

Arlene Schnitzer

January 10, 1929 – April 4, 2020



Arlene Director Schnitzer, businesswoman, philanthropist, and civic leader passed away Saturday, April 4th, 2020 in Portland Oregon at age 91. Born in Salem Oregon her parents Simon and Helen Director moved to Portland when she was 3 years old. She attended grade school and one

year of high school in Portland before transferring to Westlake school for girls in Los Angeles where she graduated in 1947. From a young age, she was very involved in Portland Civic Theater and after one year at the University of Washington, she was intending to enroll at USC in Los Angeles to pursue becoming an actress, when she met Harold Schnitzer in the summer of 1949. At the end of their first date,



she turned to him and said, "Harold you are going to marry me, so you better get used to the idea!" Harold Schnitzer always said he liked a woman who was decisive and after several weeks of dating they were engaged and married five weeks later in September 1949.

Married for 62 years they were life-long partners in business, the arts, and philanthropy. She helped Harold start Harsch Investment Corp. which is now run by their son Jordan and has become one of the largest privately-owned real estate companies in the Western United States. In 1961 after attending the Portland Art Museum Art School, now called the Pacific Northwest College of Art, she opened the first art gallery in Portland Oregon, the Fountain Gallery of Art. She operated the gallery until 1987 and during those 26 years, she was instrumental in helping many businesses and individuals understand the importance of having art in their life. In addition to operating the gallery, she also produced a current events television show for 14 years and was the host of her own interview program on Oregon Public Broadcasting. In 1998 Harold and Arlene established The Harold and Arlene CARE Foundation, which has now funded over 150 million dollars to non-profits in the Pacific Northwest and in several other West Coast cities. The Foundations' principal interests are art and culture, social services, at-risk youth education, and medical care. Arlene and Harold were very proud of having endowed The Harold Schnitzer Diabetic Health Center at Oregon Health Sciences University, which provides care for over 7,000 patients a year, irrespective of their financial ability to pay.

In 1984 the family made their first philanthropic gift to help renovate The Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall now referred to as the "Schnitz." In addition to philanthropic support, Arlene was highly recognized as one of the best board members for her energetic leadership and served many organizations, such as The Portland Art Museum, Oregon Health Sciences University, The Children's Institute, Girls Inc, Oregon Symphony, the College of the Desert, McCallum Theater in Palm Desert, Palm Springs Art Museum, the Palm Spring International Film Festival, the Rancho Mirage Writers Festival, the National Council of the Fine Arts Museums in San Francisco and The Performing Art Committee of The Kennedy Center of Washington DC.

Arlene and Harold were always committed to the arts and established The Center for Northwest Art and several curatorial positions at The Portland Art Museum. At Portland State University, they funded The James DePreist professorship and Endowment created to hire and enable professors dedicated to helping students understand multicultural art The Arlene Schnitzer Arts prize-awards students from the College of the Arts cash prizes to recognize their talented work.

In addition to being significant collectors of contemporary artists of the Pacific Northwest, Arlene and Harold became fascinated by Chinese Han antiquities which are over 2,000 years old. For 45 years they assembled the most important private Han Dynasty collection in the United States, which is now on display at The Portland Art Museum in the Harold and Arlene Schnitzer wing of early Chinese art.

Arlene always wanted to help young people have opportunities to become the best they can be. A youth philanthropy program CommuniCare was established which helps over 600 high school students learn to be grant makers. These youth groups fund over \$500,000 annually in grants to local non-profits.

Arlene received many awards which include a Doctorate of Humane Letters, Portland State University 2004, Oregon Governors Arts Award 2008 Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts Degree PNCA 2011. Arlene and Harold were named Portland's First Citizens in 1995.

While Arlene was proud of all the accomplishments and recognition, she was most importantly a wife, mother, aunt, and loyal friend.

Growing up with parents who were immigrants, she always felt lucky to live in this country. When Arlene was a young girl, she decided she wanted to "make something of herself". Her drive and ambition led to a life full of passion, Passion for family, for friends, for the arts, for making the world a better place and most of all a marriage of 62 years!

Over the last several decades Arlene was given many tributes. As the date of the event got closer, she would say "why did I agree to this, there are so many more deserving people." Arlene was always humble about her achievements and felt she was the lucky one to be able to give back to the communities she cared about.

She certainly had a fun side! She loved jewelry, clothes, and getting and giving presents. You should have seen her Christmas and Hanukkah lists. If she met a bellman in Pittsburgh she liked, he got a gift! Chinese food – could not get enough! Finally, chocolate chip cookies – she rarely cooked but when she did it was to bake 500 chocolate chip cookies – the kitchen was a disaster, and her husband Harold always cleaned up the kitchen when she was done cooking!

If there are tears for Arlene, they should be tears of joy, she felt so blessed to live the life she had, to become the person she dreamed of being when she was a little girl.

Arlene is survived by her son Jordan, granddaughters Audria and Arielle, grandsons Samuel and Simon and many nieces and nephews. Arlene was smart, sassy, full of wisdom, tough, kind,

giving and incredibly candid. Her only real hobby, in addition to helping people and collecting art, was reading and golf which, she was very good at!

"Astoria and all Astorians have lost a close friend with the passing of Arlene Schnitzer. She was the leading lady of philanthropy in Oregon. The impact Arlene had on our community of Astoria was immense. Arlene was the leading benefactor of the renovation of the Astoria Column. She not only gave money, but her idea's to improve the monument and the entire park. Arlene gave the closing and largest donation to the Garden of Surging Waves. Arlene was the first person, (and one of only 10), to donate to the Astoria Riverfront Trolley Association which enabled our community to buy "Old 300", our beloved trolley. Arlene was a champion of our youth through Astoria High School athletics and scholarships. Astoria is a better place because of a lifetime of support from our friend Arlene Schintzer. I miss her and Astoria misses her."

WILLIS L. VAN DUSEN
Mayor of Astoria, 1991 through 2014

On January 21, 2020 Arlene made her last public appearance when she was honored for making the largest contribution to the Portland Art Museum in its 128-year history!

Her concluding remarks sum up her philosophy of giving back "I want to inspire other people and other families to do things for their community. If you don't do it, and I don't do it, who is going to do it? You owe something... you can't just take in the fresh air. You have - to be responsible. There's only one way to show it. You either 'put up or shut up'... you have - to show a community you care about it!



To honor her memory the family suggests contributions be made to The Portland Art Museum (Karie.burch@pam.org), Pacific Northwest College of the Arts(chorter@pnca.edu), or The Harold Schnitzer Diabetes Health Center at OHSU (mcilveen@ohsu.edu). A private family service has already taken place and a larger public memorial will be planned in the future.

