Karys**, was joined by their younger daughters, **Aralyn** and **Laryssa**, and Yidrienne joined the Board last year.

Both Yidrienne and Chris were raised in families that prioritized education. Yidrienne immigrated from Taiwan to North Carolina when she was eight. "We came for the schools. My dad stayed behind, and my mom brought us because they didn't want us in a system where early testing determined your entire trajectory." Arriving without any foundation in English meant that she had to work hard to, as she puts it, "close the gap." This experience defined her view of the importance of great teachers. "They showed me that they believed in me, and I learned valuable life lessons—like hard things can come your way and you can rebuild and discover new strengths within yourself." Christopher grew up on Long Island in a town his parents chose based on the strength of the public school system, which he attended through high school. "I had a great experience," he explains, "But one of my takeaways was that in larger schools students can be tracked and set on certain paths, and I wanted a more open environment where our kids could diverge from a set path and define their own interests."

While their appreciation of the impact that Castilleja is having on their family today is clear, Yidrienne and Chris are forward-thinking people, and they bring that



lens to their engagement at Castilleja. When speaking about their gift to *Open Their World—the Campaign for Castilleja*, Christopher says, "I work in real estate, so I know how important it is to have best-in-class facilities to maintain a competitive edge. It's how Castilleja will attract and retain excellent faculty and families. When I look at how strong the Gatorbotics program is—not just the technical training but the organizational ladder and the fact that it's entirely student-led—it's the most effective preparation I have seen for working with a CEO and heads of different groups. Our program is among the best, and I'm excited to see new spaces to support it into the future."

As a member of the Board, Yidrienne is charged with stewarding Castilleja's mission, which, she says, "is about helping students become the best versions of themselves." Part of that, she feels, involves actively opening their eyes to new possibilities. She says, "I went into college thinking I would be pre-med for lack of exposure to other options. I couldn't have imagined the job I do now. Especially for girls, it's important to think about the modern world and align our academics and enrichment programs to support career awareness and prepare girls for jobs and choices that may not exist yet."

When thinking about seeing their oldest near the completion of her seven-year journey at Castilleja, they both reflect on the strength of the community. "I appreciate being with like-minded families who believe so deeply in the mission and take women's leadership seriously," says Yidrienne. Christopher adds, "The sisterhood is what strikes me most; they are sharing positive experiences and figuring out who they are together. Then they leave with a maturity and confidence that makes them comfortable in any situation and lets them take ownership of their own evolution." As leadership donors to the capital campaign, Yidrienne and Christopher are also actively contributing to the evolution of Castilleja.