

CLOSE THE GAP:

Donors making college affordable

Jean Phillips' road to philanthropy began during a blizzard in Depression-era Illinois. "I was ten years old, and a member of the Girls Scouts auxiliary," she recalls. "We were collecting money so the choir could have new robes for state competition." The cold and driving sleet forced her companions to head back home. But Jean and her coin canister persevered. "Coming back, I smelled baking cookies and hot chocolate," she laughs. "I've been willing to work for cookies and hot chocolate ever since."



In the decades to follow, Jean Phillips would direct that determination and work ethic to a host of worthy causes, including the Red Cross, Yavapai College, educational and nursing scholarships and the foundational elements of the Prescott we know today.

A child of Elgin, IL, Jean lost her mother when she was young and took on adult responsibilities early. "By ten I was keeping house with my sisters." They were raised by their father in a home that valued learning — even in the absence of opportunity. "This was post-Depression. Education was always important, but college was not a consideration."

She married Mel Phillips, a General Practitioner, in 1944. They arrived in Arizona in 1948, after Mel secured a position at Grand Canyon National Park. "We had a little dog at the time that we loved. When we got there, the rangers said, 'no dogs.' We looked at the dog, said 'thanks but no thanks,' and drove to Prescott."

At the time, Prescott was a town of only 6,000 people, desperate for medical care and hungry for organization and leadership. Mel dug in quickly — introducing advanced anesthesia to a community still using ether, and wearing through tires as he drove back-and-forth to patients as far away as Bagdad. "Everyone loved Mel. He was your gentleman family doctor. He didn't have time for all the board invitations he received, but he was always happy to volunteer his wife," she laughs.

Once enlisted, Jean wasted no time getting things done. She joined the local Red Cross, then soon wound up managing it. When she joined the Medical Auxiliary, she was immediately given a project. "They had a \$400 budget shortfall that year. They asked me to put on a Hospital Charity Ball to cover it." They staged it at the Armory. "We had the performers play on the apron, with the curtain down, because there was artillery behind it." After the charity ball raised \$4,000, they elected Jean president twice, and had her stage 17 more charity balls.

The variety and scope of Jean's philanthropic activities helped shape Prescott's infrastructure: she led the charge to convert the old Jefferson School into a psychiatric office and counseling clinic; she participated in talks with the Yavapai Tribe and the Bureau of Indian affairs to secure more land for the new Yavapai College; Jean was also one of four key women who went door-to-door for the Good Samaritan Society in 1969, raising money for Samaritan Village, the first modern nursing home facility in Prescott. "My philosophy is, if you talk with people and get money, that's fundraising. If you don't, that's education. You're still raising awareness."

Jean and Mel both knew that education was critical to sustaining opportunity and growth in their community. "At first, we didn't know that scholarships were something people like us could do," she says. They established their first scholarship, the Phillips Family Scholarship, through the Arizona Community Foundation. Then they focused their support to help people develop their skills in medicine and education. The Phillips created the first endowed nursing scholarship at Yavapai College, and used financial incentives to keep student nurses working and training at Yavapai Regional Medical Center during the state's nursing shortage. Jean and Mel helped the Medical Auxiliary establish its own scholarship for nurses.

"Scholarships are a win-win, because your gift goes on," Jean explains. "When a person gets a scholarship, they get an opportunity. Their life changes. As a result, their children get more opportunities and on and on."

Today, twenty years after Mel's death, Jean still perseveres: promoting scholarships for causes close to her heart. She doesn't do it for the praise. "The 'thank you's' come sometimes, and that's wonderful. But most of the time, I think they're busy *using* the scholarship." She does it because it builds a better future.

"You can't get a better feeling than helping someone else get a step up," she says. "So much good comes from it."