MEDALLION SERVICE AWARD

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 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 chattering 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.

"I've always known that my art enthusiasm comes from somewhere, and I'm really excited about making communities better," she adds.

As one might expect, Ann and Al have had many opportunities to expand their appreciation for the arts. Frequently, the couple will spend a Sunday afternoon viewing 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 artists to a broader audience.

They've even been known to flip a few flipcharts at the family ranch during Susan's artist-in-residence event last year. The couple has brought people in for the event the last few years, and they volunteer to help for camp participants. The camp offers an opportunity to meet the artists — and add to her collection.

Looking to the Future

When Al retired 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.

While she's enjoying 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 known that 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, Paisy, supported the family by working as a homemaker 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 abandoned her teaching and her interest in young people by substituting teaching and working with children on a volunteer basis.

Ann began her 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.