MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT
George Evanoff, president, the University of Arizona Retirees Association

Welcome to the spring edition of Jubilación. This year has been memorable and we are looking forward to the opportunities and challenges of the coming year. I would like to thank the individuals that devoted their time and effort to the Association. The officers have spent many hours meeting its needs. The assistance and counsel of Tom Rehm, vice president and treasurer, Rose Perrill, secretary, and Suzanne Van Ort, past president are greatly appreciated.

Our Association is fortunate to have dedicated and knowledgeable committee chairs. Tom Rehm chaired the Finance Committee where he provided valuable guidance. Linda Pace, assisted by Dianne Bret Harte, arranged our wonderful UARA luncheons. Janice Murphy continued as editor of Jubilación always producing our Association newsletter with an array of interesting and informational articles. Suzanne Van Ort and Janice Murphy served as our Nomination Committee. Roger Caldwell chaired the Communication Committee, with members Susan Green, Janice Murphy and Nancy Shiley, conducting surveys and maintaining our outstanding website. Jo Henry continued her excellent service on the Membership Committee providing UARA with accurate membership records and statistics. Stardust Johnson chaired the Scholarship Committee assisted by Tom Rehm and Suzanne Van Ort. (You can contribute to the scholarship fund directly through the UA Foundation or when you participate in the UA Cares program.) Cornelius Steelink chaired our Bylaws Committee, assisted by Helen Mautner, Bob Sankey and Roger Caldwell, producing new bylaws that will be voted on for adoption at the spring luncheon. Uwe Fink, aided by Jim Burke, headed the Legislative Committee keeping abreast of state bills and activities and keeping the UARA Council informed. Susan Green chaired the Education Committee providing stimulating and informative programs.

We are fortunate to have University organizations sending representatives to our Council meetings, namely: Sharon Bouch, Staff Advisory Council; Linda Breci, Appointed Professionals; Cornelius Steelink, Faculty Senate; Heather Lukach, External Affairs. Keith Meredith, past president of UARA, continues to provide us with information on ASRS.

(continued on page 2)
(President’s Message continued from page 1)

The annual UARA survey and ballot is included in this issue. Take some time to review it, especially the interest section. We would like to have more people involved in UARA activities and to provide the activities and services that you want. Your comments and suggestions are carefully read and acted upon whenever possible. Please mail the completed form to the UARA office.

Have a pleasant and safe summer--see you in the fall.

George Evanoff

ORGANIZATION CHANGES

UWE FINK

UARA has been well informed and represented by Uwe Fink as chair of the Legislative Committee. Uwe and Jim Burke (UARA contributor who lives in the Phoenix area) have attended and participated in countless Arizona State Retirement System meetings, which has involved much travel between Tucson and Phoenix for Uwe. He has kept track of legislation affecting retirees, especially with regards to the pension fund, has participated in the Tri-university meetings maintaining contact with the ASU and NAU retiree associations legislative representatives, and has kept the Council and the membership apprised of pertinent issues. Uwe is stepping down as Legislative chair. Thank you, Uwe, for serving us so generously and well.

JO HENRY

Jo Henry has served as Membership Chair of the UARA for over ten years, keeping detailed records of present and past membership, daily searching the Arizona Daily Star and other resources for mention of deceased members to keep the records current. Her work has been invaluable both to UARA and the University. She regularly confers with Systems so that they are also aware of retirees who are deceased and can update the University records. She regularly supplies the UARA Council with current membership statistics and has been responsible for some of you, after receiving a phone call from her, coming to the decision to renew your annual dues (you know who you are!). Jo is stepping down from her position as membership chair. She has set and maintained high standards and her splendid service is greatly appreciated.

PAT WILLIAMSON

Pat Williamson, UARA Office Manager par excellence, has had an unfortunate fall and is currently in rehabilitation where she is progressing slowly. Pat has resigned and will not continue as the UARA Office Manager.

During her time with UARA, Pat has worked with the Executive Committee in maintaining the office records, assisted the Membership Chair and Treasurer in processing the incoming membership dues, participated in the annual retirees’ dinners, provided support to committees when needed, welcomed participants to education committee programs and tracked the attendance, and began to compile a Policies and Procedures Manual and to organize UARA historical documents. Those of you who have had occasion to call the office and receive her cheery welcome and have been helped with whatever question/problem was presented, know what an asset she has been to this organization. We wish her a full and comfortable recovery.

In the meantime, office hours are being covered by the UARA officers.

OFFICE MANAGER POSITION OPENS

The function of this part-time position is to represent UARA positively to retirees and the public and to answer calls and questions by retirees and others who may call or visit the office. It will include becoming knowledgeable regarding various questions callers may have (health insurance enrollment deadlines, UARA functions, key University phone numbers–parking, bookstore, etc.), maintaining office records and providing support to UARA officers and committees as requested and approved by the UARA president. Basic computer skills are necessary.

Location: UARA Office, 2030 E. Speedway Times: 8 hours per week during most of the academic year and 2 hours per week in summer.

If you are interested in this position or know of someone who would be qualified, call the office (325-4366) or email: uara@dakotacom.net to receive a complete job description.
NEWS OF RETIREES

Myra Dinnerstein, research professor emerita, Gender & Women’s Studies

Myra Dinnerstein and her friend Sandy Heiman have started a new blog called Becoming Older. We hope that U of A retirees will write an entry comment, as this is exactly the group the blog is designed for!

Becoming Older provides a forum to share experiences, feelings, and resources about growing older. We are interested in hearing about issues you face as you get older. We encourage writers to use a pseudonym, if they want to, so their entry can be anonymous. To view the blog Becoming Older, go to becomingolder.wordpress.com. You can submit your entry or comment at the email address becomingolder@gmail.com and we will then post it on the blog.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Uwe Fink, chair, Legislative Committee

A number of articles have appeared in the press about lavish public pensions intimating that all public pensions are the same. There are some states that have severe public pension problems but the Arizona State Retirement System (ASRS) is not one of them. ASRS is one of the fairest, best run and well funded pension systems in the nation. In the ASRS pension system the costs are shared 50/50 between the employee and the employer.

This is not the case for three of the other State pension systems, namely, the Corrections Officer Retirement Plan (CORP), the Elected Officials’ Retirement Plan (EORP), and the Public Safety Personnel Retirement System (PSPRS). House Bill 2726 and Senate Bill 1609, as well as some others, have been introduced to bring these plans into closer agreement with that of ASRS. In particular for those plans, it increases employee contribution rates, it eliminates the DROP (Deferred Retirement Option Plan) available to the PSRPS, it changes the graded multiplier to bring it in line with ASRS, and it eliminates cost of living adjustments (COLA’s) in those plans.

Three changes will affect newly hired employees that participate in ASRS. The point system for retirement (years of service plus age) will be eliminated. It will be replaced by a system where new ASRS employees can only retire at age 65 or at age 62 with a minimum of 10 years of service. In case an employee returns to work, her/his employer will be subject to an alternate contribution rate that makes up for the contributions lost to ASRS had the employee not retired early. In addition, no permanent benefit increases can be given unless the actuarial market value of ASRS is at least 70%.

An important fact to reiterate is that, because of contract law, these changes will affect only newly hired employees. Thus, they will have no effect on the pensions of current UARA members.

I also wish to note that this will be my last column as the UARA legislative representative since time pressures from other sources are forcing me to give up the position.

UARA MEMBERSHIP 2010/11

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RSVP NOW!

To hear Paul Matson, director, Arizona State Retirement System, on Tuesday, April 26, 7 p.m., College of Education, Kiva Auditorium, call 325-4366 or email uara@dakotacom.net to reserve your space, as it is limited.

Bring your questions about the health of your Arizona pension!

A unionized public employee, a tea bagger and a CEO are sitting at a table. In the middle of the table is a plate with a dozen cookies on it. The CEO reaches across and takes 11 cookies, looks at the tea bagger and says, “Watch out for that union guy, he wants a piece of your cookie.”
In 2010, the Government Finance Officers of the U.S. and Canada (GFOA) published an Advisory on Pension Pitfalls. This professional guidance is a must-read for policy makers for public pensions. I bring it to your attention as evidence of the proactive nature of ASRS. Girard Miller, a frequent contributor to Governing Magazine, highlighted what he considered to be major salient points made in the document. These points will be presented with a short comment accompanied by a description of actions taken either by the state and/or ASRS that address these recommendations.

* **Full funding: don’t cut corners.** The goal should always be to gain full funding. Frequent actuarial studies should be conducted to determine contribution rates based on this goal. We are fortunate, unlike some other states such as Illinois and New Jersey, that our state and employees have continued to make all required contributions. Actuarial studies of all trusts are conducted annually.

* **Stop Spiking.** Spiking is a rise in salary just before retirement that inappropriately increases the retirement benefit, e.g., a sudden promotion or salary increase, proportionately more overtime pay, etc. Many of these efforts are obviously designed only to enhance retirement benefits. To reduce the effect of spiking, ASRS changed from a 3-year average to a 5-year average for determination of salary level in 2010.

* **Adjust retirement ages for longevity.** Our life expectancies continue to increase. The retirement age should correspond to this increase. ASRS replaced the Rule of 80 with the Rule of 85 in 2010 so as to bring the retirement age more in line with our increasing longevity.

* **Stop retroactive benefits increase.** No retroactive benefit increases have been granted in over a decade.

* **Drop DROPS or at least reformulate them.** DROPs, deferred retirement option plans, are ill-designed attempts to keep employees working. They provide a windfall of benefits for the employee and are inappropriately expensive. ASRS rescinded a modified DROP that was under development in 2006.

* **Avoid unfunded COLAs.** ASRS changed from a COLA (Cost of Living Allowance) to a PBI (Permanent Benefit Increase) for this reason. PBIs only occur when excess investment returns have accumulated adequately.

* **Get real about investment returns.** ASRS reviews their investment return assumption on a regular basis. Since inception, ASRS continues to exceed its investment return assumption (8%) with an average return of 9.6%.

* **Require fair shares from the employees.** Arizona is one of few states that require the employee and the

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**PUBLIC PENSION FUNDS--SECURE OR IN CRISIS?**

**Keith Meredith, former chair, ASRS Board of Trustees**

The budgetary battles in the state of Wisconsin, as well as in many other states in the Union, have focused attention on public pension funds in ways not often seen or heard before. Media outlets and politicians alike have blamed the public pensions as being major contributors to our financial downfall, and have characterized the funds as being in crisis. Individual pundits, with undeclared agendas, have tried to establish that public pensions are leading us to financial ruin, and offer alternative “fixes” that will prevent the certain disaster that we are headed for.

Members of pension funds throughout the nation, when faced with these pronouncements of doom and gloom, must certainly feel some anxiety about the security of their retirement, now and into the future. Needed are clear statements of reality, supported by credible and recognized sources of information, which attempt to remove emotion and bias from the topics. This article will initiate a series of discussions that will address the status of pension funds nationally, and in our state. There will be no sequence to the articles, but rather a selection of issues that have been emphasized by politicians, academics, and the media. My first selection addresses the question: Is there a need for ASRS pension reform?

**ASRS--An Agency Engaged in Proactive Reform**

One of the outcries being heard is the demand for major pension reform, even to the extent of discarding the old and replacing it with an entirely new type of plan. Of course, this demand presupposes that there is a critical need for such dramatic reform. Many of the reforms, or “fixes,” that are suggested imply that our type of plan cannot succeed and should be replaced, e.g., change our defined benefit plan to a defined contribution plan. The emphasis of these proposals has been on great change. The validity of these proposals will be explored in later discussions in this series. For now, let it be said that the ASRS considers that reforms should always be considered, but as changes designed to strengthen our existing plan, a healthy defined benefit plan, that continues to serve the members well.
employer (state or municipality) to share equally in providing necessary contributions to the fund. This is a fair and just arrangement.

* Prior service must be fairly priced. Employees are allowed to purchase prior years of service to add to years of service in ASRS. The basis for service purchases was changed from normal cost to actuarial present value in 2004. The effect of this change was to make the purchase cost-neutral to the fund, thereby presenting no harm to the fund or other members.

The point of listing these recommendations and actions is to demonstrate that ASRS had anticipated every one of the recommendations prior to the GFOA publication and had taken actions as early as 2004 with appropriate policy changes. Your pension plan is proactive in its analysis and its policy direction. Reforms are always being considered and, when appropriate, changes made to strengthen the plan for its members. ASRS was recognized as a model of pension programs by a PEW Charitable Trust analysis in 2010. There is no evidence of a need for major or dramatic change in the existing plan.

My next article will summarize facts about state and local government pensions across our nation. You will be amazed by the differences between this upcoming presentation and the hyperbole that is so prevalent in our 24/7 barrage of questionable information.

If you have burning questions about your pension plan or if you just want to be better informed about your retirement future, take advantage of the presentation by Paul Matson, executive director of the Arizona State Retirement System, on campus April 26. Mr. Matson has been your advocate and leader for over a decade and will present a clear, informed picture of ASRS in the world of pension plans. Mr. Matson is recognized internationally as an authority on pension programs. If he doesn’t address all of your interests in his presentation, he most certainly will in a question and answer session that follows. Location and time are given in a flyer included within this issue. See you there!

UPCOMING EVENTS

| April 12 | UARA Advisory Council meeting |
| April 26 | Speaker, Paul Matson, ASRS Kiva Auditorium, Educ. Bldg. |
| April 30 | Luncheon, Tucson Country Club, Speaker, James Moore, U of A Foundation |
| May 10 | UARA Advisory Council meeting |

NB: Council meetings are at 9 a.m., 1125 N. Vine (west of the Poetry Center)

UARA WEBSITE - PROFILE OF BOOKS AND CONSUMER SURVEYS

Roger Caldwell, chair, Communications Committee

The UARA website has a variety of information of interest to retirees. One of the home page sections is Resources for Retirees. In that section there is a link to Books and Consumer Surveys, where you can find brief summaries and links for websites with the specific information.


The Consumers Surveys section includes sources and descriptions of available survey results, including several Arizona state government agencies. Specific links on the UARA website will take you to:

J.D. Power. Evaluations of cars (by brand and year), electronics, healthcare, insurance, telecommunications, home builders, and travel.

JUBILACIÓN (HOO BEE LAH SEEOWN) = RETIREMENT

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The foregoing information was gathered by a UARA volunteer viewing the Funeral Notices in the Arizona Daily Star, by information provided Benefits at the U of A, or by return mail with the notation “deceased.” Some may be missed because the U of A is not mentioned. If any deceased retiree is not listed who has died within the past year, it is because UARA did not have this information. If a retiree is listed who passed away some time ago, it is because UARA and Systems became aware of this in the past year. If you have questions or comments, please call Jo Henry at 744-2779.

University of Arizona Retirees Association Mission Statement

*Purpose:* to foster the benefit, interests, and well-being of the retired faculty and staff of the University of Arizona through social, educational, and promotional activities, as well as to encourage continuing contact between retirees and the University.

*Membership:* open to University of Arizona retired faculty, appointed professionals, staff, and their spouses.
American Customer Satisfaction Index. Includes annual survey results for government agencies, insurance and banks, manufacturing and retail sales, restaurants and hotels, airlines, and e-businesses.

Better Business Bureau (Southern Arizona). Reviews customer complaints and brief descriptions of local businesses and charities (includes both BBB members and non-members).

Arizona Attorney General. The AG provides lists of consumer scams, examples of elder abuse, life care planning (e.g., powers of attorney and living wills).

Arizona Department of Health Services. Lists the quality of licensed health institutions (assisted living, long term care, behavioral care, child care, and medical care. Licensing status and number of citations are provided and can be found by city or institutional name.

Arizona Department of Insurance (ADI). Twice each year the ADI provides a list of auto insurance companies in Arizona, including their premiums (for several types of driving or ages), the number of complaints and number of policies. The same information is available for home owners insurance.

In addition, the ADI has information on general consumer information and Medicare supplements.

Some software is free for retirees and can be found at sitelicense.Arizona.edu (however, most of it is specialized and probably of limited interest to most retirees).

As a retiree you can purchase items from the UA Bookstore, including from the Technology Center (Computer Store). This allows retired faculty and staff to purchase hardware and some software at the academic discount. You must have a current CatCard. The software that is excluded is special licensing for departments where a home computer is used for work related purposes. Examples of included software are: Microsoft operating systems and Microsoft software, plus products from Adobe, Apple, Intuit, McAfee, Roxio, Symantec, and others. In addition, the Technology Center can order from any company that provides an "academic discount" for software.

Hardware (Apple, Dell, HP, Levano, and Sony) can be purchased and serviced, and there is a direct order service for UA faculty and staff on the Dell website.

Sometimes the prices are comparable to what you can get from other sources and sometimes the prices are very good--it depends on the specific product. If the listed price on the website seems higher than it should be, call the Technology Center for confirmation of the current price (621-8874).

The Technology Center is in the basement of the main campus book store (Student Union). The website is http://uofabookstores.com--select the Computer Store tab and pull down menu to find Apple or Dell hardware. For software, you need another approach--do not select the Computer Store tab, but go down the menu on the right and select Software (listed under Shop Now). The on-line software listing is not well maintained and links remain broken a long time, so it is best to call the Technology Center to be sure the product is available.

As mentioned in the last Jubilación, the UA is changing email programs this spring. Since this is the last newsletter until fall, future updates on the email changes will be posted on the UARA website. Briefly, you will be able to keep your current email account name and web mail use. When the change occurs you will continue to use your UA NetID to access email and you will have to change the server
The Arizona Center on Aging (ACOA) at The University of Arizona College of Medicine is home to a new, innovative program for students in the health-care professions. The Interprofessional Senior Mentor Program at ACOA’s Geriatric Education Center launched in January with 30 health-care students from the UA Colleges of Pharmacy, Medicine, Nursing and Public Health and the ASU School of Social Work.

Each student is paired with an active older adult mentor, 60+, who provides opportunities for the student to enhance understanding of older adult patients. In monthly meetings with their mentor, students gain an understanding of the aging process and an increased comfort level communicating with older adults.

Anne Morrison, MPA, program coordinator, notes that tomorrow’s health-care professionals will increasingly be called upon to be comfortable with and knowledgeable about our aging population. “We hope this experience will have a positive effect on their attitudes toward older adults and give them some of the skills needed to work in interprofessional healthcare teams, improving health outcomes.”

Feedback following the initial sessions of the new program is positive. Christina DiGiacomo, UA College of Pharmacy PharmD candidate (2011) said, “After only 10 minutes I knew I had amazing mentors. I was impressed by their involvement in the community, volunteering, and their high activity level. I was excited to get to know them.”

The Interprofessional Senior Mentor Program is actively recruiting senior mentors for fall 2011. If you are interested or would like more information, please contact Anne Morrison at morrison@aging.arizona.edu.

The Green Valley campus will charge $50 for the summer session.

In Tucson, the session will run for six weeks, on Tuesdays only, from May 10 to June 14th. As of this date, a few of the Tucson classes are: Discussions on Art and Selected Artists; News and Views; University Treasures, Literature of the Modern Middle East, and PowerPoint Basics.

The Marana campus will offer classes in June, including Real and Complex Numbers, The Art and Science of Origami, Beginning Norwegian Embroidery, and an International Film Festival.

The Green Valley classes, from May 31 to June 24, include Reading the New Yorker, Investing 201, and Unspun: Finding Facts in a World of Disinformation.

The summer study group locations are: Tucson, classes are held in the University Services Annex, 200 W. Sixth Street (east building); Marana, classes are held in the Heritage Highlands Clubhouse at Dove Mountain; Green Valley, groups are held at various locations. Details on additional classes, directions, times, and registration can be found on the OLLI website: http://olli.arizona.edu. Click on the appropriate campus. Information is also available at 520-626-9039. (OLLI/UA = the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Arizona)

This summer the Humanities Seminars Program (HSP) continues its 27-year tradition of offering an intriguing selection of courses in letters, arts, and sciences designed specifically for adult students in the greater Tucson community. All courses are taught by present and former U of A professors.

Four four-week classes are offered, meeting once a week from 9 a.m. until noon. More information is available at http://hsp.arizona.edu (note: don’t enter www) or by calling Kerstin Miller at 520-626-7845.

On Tuesdays in May, join Pat Willerton in investigating Four Modern European Democracies: Achievements and Challenges. The course will relate European experiences, achievements and challenges to the contemporary U.S. and world settings.

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Richard Poss looks at how science fiction portrays new scientific or technological advances in the *Anatomy of the Science Fiction Short Story*. The stories illuminate technology, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology and medicine, time travel, and genetic engineering. The class meets on Thursdays in June.

In *Exploring the Universe Within: Mind and Brain*, Lee Ryan shows how the brain allows us to interact with our world through movement, vision, language, emotion, and decision making. It considers brain injury, cognitive abilities, aging, and the workings of the normal human brain. The class meets in June on Wednesdays.

Join David Soren on Wednesday mornings in July for *Art History and the Cinema*, as he explores how the history of cinema relates to a variety of art movements. See how classic films like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and the Gothic horror films of the early 1930s, such as *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* draw on the Baroque, Pop Art and more.

**DYING**

*Kenney F. Hegland, J.E. Rodgers professor emeritus, Law Instruction*

Art Buchwald, newspaperman, decided enough is enough. He stopped kidney dialysis. He gave a last interview to Tom Brokaw.

> “Art, what do you think you will miss the most?”

> “Global warming.”

> “Hold it right there, Arthur! That’s the wrong attitude. ‘Do not go gentle into that good night, rage, rage, against the dying of the light.’”

The rant of a young man, in this case Dylan Thomas. He’s wrong.

Maybe Art is raging; it’s just that we can’t rage constantly. Snarling at the Grim Reaper is fine but most likely we’ll lose footing with thoughts of dinner, or, more hopefully, a good joke. It is our salvation, or perhaps our damnation, that we cannot stay too long with one emotion or one thought. Watching a rehearsal of a sword fight, the director stops the action:

> “You two aren’t getting the emotional side of it. Sure, you seem angry but even fighting for your life, emotions will change, from anger to fear to relief to confusion and perhaps even mercy.”

Anthony Trollope, a contemporary of Dickens, put the matter this way: a man is thinking about an argument he has just had with his wife when suddenly he begins thinking about whether he should give away his old boots.

What is one to make of this aside--other than Trollope, from a distance of over 150 years, pegged you? That it’s okay, in moments of great joy or great sorrow, not to feel what the poets or experts proscribe. We all have enough to feel guilty about.

But is Art raging at the dying of the light? Probably not. Things we fear seldom turn out as bad as we think they will. What about severe disability? Nancy Mairs suffers from it. In *Waist-High in the World*, she writes:

> “There are readers who need, for a tangle of reasons, to be told that a life commonly held to be insufferable can be full and funny. I am living that life. I can tell them.”

Death, when viewed from afar, looks ghastly, maybe up close, not so much.

Studies show that elderly people are generally happier than younger. Make of that what you will.

As a young man, the 16th Century essayist Montaigne had a morbid fear of death. Many of his friends and relatives had died suddenly, young, a brother from being hit by a tennis ball. At parties Montaigne would sit alone, brooding with the thought that the very next moment might be his last. (A tennis ball!)

Then he had a bad fall from his horse. Bloody, crying in pain, his friends rushed to his aid, fearing he was dying. But what was he thinking?

> “It seemed to me that my life was hanging only by the tip of my lips. I closed my eyes in order, it seemed to me, to help push it out. I took pleasure in growing languid and letting myself go. I was not only free from distress but felt that sweet feeling of sliding into sleep. I believe that is how people feel whom we see in the agony of death. We pity them without cause, thinking that they are troubled by grievous pains or have their souls full of distressing thoughts.”
Seeing death up close, he no longer feared it. No more brooding; no more rage. He began to party with the best of them. In Tuesdays with Morrie, Morrie, who is dying of Lou Gehrig’s disease, says,

“Everyone knows they’re going to die, but nobody believes it. If we did, we would do things differently…. To know you’re going to die, and to be prepared for it at any time. That’s better. That way you can actually be more involved in your life while you’re living. Once you learn how to die, you learn how to live.”

Doing things differently, being more involved with life, learning how to live, all sound wonderful. But how does one learn how to die? Books? Meditation? Maybe it’s not that complicated. Maybe it’s just fessing up to reality, to accepting it rather than ignoring it, to believe it rather than just knowing it. As to the details, Montaigne assures us:

“If you don’t know how to die, don’t worry. Nature will tell you what to do on the spot, fully and adequately. She will do this job perfectly for you; don’t bother your head about it.”

Even it means missing global warming.


WHATEVER HAPPENED TO…
GORDON DUTT?
Susan Green, editor, College of Education, retiree

We bounce along the soft ruts and furrows, passing row upon row of staked bare vines and occasional wooden signs, such as Colombard or Pinot Noir. We are on a tour of Sonoita Vineyards, Gordon Dutt’s personal Eden, which he has nurtured into existence and of which he is the proud caretaker. These grapes, he explains, produce wines similar to those of Burgundy, France, due largely to soil similarities. They also represent the beginnings of the modern wine industry in Arizona, for which Dutt can legitimately claim credit. His achievements have been noted in the San Francisco Chronicle, Vines and Wines, and the Washington Post. One of his wines has been served at the White House. Though there were many who thought Arizona too hot for premium wines, his display of state and international medals have proved them wrong.

Gordon Dutt was raised in Montana. He attended Purdue for his master’s and doctoral degrees in physical (soil) chemistry, landed his first job at UC Davis, but before long was hired by the UA to study water quality issues. In 1970, he and a horticulturist partner convinced some Yuma table grape farmers to experiment with wine grapes. That was the beginning. Later, when the UA had him test some water harvesting methods near Oracle, he chose to use wine grapes for the test crop. Once the fruit was hanging from the vines—“I didn’t like to see them go to waste, so I taught myself how to make wine.” The first wine was made in his kitchen, because the University did not condone making wine on campus.

In 1976, he was approached by Blake Brophy, owner of the expansive Babocomari Ranch, near Elgin, to use his land for wine growing, and Dutt was able to get a $95,000 grant to study the potential for premium wines. The project was successful, and a few years later he started his own commercial winery, Sonoita Winery. There are now 10 wineries in the Sonoita region, which benefit from its 5000’ elevation, and 48 in Arizona. Dutt looks on his vine-growing neighbors like a father, proud of their growth and success. He has 30 acres himself—fewer now than at his peak—producing 3000 cases a year. He sells 90% of it at his winery. He is still very much involved in its operation, though he has hired a new winemaker. He divides his time between the winery and his home in Tucson.

Wines are not his only legacy. Dutt was co-founder of the Tucson Soaring Club, where he took the first flight of the club’s existence in 1960. He flew both gliders and tow planes, and his sons, Rocky and Howard, who still live in Arizona, flew with him. He and his wife Frances, who died in 1998, were also very serious travelers. Dutt enjoys his reputation for taking on a challenge and bringing new ideas to fruition. He says with a smile, “I have made a lifetime doing things that people told me I couldn’t do.”
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