

From the Runway to the Stage: How The Phoenix Theatre Company Guild Has Supported Theatre in Phoenix for Over 70 Years

By Elizabeth Montgomery



In 1953, a group of volunteers came together to support The Phoenix Theatre Company, and they haven't stopped since.

The Phoenix Theatre Company Guild has spent more than 70 years raising funds for the nonprofit theatre, growing from a small volunteer organization into one of the Company's most steadfast community partners.

Today, the Guild continues to support the people and programs of The Phoenix Theatre Company. This year, that included a \$41,000 contribution to inclusive Summer Camp, including scholarships.

A Tradition with Purpose



Leslie Benner with Michael Barnard, The Phoenix Theatre Company Producing Artistic Director

For Leslie Benner, Board President of The Phoenix Theatre Company Guild, the work is personal. Her connection to the theatre began in 2002 as a theatre board member. When that service ended, the Guild gave her another way to stay connected to a place she already loved.

"We're a group of theatre lovers who are proud to support The Phoenix Theatre Company and the incredible work they do on stage and throughout the community," Benner said. "We're honored to contribute to an institution we hope will continue inspiring audiences for the next century."

That kind of devotion is what the Guild is built on.

Each year, the Guild hosts a series of events that blend good company with genuine impact. Holiday Prelude, the Guild's largest annual fundraiser, has become one of the Valley's signature holiday traditions.

Where Community Meets Impact



Presented in collaboration with the Phoenix Youth Symphony Orchestras, the event welcomes hundreds of guests to shop local boutiques, enjoy a seated luncheon, and watch a runway show featuring contemporary designers from near and far. Proceeds benefit both The Phoenix Theatre Company and Phoenix Youth Symphony Orchestras.

"It's a fun event that combines a professional fashion show along with holiday shopping. It's a great kick-off to the holiday season, and most importantly, it's our largest fundraiser of the year," Benner said. "It takes a full year of planning, and I'm very inspired and very impressed by the work that is done by the Prelude Committee each December."

The Guild doesn't limit its events to the runway, either. Past gatherings have included author appearances, floral design demonstrations, and other experiences curated to bring people together in unexpected ways. Membership is not required to attend. Guild events are open to anyone who wants to connect, support the arts, and be part of the community.

This year, the Guild's Summer Camp contribution hit close to home for Benner. Her daughter attended Summer Camp at The Phoenix Theatre Company, and the experience stayed with her.

"It's so much more than just sending your kid to summer camp," she said. "It was magical to see my daughter blossom and grow during her time at the theatre. The Theatre Guild loves the Summer Camp programs for all they provide for children in our community. The camp helps children develop a voice, self-confidence, build resilience and learn about working with others."

For Benner, that is part of what makes the Guild's support so meaningful. It helps create a place where young people can feel seen. A place where they can try, listen, grow, and discover that their voice has room.

"I love, love, love the Summer Camp partnership with Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center and making the arts accessible to children of all ages and abilities," she said.

A Legacy of Showing Up

When Benner looks at what the Guild has built together, year after year, she is proud of the way a small group of people can create something with lasting impact.

"Our board and our Guild members are the reason any of this is possible, and what we accomplish together is something I'm incredibly proud of," Benner said. "We may be small, but we're creative, collaborative, and we have a great time raising funds for the Theatre. The highlight of every year is the donation we're able to make, knowing it fuels the work we all care about."

More than 70 years after that first group of volunteers came together, the Guild is still doing the work: gathering people around the theatre, supporting the artists and programs behind it, and helping more people find their way into the room.

To learn more about The Phoenix Theatre Company Guild or to become a member, visit phoenixtheatreguild.org.