



Since 2010, President's House has provided young Trojans with a home for the holidays. Every November, some 300 students arrive by bus from campus for a Thanksgiving dinner hosted by the entire Nikias family. For many international students, this is their first introduction to the American Thanksgiving tradition.



## *Chapter 13*

# *A Changing University, an Unchanging Spirit*

## *New Traditions*

USC today is “only” 135 years old—a young soul, by the standards of America’s earliest universities, and even more so in comparison to those learning institutions that arose in Europe nearly a millennium ago and still stand today. Within a few years of the school’s founding, some distinct, venerable traditions had already arisen at USC—and its students, faculty, alumni, staff, and parents embraced them firmly from the start. The university’s alumni, who were being unleashed annually to play leadership roles across Southern California society, quickly gained a reputation as one of the most powerful and loyal networks in higher education.

Today a spirit of tradition is at the core of the Trojan Family experience, though it is certainly a forward-looking spirit. As the community has grown in size and global scope, now with 350,000 alumni and countless friends and supporters spread around the world, a number of new traditions have also taken shape.

### **New Traditions for the Newest Trojans**

A USC education is designed to be a powerful, defining personal experience, filled with varied academic and social rituals, that generates enduring feelings of loyalty and mutual support among its students, parents, and alumni.

When President Nikias took office in 2010, he believed that the undergraduate phase called for an initiation ritual of memorable scale and scope. With that came a spectacular transformation of USC’s annual fall convocation and Welcome Week program for new students.

The ceremony had long been an indoor, evening function with modest attendance. USC turned it into a morning gathering in Alumni Park, in order to put it on the same footing as its grand graduation celebration. The reinvented event now kicks off with an academic procession of university officials and faculty, along with the incoming Trojans, wearing academic regalia (minus the





cap associated with commencement). The students are seated in the same sections, arranged by their schools, as they will be at their graduations four years hence. It is a powerful symbol of a mutual promise and expectation on the part of the students, their families, the faculty, and the larger Trojan community.

During the ceremony, the young people are formally inducted into the ancient yet dynamically enduring tradition of the academy. Each USC dean (even those representing schools without undergraduate programs) takes a turn welcoming the newest Trojans to the community of scholars, as do student leaders and faculty representatives.

In his 2010 address at the first of these reinvented convocations, Nikias





ROTC cadets prepare to participate in USC's annual New Student Convocation. In the fall of 2010, the event was expanded dramatically and moved from Bovard Auditorium to Alumni Park.



At the start of a new academic year in 2015, President Nikias offers the USC "V for Victory" salute to students on Move-In Day.

challenged the newcomers, whether they were studying the arts or sciences, to avail themselves of the incredible opportunities that were open to them for the next four crucial, life-shaping years. He exhorted them to become fluent in the language of imagination and possibility. And he called on them to develop themselves into citizens who could improve and bring honor to their communities and their world, likening their journey to that of a noble family of antiquity:

Nearly twenty-two hundred years ago, the great Roman politician and philosopher Cicero sent his only son away to college. All of the wealthy and powerful families in Rome wanted to send their sons to Plato's famous Academy in Athens. There was only one problem. Cicero's son, Marcus, like many students of his age, was more interested in the social aspects of higher education. Let's just say that he was neglecting the great books in favor of having a good time.

So Cicero wrote an entire book of letters to his son to remind Marcus of his responsibilities to himself, his family, and his society. In short, he wanted to remind his son of the principles that lead to an honorable life.



Cicero titled his book *On the Obligations of a Good Citizen*, or, in Latin, *De Officiis*. This was in fact Cicero's last book. Even as he wrote it, he was aware that his opposition to Mark Antony might tragically end his life. Let me share with you some brief thoughts that Cicero hoped would be meaningful to his son, and that I hope might inform your days at USC.

What, Cicero asks, distinguishes a man from a beast? Animals are moved only by their senses, and cannot perceive the past or the future. Humans, on the other hand, possess a unique ability to reason and to comprehend the chain of consequences, perceive the causes of things, and connect the present and the future. A man, Cicero wrote, "can therefore easily survey the course of his whole life and make the necessary preparations for its conduct."

So, to paraphrase Cicero: The choices you make today will shape the person you become tomorrow. The actions you take in the present will have consequences in the future. Use your reason to make honorable decisions—decisions that will benefit you, your family, and your society. Cicero also tells his son, "We are not born for ourselves alone. We do not live for ourselves alone. Our country, our friends, have a share in us."

Nikias concluded in a lighter vein by showing USC's newest Trojans how to make the "V for Victory" salute, so that they could greet their peers throughout the world with that universally beloved sign.

Carrying the same hopes that Cicero did two millennia earlier, parents became a more integral part of the revamped convocation. They gathered early for breakfast in the adjacent McCarthy Quad, then cheered for their children during the event. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the students processed out of Alumni Park, symbolically marking the ritual of separation, whereby the young people move into their independent, adult journeys.

By 2015, the convocation tradition had been expanded to the spring semester as well, so that USC leaders and faculty could greet and commission midyear enrollees. The spring program involved a Thursday night social mixer,



During Welcome Week, a Trojan father and mother share a letter they just wrote with their daughter. The Office for Parent Programs created this new tradition; the parents' letters are usually delivered to students during their first week of classes, although some families choose to share them in person.





a Friday morning ceremony in Bovard Auditorium, and a subsequent reception in the Tutor Center.

As a part of his larger effort to expand the Trojan Family to include all parents, Nikias emphasized that the convocation and Welcome Week activities were not just a rite of passage for students but for their mothers and fathers as well. During Welcome Week, parents would take time to write letters to their children, which USC staff would later deliver to the students once classes began. And parents would be invited to reunite with their progeny several weeks later on Trojan Family Weekend, which would allow them to feel even more connected to the life of their children's university.





Immediately upon taking office, President Nikias began a tradition of meeting regularly with small groups representing a cross section of the student body. At these “student teas,” attendees are invited to share candidly both what they enjoy about USC and what they feel could be improved.

### Honoring a Great Milestone in the Great Voyage

Through its convocation for incoming freshmen and transfer students, USC emphasized the nature of the academic journey upon which they were about to embark. For its commencement ceremonies, which represented the culmination of that academic journey (or at least the completion of a major chapter), the university’s leadership fittingly introduced a charge from *The Aeneid*, Virgil’s epic about the great journeys and destinies of the mighty Trojans. The passage was read in English, Latin, and the original ancient Greek.

*My comrades, hardly strangers to pain before now, we all have weathered worse. Some god will grant us an end to this as well. You’ve threaded the rocks resounding with Scylla’s howling rabid dogs, and taken the brunt of the Cyclops’ boulders, too.*

*Call up your courage again. Dismiss your grief and fear. A joy it will be one day, perhaps, to remember even this. Through so many hard straits, so many twists and turns our course holds firm for Latium. There Fate holds out a homeland, calm, at peace. There the gods decree the kingdom of Troy will rise again. Bear up. Save your strength for better times to come.*



First Lady Niki C. Nikias (center) expanded the annual Ladies’ Tea event in order to allow full participation among local women’s organizations that support the USC mission.





### Connecting at Teatime

In 2011, Monish Tyagi, then the president of the undergraduate student government, told the *Daily Trojan* that he was especially impressed by President Nikias's accessibility. "In the midst of all of the things he has to do and the demands in his schedule—the fact that he has time to engage with students speaks a lot to [his character]," Tyagi said. "He hosts monthly teas where he interacts with students, meets with our student government a few times a semester, and he is very student-friendly."

Immediately upon taking office, President Nikias had instituted a regular, monthly slate of "student teas," giving him the opportunity to engage with small cross sections of USC's undergraduates and graduates, who represent every walk of life and academic field.







The first lady welcomes attendees of the 2012 USC Women's Conference. Mrs. Nikias actively supports organizations that nurture academic and professional growth among the university's female students and alumnae.



Nikias described the teas as “sustain and improve sessions.” He would begin by asking attendees to respond in their own way to the two-pronged question, “What do you believe needs to be sustained at USC, and what do you believe needs to be improved?” The insights he gained in these intimate conversations often found their way into the deliberations of his presidential cabinet, trustee committee meetings, and other official leadership discussions.

Jihyun Shin, a PhD candidate in international relations, participated in one tea session in 2014. As she later shared in a university newsletter, “President Nikias listened intently and took notes as we spoke....During the meeting, I realized I had enjoyed all of these blessings without much reflection on how they developed. Like with every great achievement in the world, the things I love about USC do not arise on their own, nor are they sustained on their own. There are always people working behind the scenes and striving for greatness. The great things about USC are like the fruit that seems effortless, until you realize that it was the result of people’s hard work and sweat.”

### **Bridging Town and Gown**

As one of her many new priorities as first lady, Niki C. Nikias dedicated herself to connecting with and building up the women of Troy. She participates in the USC Women's Conference, an annual offering of the Alumni Association to promote leadership, professional development, wellness, and financial strategy—some years giving the opening remarks. She has also reestablished and expanded the old tradition of hosting an annual Ladies' Tea at President's House, bringing together and honoring the many women's organizations that have long histories of raising millions of dollars each year to support the university.

USC unveiled a statue in 2014 honoring Judge Robert Maclay Widney, the man who, as President Nikias said, “moved heaven and earth” to establish a great university that could power the progress of a small but growing village in 1880.





The first lady also serves as the honorary president of Town and Gown of USC, the school's longest-running support organization. At its 2013 annual benefit, Town and Gown recognized the efforts of both the president and the first lady to promote arts and culture at USC and in the larger community. It commended Mrs. Nikias for her work in welcoming visiting artists into the university through a range of receptions, dinners, and other events, as well as her championing of the highly successful Visions & Voices initiative in the arts and humanities.





Beginning in 2010, USC significantly expanded its annual New Student Convocation, instituting a formal processional in which students would sit in the same sections reserved for their graduation ceremony four years later. Visible in the front row of the 2015 event are Texas governor Greg Abbott, First Lady Niki C. Nikias, and Trustee Steven Spielberg.

## Campus Truly Becomes Home

By 2014, USC had established a new tradition as a residential university, one that housed all freshmen on campus during their crucial, formative first year. This followed years of planning and expansion at a university that was once viewed by many as a commuter school. And like so many other areas in which the university sought to grow, one part of the equation involved catching up to institutions who were leaders in the area, while the other part involved building USC's own leadership niche by capitalizing on certain advantages: in this case, the Trojan school spirit and camaraderie, and its prime location in the heart of Los Angeles.

The construction of the grand USC Village will add nine residential colleges upon its completion in 2017, each with faculty masters to help curate and steward undergraduates' round-the-clock living-and-learning experience. With the 2,700 undergraduate beds that the project will add to USC housing, the university will finally be able to turn 1,400 other beds north of campus into much-needed housing for graduate students.

## Paying Tribute to a Tradition of Support

USC has always paid special tribute to contributors who make donations of historic size—some even reaching eight or nine figures. In 2012, however, the administration launched a tradition to honor all those who have given \$1 million or more to the university in their lifetimes with the establishment of the USC Widney Society. Named in honor of the school's forward-thinking founder, Judge Robert Maclay Widney, the organization now annually inducts its new members at a gala held next to Widney Alumni House. Each inductee goes home with the society's symbol—an impeccably reproduced feather quill pen from the founder's era.

## Caring for the (Entire) Trojan Family

In truth, every major American research university is a vast, nonprofit enterprise that relies on productive and mutually generous relationships. An eager, committed, and hardworking Trojan Family was the guiding metaphor of the new USC leadership's hopes of quickly moving the university forward. Therefore a key role of the incoming president and first lady was working to



expand and deepen the bonds connecting 350,000 members of that worldwide community.

In their first five years in office, the Nikiases hosted or attended more than a thousand events—academic, cultural, athletic, social, and philanthropic—that brought together tens of thousands of members of the Trojan Family. The couple, who have been together for four decades, understood when they embarked upon the presidency that they would be booked most evenings in the cause of university business. Much of that business involved a constant practice of building community—and of caring for the people who care the most for USC.

Niki C. Nikias took on the role of chief caretaker of that Trojan Family. USC professor and renowned historian Kevin Starr told *Trojan Family Magazine*, “First ladies project the values of the university, and Niki is projecting something of USC’s character—in the sense of an ambition to do things better, to make the world a better place.” He added that it helped that she could do all this while exuding “empathy, optimism, and panache.”

First Lady Nikias has said that gratitude for the blessings of education, and an attendant sense of stewardship, is what drives her. “Both Max and I were very fortunate,” she told a reporter. “Our parents started from having nothing, and they built their own small businesses. Max’s father was a carpenter, and he opened up his own workshop. My father was a clearing agent for importing goods in Cyprus. So we come from families who were very loving and very business-successful.”

Her appreciation of her family has been equaled by her appreciation of her adopted nation. “It’s only here in America where you come and you work hard and you succeed to achieve your goals,” she said. “I mean, who would have dreamed that Max would be a president? It’s been a great journey.”

Mrs. Nikias was dedicated to ensuring that the next generation would have maximum access to education. She herself earned a bachelor’s degree in accounting from the Athens University of Economics and Business in Greece and an MBA with a specialization in finance from SUNY Buffalo. She spent years as a corporate accountant and finance consultant in Athens, London, and the United States before taking leave to tend to her growing family.

@USCPRES ON INSTAGRAM: President Nikias dove into social media with both feet, launching his Instagram handle in 2014. With hundreds of posts and thousands of followers, @USCPres gives the Trojan Family around the world a window into his personal experiences and up-to-the-minute insights on USC events.

TOP ROW, from left: The president snaps selfies with actor Sylvester Stallone and his wife, Jennifer; music producer Quincy Jones; musician and global activist Will.i.am of the Black Eyed Peas; actor Pierce Brosnan; and comedians David Spade and Dana Carvey.

BOTTOM ROW, from left: First Lady Niki C. Nikias with Sandra Bullock and George Clooney; the president with Halle Berry; Will Farrell joins the Nikiases to cheer on the Trojan football team; and the president with Steve Carell.





Daughters Georgiana and Maria went on to distinguish themselves academically, both attending USC, pursuing multiple degrees, and moving into careers in law and journalism, respectively.

Upon becoming first lady, Mrs. Nikias suddenly saw her family grow to enormous size, but she brought the same principles to caring for the larger Trojan community. “I don’t think I realized what the Trojan Family meant until I started spending more time at USC and getting involved with the different aspects of the university. Then I realized that it’s like my own family, except that it’s bigger.”

### **Our Home Truly Is Your Home**

The Nikiases took several intentional steps to make their new house the de facto home for the entire Trojan Family. They personally host approximately 50 to 60 university events a year at their official residence in San Marino, President’s House.

A 2014 *San Marino Outlook* feature on USC’s first couple highlighted the ease with which they carry out their duties, noting that they have hospitality “embedded in their DNA.” The article reported:

“In Greek culture, you never sit down to have dinner alone,” Niki





says. “There’s always the neighbor, the cousin, the mother-in-law, the father-in-law who will drop by and say, ‘Well, what’s up for dinner?’ And you don’t even plan on it. Not only that, but you also plan a lot of parties—birthdays, celebrating by hosting dinners at the house. It’s something that I’ve done a lot.”

“The rule is,” Max adds, “you don’t do it unless you really love it. The pressure is always there, the time commitment is always there. The challenge you face is how you pace yourself. But





President and First Lady Nikias welcome guests to President's House in San Marino, adjacent to the famed Huntington Library and gardens. In preparation for the *Fas Regna Trojae* fundraising campaign, the Nikiases dramatically escalated the number of university events held at their official residence.



The Nikiases—often joined by their daughters, USC alumnae Maria (at left) and Georgiana—enjoy hosting thousands of Trojan Family members each year, especially during the busy holiday season.

when you have to be on, you have to be on, and you have to love it. You can't fake it."

The article noted they insist on jointly greeting every single guest warmly at their front door—even if the event is a massive tented party of 400 people in their backyard. "It doesn't matter the size of the party," Trustee Lorna Reed told the *Outlook*. "When you walk in the door, they're both right there to greet you. Large or small, they make you feel you're the most important guest to walk through that door." Their welcoming policy meant that, in just their first four years in office, each of them shook about 15,000 hands at their home's entry, pausing to connect in a meaningful way with each member of the Trojan Family, as well as community leaders and other supporters.

### A Trojan Family Dinner

In the fall of 2010, just a few months into the Nikias presidency, the Thanksgiving holiday was approaching, along with a rare chance for the president and his family to retreat from formal functions. Instead, the Nikiases determined, along with daughters Georgiana and Maria, to throw open the doors of President's House to some 250 "Thanksgiving orphans"—USC students who weren't able to return to their homes in other states or nations for the



holiday. Buses delivered them from University Park Campus to San Marino, where they were given a traditional meal and a chance to learn more about the meaning of family—Trojan-style.

“We decided, as a group, that it was important for us to spend the holiday with USC’s students,” Mrs. Nikias said. “Max and I had been international students ourselves years ago, so we identified with what it felt like to not have family to be with on Thanksgiving Day. So we chose to bring them into our own family for the day. Being parents, Max and I feel like all these kids are our kids. It was beautiful to see the students filling their plates and coming up to us and saying, ‘Oh, thank you. It was so great, so delicious.’”

“There’s nothing like a home-cooked meal,” Georgiana told the *Daily Trojan* in 2010. “Thanksgiving is a time to enjoy a really good meal, sit down, and be lazy. You don’t do any homework; you just relax.”

“We love the company,” her younger sibling, Maria, added. “We know how important food is—good food—on Thanksgiving.”

The generosity did not go untested or unappreciated. “Dinner was amazing,” USC senior Sunit Rohant told the newspaper, adding that the event made one of the school’s great claims—the existence of an intensely supportive Trojan Family—undeniable to him and other students. “I’m really glad that [President Nikias] invited all these students here because it just reinforces the idea of the Trojan Family, where we’re actually having a family dinner together on Thanksgiving,” Rohant said. “We went around in a circle and said what we were thankful for, and it just reinforces it.”

The Thanksgiving dinner has become a regular event, growing to more than 350 students—some of whom even skip or cut short their own family celebrations so that they can join in this special Trojan Family holiday tradition.

### Supporting Troy’s Warriors

During the first two years of their presidency, while the football team was under NCAA sanctions and therefore not eligible for a bowl game, the Nikiases made it a point to show their support for these athletes. As the president had noted in speeches to the USC community, the members of the 2010 and 2011 teams “inherited adversity, and they handled themselves with courage and class.” One expression of their appreciation was hosting holiday celebrations



Each year, hundreds of USC students gather at President’s House for a Thanksgiving dinner hosted by the university’s first family. Attendees include students from other states and countries—and even some local ones who trade in time with their own families on the holiday to be with members of the Trojan Family.





for the football team and its coaches and staff during these years at President's House. *Trojan Family Magazine* reported on one of the gatherings:

One holiday guest, USC star quarterback Matt Barkley, says, "I sat next to Mrs. Nikias at the banquet, and we pretty much talked the whole night about traveling, Europe, and academics and other things." He adds, "It's always fun to talk to her, because of the way she conducts herself—very gracious, very welcoming and warm."

The first lady also brought her hospitality to the campus to support Trojan athletics. During the week of the USC-UCLA football game, it had become an annual practice for the Trojan Knights organization to stand guard over







President and First Lady Nikias cheer on the Trojan football team at nearly every game—not only at home in the Coliseum but also at away games across the full breadth of the nation, from Boston to Hawaii.



Tommy Trojan, camping out each night to prevent meddling Bruins from defacing USC's beloved statue and icon. Mrs. Nikias began her own tradition, personally delivering classic Greek baklava to the Knights as they stood watch over the walls of Troy.

Athletic Director Pat Haden noted with admiration how the first lady took to her role with enthusiasm. "She really appreciates what the football game means to the Trojan Family. She's embraced that. She comes to all the games, home and away."

### The Personal Touch

Mrs. Nikias is keenly aware of the demands of the presidency—as well as the opportunities to strengthen relationships with supporters, public officials, civic leaders, parents of students, and other key groups. Accordingly, the first lady does far more than simply show up at university events; she works long hours alongside the USC staff beforehand, learning about the individual guests and their interests, and then guides and directs each function so that attendees come away with deeper connections to the university.

Describing her role as "promoting USC through all its constituents and all the organized events," she has said, "There's so much to be accomplished, and this \$6 billion fundraising campaign...is the key to how we want to bring USC to the next level. So we are really focused on that, and it takes a lot of our time."

Her efforts have drawn notice and praise throughout the university community. Calling her a "toughie," Board of Trustees chair John Mork told *Trojan Family Magazine*, "I've been on arduous, long trips with her—travel and miserable 14-hour days....She can hang in there with you. There's this warmth and calmness about her. When the whole world is spinning, she's there going, 'Oh, don't worry. We've got this.'"

During the high-intensity rivalry week leading up to the annual USC-UCLA football game, members of the Trojan Knights camp out night and day at the feet of Tommy Trojan to protect it from pranksters. To thank the Knights for guarding the university's famed symbol, First Lady Nikias brings them baklava, a family favorite.



Gayle Garner Roski, alumna and Roski School benefactor, recalled being on an exhausting trip across India in 2011 as part of a high-level USC delegation working to establish key partnerships in the rising economic giant. “I saw Max and Niki going 24 hours a day, together, hand in hand,” she said. “I love that about them. I’m always seeing Max pick up her hand, and I see how much she means to his life.”

One of the annual events hosted at President’s House is the dinner for the President’s Leadership Circle of the USC Good Neighbors Campaign. Membership in this group is reserved for the hundreds of staff and faculty who contribute 1 percent or more of their salary to the university’s community partnerships. The first lady has brought global variety and flair to these gatherings, instituting a different theme each year and representing the various ethnic cultures that make up Los Angeles’s polyglot society.

Mrs. Nikias has drawn praise for her ability to bring a personal touch to such large-scale USC events, but many have noted that her true gift in building connections and relationships is even stronger in small get-togethers, where attendees can receive the full attention and warmth of the first couple.

This “hospitality gene” has led to new opportunities across the university. USC deans, for the first time, have been able to organize intimate dinners of 6 to 16 guests at President’s House for key supporters and donors. The Nikiases host some 25 such development dinners each year. The first couple also regularly give small dinners for USC VIPs, civic leaders, and others important to the university’s mission. President’s House had traditionally hosted six holiday parties each year for faculty, supporters, and student leaders. In short order, the Nikiases doubled the number of these events, allowing hundreds of Trojans to join in the celebrations.

The 2014 *Outlook* feature noted that the Nikiases were willing to share their home and their time—particularly if it meant that the recipients of that generosity would in turn be more generous to USC:

Niki asked that a bedroom suite be created on the ground floor. Max says he “half-jokingly, half-seriously” refers to it as the Lincoln Bedroom, because an overnight stay in those quarters costs \$1 million, “payable to USC.”



Students from the USC Thornton School of Music perform holiday standards at a party for university faculty at President’s House.





Guests stay up late chatting with their hosts and have breakfast with them in the morning. The couple still chuckle about the overnight visit of David and Dana Dornsife, who donated \$200 million to USC's College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, which now bears their name. After breakfast the next morning, Max had to get to his USC office but told the Dornsifes they were free to linger and stroll the property. He chuckled at the memory: "I got a text from Dana: 'Thank you, Max, we had a great time; 199 nights to go.'"





David Dornsife later said that over time, Mrs. Nikias had become the lynchpin of their relationship to the university. “Niki is one of my favorite people,” David said. “We enjoy talking to the Nikiases, so a lot of times we’ll arrive early to an event. That gives us a little bit of a chance to talk to her before the guests come in.”

### **A Headquarters for Strategic Planning**

The goal of the Nikiases has been to ensure that President’s House remains “USC first” and only secondarily their residence. More than an elegant place for social and development gatherings, it has also served practical functions for

Niki C. Nikias organizes and prepares for one of many university functions held at President’s House each year. Intimate donors’ dinners and small-scale entertaining have also become a part of the first lady’s routine that has been noticed and appreciated throughout the community.





Rest, relaxation, and renewal: The Nikiases began a new presidential tradition of active cycling during their summer breaks, to let go of the pressures of the last academic year and prepare themselves for the rigors of the next one.

a variety of university purposes. Over the past five years, it has become the site of the annual board meeting for the USC Ming Hsieh Institute for Research on Engineering-Medicine for Cancer; it also played host to a number of retreats dedicated to campus planning and the development of USC Village.

The Nikiases occasionally managed, during their rare downtime, to return to their beloved house “down the road” in Rancho Palos Verdes, where they had raised their daughters, Georgiana and Maria, and felt most truly at home. “It’s like a Greek island right here in California,” Mrs. Nikias said. There they would unwind and find time to bicycle for dozens of miles to renew themselves.



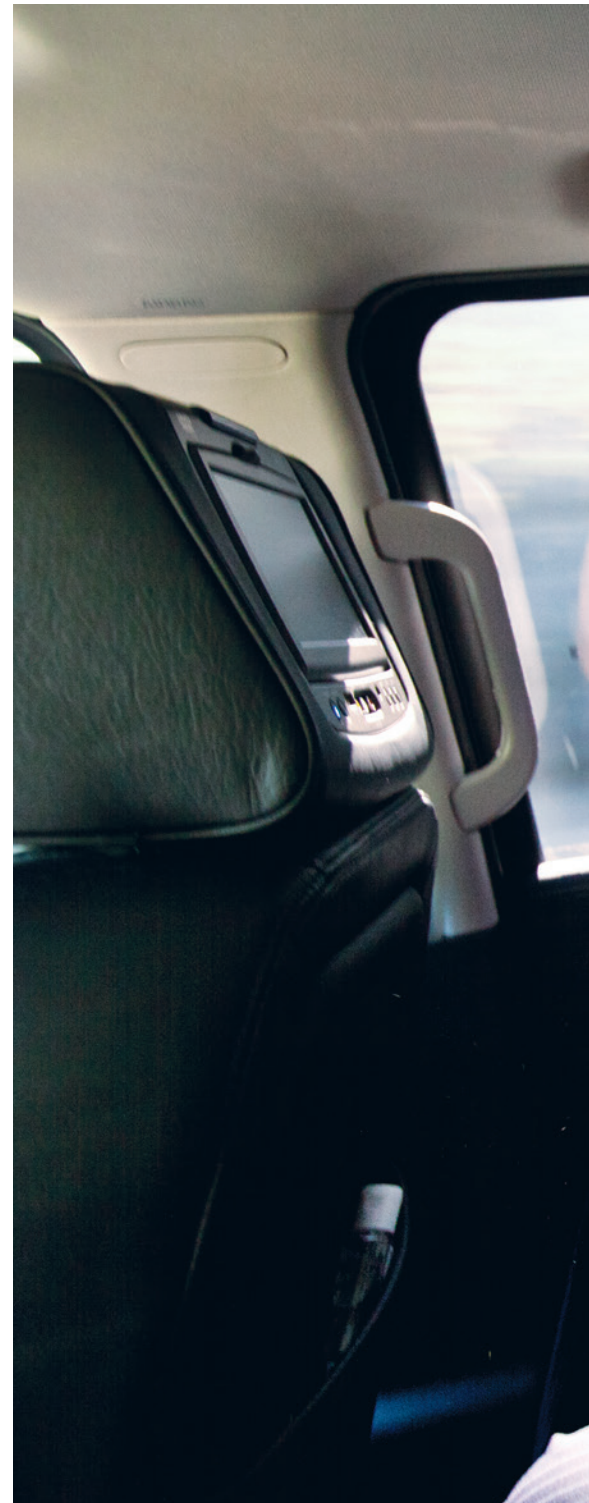
They also vacationed occasionally at a home they purchased a few years earlier in picturesque Sun Valley, Idaho, where they might bicycle as much as 600 miles over a three-week period. But even the Sun Valley home became a place for the work of USC, serving as something of an unofficial Camp David, where the president conducted business and also hosted senior officers at an annual retreat prior to each new academic year.

### **Planes, Trains, and Automobiles: Taking the Presidency on the Road**

While the president and first lady made their house a home for all the Trojan Family, the reality of the USC presidency is that the incumbents must also learn to live out of suitcases, crisscrossing continents to establish academic partnerships, recruit students and faculty, and cultivate support for the university's growth.

Yet even when far from home, the Nikiases have viewed their role as bringing others into USC's larger, worldwide family. At both the outset and the midpoint of the university's \$6 billion campaign, they hosted thousands of alumni and supporters at "Trojan Family receptions" around the nation and overseas, encompassing southern and northern California, Dallas, Chicago, Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C.—along with visits to cities in Asia, Latin America, and beyond.

For the president and the first lady, the work of building the USC community never ends, but there is also no end to their dedication to the task. "Max loves what he's doing," said Mrs. Nikias, "and I love seeing him being happy. We don't see it as a job. With USC, it's a commitment. It's like your family."



President Nikias en route to another event in a grueling calendar that involves 80-hour work weeks and near-constant travel, all to build support for the university community and its academic mission.



