

## Simpson's goal: sharing art with Wyoming

By DEBRA BAKER BECK, ALUMNEWS Editor

When Ann Schroll Simpson (BA '53) decided the University of Wyoming needed an Art Mobile to take UW's cultural resources to isolated communities, she took charge and raised the funds necessary to get the job done.

It wasn't even a particularly daunting task for the 1996 Medallion Service Award winner.

"You can sell anything if you believe in it," Simpson says.

That philosophy has worked well for the Greybull, Wyo., native as she's approached a line-up of heavy hitters on behalf of the UW Art Museum. The real beneficiary of all her hard work has been the museum, which now boasts not only an active Art Mobile program but also an endowment exceeding \$1 million.

Simpson has been with the Friends of the University of Wyoming Art Museum since its inception. Over the last 16 years, she has been the board's prime fund raiser, calling on organizations with Wyoming ties to support an important cultural resource.

"My pitch has always been that this is an opportunity for you to respond to the people you have working in Wyoming — who would not be there if it weren't for your company," Simpson says.

Ann's motivation to help provide cultural outreach to the far corners of Wyoming goes back to the days when her husband, Al, first ran for the United States Senate. She recalls going door-to-door in isolated communities and encountering young mothers living in trailers and hearing the clatter of children and television sets in the background. Simpson shares that vivid mental image with potential donors.

"I've always told them about my campaign experience of seeing people in isolated areas, who really need some cultural outreach," she says. Since many of her corporate contacts also come from small towns, they can generally relate to what she describes.

"I find people respond to that, because they feel the same way," she says.

Being the wife of a U.S. senator can certainly minimize the chance of rejection on fund-raising calls.

"I'm well aware that Al's position has greased those hinges," Simpson says of the doors opened to her. But once she has the donor's ear, she makes a convincing argument.

All of that drive and persuasiveness paid off, and Simpson's dream is now a reality. The UW Art Mobile travels nine months a year, bringing parts of the museum's collection to Wyoming citizens and offering residents hands-on experience in different artistic media. Besides stopping in cities and towns across the state, the traveling exhibit visits places like the Wind River Indian Reservation and the Wyoming Training School. The museum staff also has made a special effort to reach the children of migrant farm workers.

When the Art Mobile comes to town, people of all ages turn out for the exhibits and demonstrations. Community volunteers pull together to make the event a success, and corporate donors frequently get involved. The entire town of Wright turned out when the Art Mobile paid it a visit, according to Simpson.

Ann is proud of what the Friends' founders have accomplished over the years. As she closed out a two-year term as board president this summer, she was especially proud of the fact that the Art Museum now has a sizable endowment for the future. A significant gift from the estate of Lucille Wright, a former Friends board member, got that job off to a solid start. But Simpson's effort and vision has kept the dream alive.

Fellow volunteers and museum staff appreciate all that she has done to insure the facility's financial future. One



Ann Simpson

event in particular has become a staple in the museum's fund-raising plan.

"Due to her ability to set tough goals and to inspire the voluntary museum advisory board, that group has turned its annual Gala into the single most successful weekend fund raiser in the history," one nominator writes, noting that the 1995 edition netted more than \$225,000.

One of the reasons the Friends of the UW Art Museum has been successful is the dedication of its founding members to the organization's goals, according to Simpson.

"It's been one of the hardest working, most committed boards," she says of Friends.

While her work with the Art Museum has been rewarding, she's definitely ready to pass the torch on to someone else.

"We don't plan to jump ship," Simpson says of longtime Friends board members. "But we feel that it needs to go on with new vitality, with some of the younger people."

### Art Appreciation

Ann's appreciation for art didn't truly develop until her adult years. During Al's military service in Germany, the couple spent most of their free time touring the area and exploring the local art museums. The rich European history and marvelous art impacted the Simpsons in a profound way, as they broadened their knowledge of fine art and the individuals who created it.

In later years, Ann and Al shared this appreciation with their three children. Whenever the Simpsons traveled, they made a point to visit cities and to take in the local art museums with the children. The three younger Simpsons — Bill (BS '80, JD '83), Colin (JD '85) and Susan — developed an appreciation as a result of that exposure. All three have begun collections of their own, and two have expanded their interests in other ways: Bill is a talented amateur artist; and Susan, who earned a master's degree in art history, owns an art gallery in Cody, Wyo.

As one might expect, Ann and Al have had many opportunities to expand their appreciation for fine art. Frequently, the couple will spend a Sunday afternoon visiting art museums in the Washington, D.C., area. When they travel, they always try to arrange a tour of the area's museums and galleries. The Simpsons also occasionally arrange exhibits in the Washington, D.C., area to introduce young Wyoming artists to a broader audience.

They've even been known to flip a few flapjacks at the family ranch during Susan's artists camp, an annual event that brings artists and others to the Cody area. Simpson has brought people from Washington in for the event the last few years, and she volunteers to help cook for camp participants. The camp offers Ann an opportunity to meet the artists — and add to her collection.

### Looking to the Future

When Al retires from the Senate at the end of this year, Ann will accompany him to Massachusetts, where he will spend six months teaching at Harvard University. The couple plan to live in student housing during that period and dine with students several times a week. Ann will take a break from her real estate career to take in the local scenery (and art!) and maybe sit in on a few classes.

"I plan to just enjoy the Boston area and get as much out of it as possible," she says.

They'll hit the road again at the end of the year, as Al promotes a book due out in December. Then the couple will go home to Cody to enjoy their retirement and be closer to their family. They don't have any firm plans once they return to Wyoming. Rather, the Simpsons plan to "bloom where we're planted."

While she's enjoyed working and living in the Washington area over the years, Ann always knew that she'd be returning to her home state.

"I've always looked on my Washington experience as just sort of a long trip," Simpson says.

### Biographical Information

Ann and Al Simpson have three children: Bill, Colin, and Susan. They have two grandchildren.

A Greybull, Wyo., native, Simpson graduated from Laramie High School. Her family moved to Laramie following her father's death; and her mother, Pansy, supported the family by working as a housemother for Hoyt Hall and Kappa Sigma fraternity.

Ann originally planned a career in interior design, but since UW didn't have a program, she majored in elementary education. She graduated in 1953 and taught third grade at Hebard Elementary School in Cheyenne for one year. After marrying Alan Simpson, she maintained her interest in young people by substitute teaching and working with children on a volunteer basis.

Ann began a real estate career in Cody after her two sons graduated from high school, to finance her children's college education. It was a natural move for her.

"I was always matching my friends to houses," Simpson says, "and I decided to do it as a profession."

She has continued her real estate career in the Washington, D.C., area with a great deal of success. Today, she has two partners and two offices — one in the District of Columbia and one in Virginia.

Simpson serves on the boards of the Friends of the University of Wyoming Art Museum, the University of Wyoming Foundation, Ford Theater, and the Lab School of Washington. Her involvement with the latter, a school assisting bright children with learning disabilities, is a result of a personal interest in education and mental health issues.