

Associated with Success

After 25 years of providing \$1,000 annual, unrestricted gifts to OU, the President's Associates is thriving — with even higher ambitions for the future.

BY CHARLOTTE GAY

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The meeting was scheduled for 8 a.m. on a chilly February Saturday, but since it was then-University of Oklahoma President Bill Banowsky who had scheduled it, none of the OU senior staff members considered declining.

Among those sitting around Banowsky's conference table in Evans Hall on that weekend morning in 1979 were a handful of individuals whose OU legacies now are firmly established.

Included were J. R. Morris, Norman campus provost who later would serve twice as interim OU president; David A. Burr, long-time vice president for University Affairs; and Thurman J. White, veteran vice president for continuing education and public service. Joining these active executive officers was R. Boyd Gunning, who had recently retired after 31 years as executive director of the University of Oklahoma Foundation Inc. The junior member of the group was Judi Freyer, then assistant to the president and now executive director of the President's Associates Program.

OU's president for only five months, Banowsky quickly had become known for his fervor, energy and ambitious plans.

Once he had his top advisers gathered, he revealed a plan that was stunning for its time: Could OU ask its alumni and friends for unrestricted academic gifts of \$1,000 annually through a program to be known as the University of Oklahoma Associates? If so, how many could be expected to become Associates?

The staff members were a little hesitant to speak up—so Boyd Gunning took the lead. "Let's go for 300," he said.

Gunning knew that they had some cushion—that 75 alumni were already giving \$1,000 a year through OU President Emeritus Paul Sharp's President's Council. The others nodded agreement.

"Okay," Banowsky replied. "Go get them."

That tentative beginning 25 years ago began the most successful private giving program in OU history—now called the President's Associates—an annual giving program that has transformed the University and is the major source of unrestricted funding for academic programs.

The Associates also laid the foundation for OU's overall private giving program, which today, under the leadership of President David L. Boren and Vice President for University Development David L. Maloney, yields approximately \$85 million a year for the University of Oklahoma.

As has been the case since the program began, Associates funding is channeled directly into the academic enterprise—creating new opportunities, adding vitality to existing programs, addressing academic needs as they arise.

The first hint of things to come in the Associates' inaugural year was that there were not 300 people willing to give \$1,000—there were 800. That first list of Associates is literally a "who's who" of the individuals whose continued generosity places them at the top among OU's most important contributors.

The success of the program became more apparent when OU prepared for its first Associates dinner. Held at the Skirvin Hotel in Oklahoma City, the dinner featured former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger as guest speaker. One thousand guests attended.

"Founding the Associates is one of the best things we ever

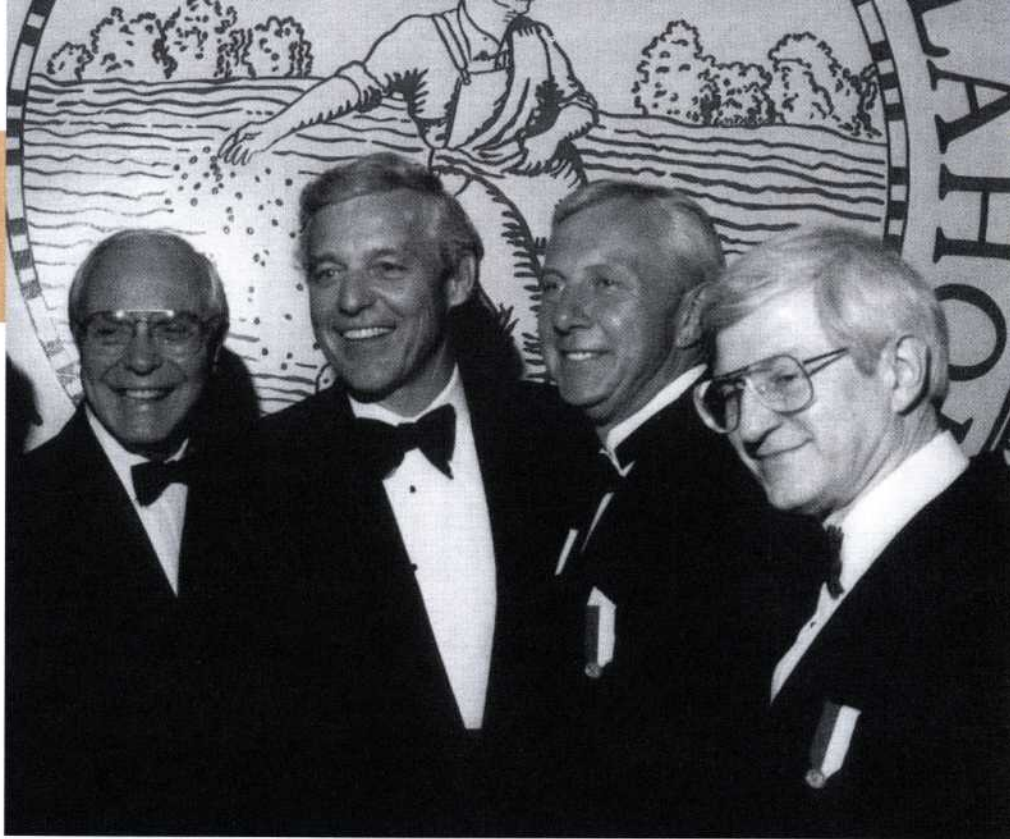


Early Associates dinners of the Banowsky era were black-tie affairs. In this photo, former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Carl Albert, left, OU Regent Julian J. Rothbaum and Mrs. Albert arrive at the 1980 event in Lloyd Noble Center.



Football calls for less formal Associates gatherings, such as pre-game tent parties attended here by Associates Council past chairs Gene Rainbolt, left, Judi Ford Barber, Mike Cawley, Doug Fox and Tom McCasland III.

PREVIOUS PAGE: President Bill Banowsky, left, and founding chair Dean A. McGee welcome the first OU Associates to the 1979 dinner featuring Henry Kissinger.



Four of David L. Boren's presidential predecessors, here attending the University's 1990 Centennial Celebration, left their stamps on the Associates program. From left: Paul F. Sharp, who introduced the idea with his President's Council; William S. Banowsky, who made the Associates a major private funding force; Frank E. Horton; and Richard L. Van Horn.



Judi Freyer

Current President's Associates Council officers attending the 25th anniversary dinner at the Oklahoma Memorial Union in April included chair Darrell Bull, left, chair-elect Pat Richardson and immediate past chair Lindy Ritz.



Since becoming OU's president in 1994, David Boren, center, has hosted the Associates in Dallas at a brunch before the OU-Texas game. Two early guests were founding member and long-time OU benefactor, the late Allece Garrard, left, and Frank Edwards.

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ABOVE: Following in the Associates tradition of internationally known dinner speakers, Queen Noor of Jordan, left, joined OU President David Boren in celebrating the donor group's 25th anniversary. The queen and the president visited each of the six overflow venues, which with the Ballroom accommodated a record 1,400 Associates and guests.

AT RIGHT: President Boren presented Bill and Gay Banowsky, here with artist Carol Armstrong, center, with her original watercolor of OU's Seed Sower statue at the Centennial archway. A tile bearing a replica of the painting was presented to each of the Founding Associates attending the 25th anniversary dinner.



did,” says Banowsky, who is retired and lives in Dallas with his wife, Gay. “I really owe the credit to my predecessor, President Emeritus Paul F. Sharp, who had already formed the President’s Council.”

When David Boren arrived in November 1994 as OU’s 13th president, he immediately understood how important the Associates were to his goal of turning OU into a pacesetter for public higher education. He made increasing participation in the Associates among his first goals.

“We will always struggle to have an adequate base of support from the state,” Boren said at the time. “At best, we will have tight budgets. The margin of excellence—the ability to create centers of excellence and the ability to fund and launch those centers of excellence—depends upon private funding, particularly unrestricted private funding.”

Under Boren’s leadership, the Associates Program has flourished, with membership increasing nearly 125 percent, from approximately 1,350 when Boren arrived to more than 3,000 today. Annual gifts now total \$3 million, equivalent to an endowment of \$60 million.

Of the original 800 founders, 210 are still with the program 25 years later. The program’s endowment levels have attracted 180 Endowed Associates, those who have made unrestricted gifts of at least \$50,000, and another 79 Life Associates, who have made an unrestricted gift of \$25,000.

Just as important to the future of the University, the roster also includes many Associates who are just beginning their own legacies as donors—the Young Associates, who are 39 and younger and begin their participation at the \$500 level.

Freyer notes that people support the Associates because they know their gifts are important to strengthening the educational experience for OU’s students. President Boren consistently has used Associates funds to attract and retain top students and faculty and to support their teaching and research activities.

Among the uses of the funds:

- Support for the Associates Presidential Professorships for outstanding teachers and mentors. Since the program was launched in 1996, 25 faculty members on the Norman campus and at the OU Health Sciences Center have held the Associates Presidential Professorships.
- Fellowships for top graduate students, who provide critical support to the faculty as teaching and research assistants.
- Scholarships for members of the President’s Leadership Class, which recruits outstanding student leaders to OU.
- Support for College of Medicine technology, including the student computer lab and Medical Human Simulation Center, which provides computer-controlled human simulation mannequins for clinical training.

One of the most far-reaching programs supported by the Associates has been the National Merit Scholars program. With the help of Associates funding, the University of Oklahoma has been a national leader in attracting National Merit Scholars for 14 straight years. Currently, OU ranks No. 1 per capita among all public universities in the nation in the number of freshmen National Merit Scholars.

President Boren gratefully acknowledges the Associates’ con-

tribution to that national distinction and notes that the 600 National Merit Scholars at OU strengthen the entire University. “Learning at a university occurs not only in the classroom. For every hour students spend in class, they spend three or four hours a day with each other. The quality of the student body is exceptionally important because students learn from their peers. They are stimulated by their peers to think about issues.”

Freyer notes that the funding available through the Associates sometimes has the greatest impact when used as seed funding for programs that have enormous potential. Her favorite example is the seed grant of \$22,000 in 1986 that set the stage for the establishment of OU’s Center for Analysis and Prediction of Storms (CAPS), directed by Kelvin K. Droegemeier, Regents’ Professor of Meteorology. That seed grant established the first research network link between OU’s north campus, site of the National Severe Storms Laboratory (NSSL), and the main campus, where the School of Meteorology is located.

“We used it to exchange data on all sorts of research, especially of the type that set the stage for CAPS, such as numerical model output, graphics, etc.,” Droegemeier says. “CAPS itself was funded for about \$25 million over its 11-year lifetime as a Science and Technology Center. It is the only center that also gave birth to an Engineering Research Center, which will be about \$100 million over 10 years. We also have a new \$10.25 million grant from the National Science Foundation, so we’re doing very well!”

Leadership from members of the Associates program has been a key to its success over the years. The Associates Council’s first chairman, Oklahoma City banker Gene Rainbolt, like both Presidents Boren and Banowsky, was a man with a vision for what the program could become. His ultimate dream is that the program will grow to 10,000 participants.

“My motivation to get involved and stay involved comes from the recognition that so many people had received so much from the University of Oklahoma and needed to give something back to guarantee that future generations could have what we received,” Rainbolt says. “The Associates Program is a marvelous way to be involved and consistently contribute and change the lives of future generations.”

President Boren honored Bill and Gay Banowsky and all the Associates in April 2004, when the President’s Associates celebrated its silver anniversary in regal style at a gala dinner featuring a keynote speech by Queen Noor of Jordan. A crowd of 1,400 Associates, students, faculty and other guests—the largest dinner gathering ever at the Oklahoma Memorial Union—attended the event.

“Twenty-five years ago, President Banowsky dared to dream that our alumni and friends might make contributions that would allow the University to reach a level of greatness otherwise unattainable,” says Boren. “We all owe a debt of gratitude to every donor who helped the University achieve that dream in 1979 and in every year since. The President’s Associates are truly extraordinary supporters of the University of Oklahoma.”

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