UA President Emeritus Henry Koffler Dies at 95

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University of Arizona President Emeritus Henry Koffler, who led the UA as president from 1982-1991 and oversaw its ascension to the top ranks of major research universities, died March 10 at the age of 95.

Koffler was the first UA alumnus to serve as president. During his tenure, the UA grew dramatically, increasing enrollment by 16 percent, hiring 700 additional faculty and staff, adding 24 buildings and growing external research funding from $60 million to $192 million.

Under Koffler, the UA was elected to membership in the Association of American Universities in 1985. The AAU is composed of the top 62 research universities in the U.S., Canada and Britain. Koffler also led the Century II Capital Campaign, the UA's first major fundraising activity, with a goal of $100 million. The campaign yielded $198 million.

Koffler also is recognized for his contributions to expanding the general education and honors programs, implementing the first online student information system and investing in central computing capacity, facilitating collaborations with community colleges, and championing efforts to improve the enrollment rates and graduation rates of underserved students.

"I am so grateful that I was able to spend some time with President Koffler and learn from him as I joined the UA community," said UA President Robert C. Robbins. "He was a superior intellect and a very sweet and caring man. We had the same physician, and I saw him often and greatly enjoyed our conversations and his handwritten letters. I tell people everywhere that we must instill a love of lifelong learning in our students, and I can think of no better example than the way President Koffler pursued new ideas and forms of engagement through his entire life. His Pilates regimen was impressive and his artwork is incredible, with an exhibit on display right now at the Tucson Jewish Community Center. He did amazing things for the University, and he's a great inspiration for all of us. I know he will be fondly remembered by the Wildcat family for years to come."

Academic Career

Koffler entered the UA to study agricultural chemistry in 1940. He earned a bachelor's degree from the UA in 1943, a master's degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1944 and a doctorate from the University of Wisconsin in 1947.

He joined the faculty of Purdue University and became a distinguished microbiologist and biochemist who earned a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Eli Lilly Award in Bacteriology and Immunology. One of the youngest full professors at Purdue, he became the head of the Department of Biological Sciences and is credited with bringing the department to international renown.

An able academic administrator, he then served as senior vice president for academic affairs
at the University of Minnesota in 1975, chancellor for the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in 1979 and president of the UA in 1982.

In 1991, the Arizona Board of Regents gave him the title of president emeritus. The Henry Koffler Building was named for him in 2000. The 127,000-square-foot building houses 22 chemistry labs, 17 biology labs and three lecture halls, all for teaching undergraduate chemistry and biology classes.

Former UA Provost George Davis says Koffler’s defining characteristic was his ability to spot and identify talent in the people he hired and led.

"Henry believed that the core mission of a university requires recruiting, developing and retaining outstanding talent, and, at the same time, creating a working environment where talented people can be productive," Davis said.

**Personal Life**

Koffler was born in Vienna in 1922. He was 5 when his father died, and his mother raised him to appreciate Vienna's music, theater and artistic offerings.

He came to the U.S. from Austria alone at age 17, after the Nazi annexation of Austria in 1939. His mother followed two months later. At his suggestion, they settled in Prescott, Arizona, of which he knew from German writer Karl May’s Western adventure books.

Koffler met his wife, Phyllis, at a concert at the UA and they married in 1946.

After his retirement, Koffler conceived of and created the Arizona Senior Academy and Academy Village, a retirement community for people interested in lifelong learning and intellectual and artistic pursuits. It has been described as a place "for people who wanted to retire from work, not life."

"Henry Koffler believed that a life well-lived does not end in retirement," said Gary Fenstermacher, former UA dean of the College of Education and president of the services division of the Arizona Senior Academy. "He proudly would describe the Arizona Senior Academy as one of his greatest accomplishments. He was instrumental in assembling a community of creative individuals who are committed to continuing growth and sharing a productive and challenging life. And it is rewarding to know that this community ultimately served him and Phyllis well."

In 2013, at age 90, Koffler became a digital artist, using his iPad to create abstract paintings inspired by biology and chemistry. He had five art shows, including two sponsored at the UA Tech Park.

Koffler is survived by Phyllis (Pierson) Koffler, his wife of more than 71 years.

Expressions of condolence may be sent to Phyllis Koffler at the Vivaldi Villas, 7700 S. Vivaldi Court, Tucson, AZ 85747. The family requests no flowers. Donations can be made to the Henry and Phyllis Koffler Prize fund at the University of Arizona Foundation, or to the Koffler Memorial at the Arizona Senior Academy at 13715 E. Langtry Lane, Tucson, AZ 85747.