

Sandra Day O'Connor: Decades of Support and Guidance for the Heard Museum

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Visitors to the Heard Museum sometimes stop to question why words over the door of the museum's original auditorium identify it as The Sandra Day O'Connor Gallery. It is always a pleasure to explain that the museum was fortunate to have the guidance and support of Sandra Day O'Connor for several decades. O'Connor served as an officer on the museum's board of trustees for 13 years, between 1968 and 1981. She was the board's president on July 7, 1981, when President Ronald Reagan nominated her to the United States Supreme Court.

The formal extent of her activity at the Heard is contained within the list of committees in which she participated: Nominating, Finance, Personnel and Bylaws. She chaired the board's Program Committee and the Long-Range Planning Committee. As board president, O'Connor drafted the Heard Museum's first Collection Management Policy. It was written at a time when few museums had written such a policy, and it was widely requested as a model by other museums beginning their own planning. While our policy has changed with the times and is routinely updated, the framework and important portions of that original policy remain today.



Board of Trustees members ca. 1977-1980. Photo by Al Abrams. RC76(B62):5

During her years as a Heard trustee, and even after she joined the Supreme Court, it was not unusual for the museum to welcome Justice O'Connor and her guests visiting Phoenix, including fellow jurists and representatives of the national news media. As a curator, I remember, as just one example, giving a tour accompanied by Justice O'Connor to Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times reporter Linda Greenhouse. During those tours, I recall Justice O'Connor's kind but on-point questions regarding pertinent information she wanted her guests to have. Justice O'Connor was instrumental in establishing a Heard Museum National Advisory Board that included friends and acquaintances who were collectors and active supporters of the arts. Their introduction to the museum brought us loyal supporters for many projects.

The excitement at the Heard when O'Connor was nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court was mixed with a real sense of loss, knowing she could not remain as actively involved with the museum. The Heard held a farewell banquet in her honor at the Arizona Biltmore, and some of the museum's largest Navajo textiles were staged behind the speakers' platform. Hunkpapa Sioux opera singer Bonnie Jo Hunt sang at the event. In the years that followed, beyond serving on the Heard National Advisory Board, Justice O'Connor

continued to honor the museum as a speaker and as an author, signing her book *Lazy B: Growing Up on a Cattle Ranch in the American Southwest*.

Today, Justice O'Connor's son, Scott O'Connor, who has served on our board of trustees, remains involved with the museum as a life trustee. As for Sandra Day O'Connor, we were fortunate that she didn't really leave us when she joined the Supreme Court, and her legacy remains with us today.

