

# The Zarrow Vision

**F**lanked by his daughter, Judy Kishner, and granddaughter, Julie Wohlgemuth Cohen, Henry Zarrow made his way down the hallway to the dedication ceremony for the beautiful new building that bears his name. Spontaneous applause erupted from well-wishers on both sides of the aisle. True to form, the man of the hour smiled graciously and humbly, as if he did not know what all the fuss was about.

The fuss was about the latest shot of philanthropy from a Tulsa businessman with a history of creating brighter futures for those in need of a champion. Zarrow has long supported causes to improve education, benefit children and help the economically disadvantaged in the Tulsa community. This time, a \$5-million gift from the Anne and Henry Zarrow Foundation transformed the University of Oklahoma

School of Social Work with a gorgeous new facility, a higher campus profile and a bit of a lift in the steps of students and faculty who have chosen to serve their fellow man without limelight or fanfare—a description that fits their benefactor to a T.

Zarrow, or Mr. Henry as he is affectionately known, was born in 1916 to Russian immigrants who operated a small grocery store in Tulsa. As a child he recalls hearing stories of his parents hiding African Americans in their store as violent mobs stormed the streets during the infamous Tulsa Race Riots of 1921. At six, Zarrow began working in the family business, and at 13, opened his own store, adjusting the hours to fit his school day. After high school graduation, the young entrepreneur entered OU, but the Great Depression pre-empted his studies.

His father encouraged him to try a new business venture, and Zarrow entered the pipe supply business, funding the endeavor in part with pennies redeemed from collecting pop bottles. As a foreshadowing of things to come, Zarrow began making charitable donations even before he had fully paid for the business' first truck.

When the oil business began booming, Sooner Pipe and Iron, later Sooner Pipe and Supply, became the largest independent pipe and supply business in the world. Zarrow sold the company in 1998.



Portrait by Mike Wimmer

Anne and Henry Zarrow

His life-long partner in every enterprise was his late wife, Anne. Over breakfast each morning, Anne would read the morning paper and give her husband a “to-do” list, consisting of people or causes that needed attention. Anne’s giving nature was so generous and spontaneous that she once stopped the car to give her coat to a homeless woman walking in the cold.

To celebrate their anniversary, which was also Zarrow’s birthday, the couple would spend the day shopping for the Tulsa Day Center for the Homeless. He also served as chairman for more than 50 non-profit boards. In an age before the celebrity philanthropy of Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, the Zarrows quietly gave away more than 50 percent of their income to charities.

“To help our neighbors in need has been the central designing passion of Anne and Henry Zarrow,” says OU President David Boren. “I

have never known two people who have touched our lives and inspired more than Anne and Henry. They are partners in life, partners in giving.”

At OU the Zarrows have supported numerous faculty endowments and scholarships, as well as the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History. The latest gift to the School of Social Work will forever link the couple’s name to helping those in need. Donald Baker, director of the school, says the faculty and students are dedicated to making the “Zarrow vision” for a progressive and compassionate Oklahoma a reality.

Brianna Ellis, a fourth-year student in social work, says she and fellow students are “overwhelmed” at the opportunity to attend class in the beautiful, state-of-the art building.

“Hundreds of students will have the privilege of studying, learning and advancing our profession in this wonderful environment,” Ellis said during the dedication. “And this is only the beginning . . . In future years, literally thousands upon thousands of people will gain new levels of existence as they are snatched from the jaws of poverty and oppression.”

With the Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work, Mr. Henry has left his legacy, and thousands he will never meet will have found their champion.

— Lynette Lobban