

CLOSE THE GAP:
Donors making a difference

Phil and Bette Winklestern have a great deal in common: a dry wit, a quick laugh, and an inquisitive spirit. They enjoy – and correct – each other’s stories like a couple who know each other well.



“We’ll be celebrating our sixtieth wedding anniversary come June,” Bette says.

But the Winklesterns share more than a happy marriage. Both came from humble beginnings. Both found opportunities through education. And both are committed to closing the gap between available scholarships and the students who need them at Yavapai College.

“When you start out poor, you learn very quickly that education is critical if you want to succeed,” Phil says. Born in New York City, into a family that had never attended college, Phil sorted checks in a bank for \$28 a week. “I did a personnel interview, and they identified me as ‘vice presidential material.’” He recalls. “That got me in trouble because I was kind of a hellion at work.” But the idea of working as an industry executive stuck. He began taking college courses at night. “The bank paid 100% if you got an ‘A.’” He got all A’s, but his progress was interrupted by the post-war draft.

Bette was born in Kentucky during the Depression. Her family moved to Michigan when she was nine, where her father had a job. “Education was always important in our home — art, music and literature.” She says. “But when I graduated from high school, my parents couldn’t afford to send both me and my brother to college.” Her younger brother went to college, and Bette found a job.

Phil became a parachute rigger in the Marine Corps. “We successfully defended Miami Beach from the enemy,” he chuckles. He and his buddies made a pact to attend Michigan State together once their hitch was over. There, he studied Business, on the GI Bill.

“This was during the Korean War. The GI Bill was watered down, but it was still enough to get an education.” Phil recognized this as his chance. He lived frugally, drove an old Buick he dubbed “The Grey Ghost,” and worked at a local college hangout. That’s where he was the night Bette came in with her girlfriends.

“Phil and his buddies were always coming around to protect us,” Bette laughs. “Of course, how could we meet anybody else?”

Phil and Bette married in 1956 – a week after he graduated. They packed the Grey Ghost and drove to Schenectady, NY, where Phil started work at General Electric.

Phil's education, combined with his skills, gave his career momentum: five years in GE's Finance department led him to the Ford Motor Company, where he worked for their International Finance Division. In 1967, Ford named him Manager of Cash/Credit Control for the Ford of Europe Group, and Phil and Bette and their children moved to England for five years.

Three years after their return to the states, the Winklesterns moved to Youngstown, Ohio, where Phil took a position as Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of Commercial Inter Tech. They put down roots in the community. Bette did volunteer work as their family grew, and finally got her opportunity to attend college, studying Art History at Youngstown State University. Phil served on numerous local boards during a 20 year tenure that ended with his retirement in 1995. "One of the longest-running CFO's in the country," Bette says.

They fell in love with Arizona as a retirement destination; and fell in love with Prescott after reading about it in Barry Goldwater's autobiography. Once settled, Phil turned to education to keep sharp. "I got to know Yavapai College through OLLI [The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute]. I must have taken about 50 classes. I wanted to learn subjects I knew nothing about."

"About a year later, I gave OLLI a try," Bette says. Soon, she was taking classes in everything from Archeology to Polar Expedition. "The ability to keep learning – and the people of different backgrounds you meet – education is just a wonderful thing to have."

And a wonderful thing to share. The Winklesterns have come far, but they've never forgotten the incredible opportunities education offered them at a critical time in their lives. Their general scholarship fund supports all education funds, including the Family Enrichment Center, Nursing scholarships, Viticulture and Enology scholarships, the Performing Arts Charitable Endowment and the Granite Mountain Hotshots Scholarship Fund – in an effort to pass those opportunities on.

"We don't get too specific about where our support goes," Phil explains, "Our principal objective, really, is to help people who need help."

"And it's rewarding, for us, to see someone else rewarded," Bette smiles. "When you meet scholarship recipients, you see the light in their eyes. You know how committed they are. This actually changes lives."

