

Arizona Photojournalist Keeps an Eye on Phoenix College Students



Willis Peterson Photographic Scholarship Helps Secure Arts Education for the Next Generation of Photographers

(PHOENIX, AZ) - Arizona photojournalist Willis Peterson is keeping an eye on Phoenix College students to help secure the next generation of photographers. Peterson recently became the first in Phoenix College history to provide an endowed scholarship directed toward photography students who demonstrate promise and insight into seeking the beauty of nature and environmental issues through photography. The endowment recipient will receive a \$1,000 scholarship for the following academic semester. The scholarship will be granted once a year to a graduating student.

"There were no entitlements back when I was in school," said Peterson. "Resources were scarce, and I worked hard to pay for my education and expenses. They were tough times, but thankfully the staff and faculty at Phoenix College strongly influenced me. Phoenix College will remain as a place where figuratively I grew up. Other students can be in need just as I was, and if so, why not provide some help toward their ambitions?"

Peterson's photographic career began at fourteen when he received a box camera for his birthday. His mother motivated him to read *Lost Cities of the Mayas*, which intrigued him from childhood. Years later, he and his family sought out those wonderful places where he photographed his first impression of the Mayan culture. Later, he and Roberta, his wife and chief supporter, still in pursuit of the Mayan Mystique, also journeyed to Honduras, Belize and Guatemala to explore Mayan cities now considered World Heritage sites. His newest exhibit of these priceless images, telling the story of the Mayan Culture opens on March 20 at West Valley Art Museum, 17420 N. Avenue of the Arts, Surprise, AZ, and will run until May 18. An artist's reception is set for March 27.

"Even with the down turn of economic events these days, we have to recognize that the arts must not be put aside, and that they are still important and are manifest for the betterment of our society," he commented.

For many years Peterson was a photojournalist and later, became a feature writer for the Arizona Republic, Days and Ways Sunday magazine. As a successful fulltime freelance photographer, his work has appeared in National Geographic, Time/Life Encyclopedias, National Wildlife, Audubon Magazine, Natural History and Arizona Highways. Peterson's imagery has been featured in many museums, including The Heard Museum, Phoenix, The National Wildlife Gallery, Washington D.C., and New York Museum of Natural History. Peterson is an accomplished writer and author of the book *Colorado Kid: A Swedish American Boy Goes West*. The story tells of his life as a seven-year-old moving from Minnesota to Colorado Springs in hopes that the dry mountain air would help his severe asthma attacks. He covers the gamut from a small town boy's backyard zoo, the cultural significance of his Scandinavian heritage, the love/hate relationship between his mother and great aunt, family political-economical discussions, experiences of the Great Depression, the election of Roosevelt, significant teachers who influenced his life and the impact of World War II across the globe.

After graduating from Phoenix College in 1947, Peterson attended Arizona State University, where he achieved a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in visual technology. In 1968, he was selected to start a photography program at Glendale Community College, creating the college's photographic curriculum including several courses. He taught there for 18 years. His artistic intuition and exceptionally high standards have been the major influences in the teaching of photography in the Southwest. In 1975 He was named "Journalism Teacher of the Year" on the Community College level by the Western Newspaper foundation.

For more information on the Willis Peterson Photographic Scholarship at Phoenix College and for Peterson's upcoming Mayan Mysteries Exhibit, contact Frank Luna, Phoenix College Director of Alumni and Development/Scholarship Relations at (602) 285-7667 or frank.luna@pcmail.maricopa.edu.

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