

CLOSING THE GAP: MEL SHUTZ

Most Yavapai College Foundation members were inspired by their own collegiate experience.

Mel isn't one of them.

"Part of the reason I support education is regret." Shutz chuckles. Animated and good-humored, Mel, 77, grew up in Philadelphia and fell in love with opera at a young age. "I went to college to study design and architecture. One teacher was so disenchanted with the field, he passed that onto us; very discouraging."



His memory of that bad classroom experience – and his resolve to create better ones – has helped close the gap between the number of available scholarships and the Yavapai College students who need them.

Mel worked in the office furniture industry. "I did management, marketing, design and sales for several companies." After 35 years, he needed a break. "I was only 56. What do you do at 56? Too late to become a brain surgeon." Mel became a "professional" volunteer: Ronald McDonald House, Make-A-Wish, some 25 different organizations over the years. He moved to Prescott full-time in 2005, volunteering along the way.

In Prescott, Mel heard about YC's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) and signed up to offer an opera appreciation class, the first of about thirty.

"That was eleven years ago," he smiles. At OLLI, Mel hopes he provided a positive classroom experience. His teaching repertoire expanded to embrace his enthusiasms. "I've facilitated classes on 'Sherlock Holmes in Film'; '1939: Hollywood's Greatest Year'; and 'Orangutans: Endearing and Endangered.' To date, he has taught about 75 different OLLI classes.

He also began working with the Yavapai College Foundation to improve opportunities for local students. "I donated scholarships to the Art and Music departments, then came *Education Now!*"

Mel provided the seed funding for the *Education Now! Scholarship Fund*, a program assisting local high school seniors who have demonstrated financial need and expressed an interest in Yavapai College. Last fall, 26 local

students received the first wave of *Education Now!* scholarships. "It's so important to serve Yavapai County high school graduates," he says. "If you can't afford school immediately, you get a job, start a family – and there's nothing wrong with that. But then, college becomes the thing you'll do later. Some people never get back. I like to see people follow their dreams."

These days find Mel happily working causes far and near: his *Save the Children* adoptee in the Philippines; his future OLLI classes, the advisory board for WildHorse Ranch Rescue; the three orangutans he supports in Borneo and Sumatra; and, of course, *Education Now!* for high school seniors.

"Prescott is 'Everybody's Hometown,' right? Many of us who live here have not supported our alma maters. Maybe we've lost touch. Maybe there's not a bond there. But I think of Yavapai College as 'Everybody's Hometown College.' It's important for students to have places like YC to come to."

-- *Michael Grady*