REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
J. ROBERT “BOB” WILLS

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for J. Robert “Bob” Wills, professor emeritus, College of Fine Arts, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Dean P. Neikirk, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council

IN MEMORIAM
J. ROBERT “BOB” WILLS

J. Robert “Bob” Wills, former dean of the College of Fine Arts, died on April 6, 2014, following a brief illness. In his almost fifty years of service dedicated to the ideals of making the arts a crucial component of education and an integral part of the community, Dr. Wills served as provost at Pacific Lutheran University and as dean at three universities: the University of Kentucky, The University of Texas at Austin, and Arizona State University. He authored three books, hundreds of articles, and was a frequent presenter at arts conferences and symposia. He produced more than four hundred plays, directed ninety-two productions and was an ardent arts advocate and spokesperson.

Dr. Wills received a B.A. degree in theatre and speech from the College of Wooster, a Masters from the University of Illinois, and a doctorate from Case Western Reserve University. He also received a commendation for excellence in arts administration from Harvard University and numerous recognitions for distinguished service in arts administration from Herberger College of Fine Arts at Arizona State University and from the American Alliance for Theatre and Education. Bob also served as a consultant for the U.S. Department of Education, the Republic of Taiwan, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Throughout his career, Bob strove to balance administrative and artistic endeavors as a gifted fund-raiser, a thoughtful advisor, a devoted mentor, and an artist in his own right. While in Austin he served the College of Fine Arts with distinction. Dr. Wills was an outstanding dean of the College of Fine Arts as he successfully escalated the importance and prestige of all the fine arts to the University, the city, state and nation. For the Department of Theatre and Dance, working with an anonymous donor and the University administration, an endowed chair in playwriting for youth was created, the first such endowment in the nation. He was extremely active in the Austin arts community serving on the boards of the Austin Symphony, Ballet Austin, Deborah Hay Dance Company, and the Laguna Gloria Art Museum.

Coleman A. Jennings, Jesse H. Jones Regents Professor Emeritus in Fine Arts and Fellow of Theatre for Youth Chair, is quoted as saying: "Bob Wills was one of my students during my first college teaching position. As a Masters degree candidate, he was enrolled in my creative drama class at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana in the summer of 1963. Years later, when he was interviewing for the deanship at The University of Texas at Austin, I was reminded of his effectiveness in conducting story dramatizations with our class of college students and twenty children. At the University of Texas, he was a constant ally of the Drama and Theatre for Youth and Communities program hiring additional faculty as the program expanded its reach into schools and the community."
During Bob’s last several years with The University of Texas at Austin, he and his wife, Barbara Salisbury Wills—herself a well known figure in children's theatre—charmed the arts community and brought a sense of awareness of the importance of the arts in lives, regardless of age or station in life. Their fourteen-year marriage ended in August 1998 with Barbara's death from ovarian cancer.

Over his twelve years in Arizona, Dean Wills secured the largest personal gift in the history of the university to fund arts in education initiatives and increased scholarship support to students by over 60 percent. Under his leadership, all of the arts programs in the Herberger College were nationally ranked and many programs were listed in the top ten in the nation. He also was extremely active in community engagement launching the Herberger College for Kids and the Herberger College at Large, a broad-based community arts program.

Dr. Wills also managed to remain active as a director, most recently directing Arizona State’s Lyric Opera Theatre’s world premiere of Caterina’s Son, a musical drama about the life of Leonardo da Vinci and a “bold and bawdy” production of Aristophanes’ The Birds, which won several arizoni Theatre Awards from local critics. Following his retirement, he served as president of the Board of Trustees of Childsplay, one of the preeminent professional theatres in the country producing work for young and family audiences.

Throughout his life, Bob’s personal mission was to “nurture the arts supporters of tomorrow.” He believed that the measure of his success would be in “embedding the value of the arts in students and the public alike.” The breadth and depth of that success is reflected in the many academic and community programs in Austin and Tempe that he nurtured and are flourishing decades later. The continued evidence of his efficacy is echoed in the outpourings of gratitude and respect from former students, colleagues, friends and professional artists in theatre, music, dance and art following his passing. Many spoke of his kindness, compassion, quick wit and deep caring as they thanked him for his inestimable impact on their lives as artists and human beings.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Martha Hilley (chair), Hunter C. March, Coleman A. Jennings, Suzan L. Zeder.

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