U trustees announce 2017 honorary degree recipients

U alumni Gail Miller and Conrad Anker to receive U’s highest honor

March 14, 2017 — The University of Utah Board of Trustees today announced that U alumni Gail Miller and Conrad Anker will be presented with honorary doctorate degrees, the highest honor given by the school, during the annual commencement ceremony on Thursday, May 4, 2017, at 6:30 p.m. in the Jon M. Huntsman Center.

“As innovators, visionaries and committed public citizens, Gail Miller and Conrad Anker are richly deserving of our most prestigious award,” said Julie Barrett, chair of the Board of Trustees’ honors committee.

Conrad Anker is a world-famous rock climber, mountaineer and author. He is best known for his perilous climbs in the Himalayan mountain range and Antarctica. As the team leader of The North Face climbing team, Anker highly values the immersive combination of ecosystems and cultures abroad and in his hometown of Bozeman, Montana. He has traversed the northern reaches of Alaska and Baffin Island down to the southern tip of Patagonia and Antarctica. Anker, with partner Peter Croft, climbed Spansar Peak in Pakistan in a single day,
making them the first two people to ascend the 7,000-foot ridge. He has summited Everest multiple times and, in 1999, gained mainstream fame when he discovered the body of George Mallory, who disappeared during an attempt to be the first to reach the top of Mount Everest in 1924. Anker is featured in the award-winning documentary Meru, which details his ascent of the notoriously dangerous Shark’s Fin on 20,700-foot Mount Meru, a peak that has eluded many professional climbers. Anker leverages his international acclaim to raise awareness for climate change. He also serves on the board of the Montana State University Leadership Institute and the Alex Lowe Charitable Foundation, among others. After tragically losing his friend and climbing partner, Alex Lowe, in an avalanche in Tibet, Anker eventually married Lowe’s widow and adopted her three boys.

Gail Miller is a powerful businesswoman, owner and chair of the Board of Directors of the Larry H. Miller Group of Companies. She also chairs the Board of Trustees of Salt Lake Community College. As a sports enthusiast and devoted Utahn, Miller recently transferred ownership of the Utah Jazz into a Legacy Trust in an unprecedented move to keep the franchise in Utah for generations to come. One of Utah’s most prominent business leaders, Miller runs numerous businesses founded by her and her late husband, Larry H. Miller, including sports franchises, more than 60 car dealerships, movie theater complexes and many other automotive-related ventures. Miller is also a heralded philanthropist and has significantly benefited Utah communities through her gifting and various programs, including the creation of the Larry H. & Gail Miller Enrichment Scholarships at the University of Utah. These 40 full-ride scholarship promote diversity by providing financial assistance to those whose ethnic background is underrepresented in higher education or who are first-generation students. Miller also supports efforts in behalf of the homeless; Utah Youth Village, Utah’s largest private provider of residential treatment for children who are wards of the state; Intermountain Research and Medical Foundation; and many other causes. She has received various awards for her humanitarian efforts and her role in business, including the Salt Lake Chamber’s Giant in Our City, the Utah Philanthropy Day Leadership Award, the Mountain West Capital Network Co-Entrepreneur of the Decade and the Sandy Chamber’s Tital Award. Miller loves spending time with her husband, Kim Wilson, and their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Honorary degrees are awarded to individuals who have achieved distinction in academic pursuits, in the arts, in the professions, in business, in government, in civic affairs or in service to
the university. Nominations are reviewed by the Honorary Degree Committee, which includes representatives from the faculty, student body and Board of Trustees. Before the finalists are presented to the university president, an advisory group of faculty, staff and administrators provide additional input to assist in the selection of recipients that will bring honor to both the recipients and the university.