In Memoriam: Lois Shelton and Sandy Rogers

University Relations - Communications
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Lois Shelton, widely regarded for elevating the UA Poetry Center to international prominence, has died at age 83 after a battle with Alzheimer’s disease.

She is survived by her husband, UA Regents' Professor Richard Shelton; their son, Brad; daughter-in-law, Carol; and two grandchildren, Milah and Carson.
Initially trained as an opera singer, Shelton took the helm of the UA Poetry Center in 1970 when it consisted of two cottages on Highland Avenue and Speedway Boulevard. She continued in her role as director until 1990.

One of Shelton’s significant accomplishments was growing the Poetry Center’s small but intriguing library, by using her connections to develop a collection that now includes over 40,000 volumes and 20,000 of the nation’s most significant literary journals. Today, the library is considered one of the most comprehensive and fully accessible poetry libraries in the nation.

Shelton also was known for being a gracious and intelligent hostess to visiting poets, including Nobel Prize winners, Pulitzer Prize awardees and several U.S. Poet Laureates.

Tyler Meier, executive director of the UA Poetry Center, says her legacy is far-reaching and contemporary.

“Before I took the executive director position, what I knew of Lois I knew through the reputation of the Poetry Center as a place where the poetry of the world was celebrated, where people came to read and talk about poetry, and where visitors were welcomed with heartfelt hospitality by Lois. Lois was through the abundant legacy of her work, of the culture she fostered, and of the reputation she helped build.”

Her ability to do this while being mindful of budget realities is something Meier continues to emulate.

As he describes it: “Lois put in place a legacy of financial stewardship that guides the Poetry Center to this day. We take pride in being a place whose mission has always been accountable to a role at the University and a role beyond it.”

Those who were influenced by Shelton became “poetry and Lois lifers.” This title fits Donna Somma, a current member of the Poetry Center’s Development Council.

“After the Poetry Center moved to its current home on the UA campus, I had the privilege of working directly with Lois. In the summer of 1975, when I was 18 years old, Lois’ son, Brad, introduced me to the Poetry Center. I was immediately struck by Lois’ warm and open manner. Her intellect and kind heart were evident in everything she did. I was thrilled to join the Poetry Center’s Development Council, I agreed to join in large part out of a sense of duty and loyalty to Lois.”

Adds Somma: “Lois was an original. For those whom she saw as good, she welcomed into her life and accepted without hesitation. She was a confidante and counselor. She was a teacher and mentor. She was a friend. She was a model of courage and innovation. She was a friend to me. She taught me the importance of giving back to the community. She helped shape me into the woman I am today. If I had to choose a single word to define her, it would be ‘grace.’”

Donations in Shelton’s memory can be made to the UA Poetry Center/UA Foundation, at 1508 E. Helen St., Tucson, AZ 85721, or online.

Sandy Rogers, student services coordinator for the College of Pharmacy, died on June 10 at age 66.

Rogers was a longtime employee of the College of Pharmacy. She began working at the college in 1972 as administrative associate to the dean, and held the position through 1992. In 1992, she assumed the position of student services coordinator.

“Sandy Rogers helped shape the College of Pharmacy into the first-class, student-oriented school it is today,” wrote College of Pharmacy dean J. Lyle Bootman in a memorial message. “We will remember her as one of the most loyal and dedicated employees the University of Arizona or College of Pharmacy ever had. It is with heavy hearts that we say goodbye to a staunch supporter and loyal friend.”

Rogers was born in Ohio in 1948 and her parents moved to Tucson shortly after her birth. She attended Sunnyside High School part-time and completed her education at the University of Arizona. She earned a B.S. degree in business education. She worked as a substitute teacher shortly before joining the College of Pharmacy.

At the UA, her responsibilities included assisting students with career counseling and placement, financial aid, awards and scholarships, and university fees. She was responsible for class scheduling and classroom assignments.

When Rogers assumed the role of student services coordinator in 1992, she was responsible for approximately 220 UA students. She served as a liaison between the College of Pharmacy and other University organizations.

In addition to her regular job duties, Rogers was president of the College of Pharmacy Staff Advisory Council from October 1995 to June 1996, and served on many committees at the Arizona Health Sciences Center and the UA.

Rogers was a member of the Tucson Business and Professional Women’s Club and served as the organization’s president from 1980 to 1981. She received the President’s Award for Outstanding Service in 1980, the College of Pharmacy’s Employee of the Year award in 1983 and the Arizona Health Sciences Center’s Georgia Reynolds Dedicated Services Award in 1998.

At the time of her retirement, a scholarship fund was established in Rogers’ name in honor of her years of service to the College of Pharmacy. To contribute to the Sandra K. Rogers Scholarship fund, visit the UA Foundation’s Sandy Rogers Endowment page.

Read her full obituary and leave condolences here.