

Jerry Samuelson

1933 - 2012

DEAN, COLLEGE OF ARTS AND PROFESSOR OF ART, EMERITUS

B.A., M.A., University of California, Los Angeles

California State University, Fullerton From September 1962 To May 2009

Birth: March 23, 1933; Death: April 27, 2012

Jerry Samuelson gave extraordinary service to Cal State Fullerton as an art professor and high-level administrator for 46 years. His artistic vision resulted in three nationally-ranked art departments – Visual Arts, Music, and Theatre and Dance – all continuously accredited since 1962, all providing the highest level of arts education, and all providing the community with access to approximately 300 art offerings (performances and exhibitions) annually. Among Jerry's many contributions to Orange County's cultural enrichment, he founded the Pacific Symphony; created and developed Grand Central Art Center in Santa Ana's Artists Village; and created the concept and oversaw the construction of a new performing arts center on campus.

Dean Samuelson joined the Cal State Fullerton faculty in 1962 as a graphic design professor. He quickly rose to the position of Chair of the Art Department and then became Dean of the College of the Arts, and has served in that position for 34 years. He was an extraordinary administrator known to be enthusiastic, dedicated and "hands on" in his leadership. These qualities, together with his passion for all the arts, enabled him to garner the academic resources necessary for the College of the Arts to grow and to offer sophisticated, strong, renowned academic programs attracting the best and brightest students from all over the world.

Under Dean Samuelson's leadership, the College of the Arts graduated more than 13,500 art majors in 40 concentration areas with 12 undergraduate and graduate degrees – all ready to take their place in the professional arts world as animators, graphic designers, painters, sculptors, glass artists, actors, writers, directors, set designers, costume designers, musicians, opera singers, vocalists, dancers, and educators.

In 1977, early in Jerry's career, two Cal State Fullerton Music Department professors requested that Dean Samuelson help establish a local orchestra. Knowing this would take a combination of budgetary support from the College of the Arts and private funding, Jerry met with community leaders to enlist their help. They agreed and the Pacific Chamber Orchestra came into existence at Cal State Fullerton. Thirty years on, this orchestra has grown into the Pacific Symphony, the third largest orchestra in California and largest in budget size of any orchestra founded in the United States in the last thirty years. Jerry was formally acknowledged as the Founder of Pacific Symphony and carried the title Emeriti Director.

In the early 1990s, Jerry pursued another opportunity which will forever enhance the Orange County visual arts scene. He was approached by officials in Santa Ana with a concept to establish an Artists Village in the city. Jerry believed that Cal State Fullerton should be the anchor institution; he acquired campus support and guided the project. The Grand Central Art Center was unveiled in 1999 on Broadway and Second Street. The center has exhibition space, a sales gallery, restaurant, printmaking studio, theatre, and classrooms, as well as apartments and studio space for graduate art students. Since that dedication, the area has transitioned into a vibrant art community and has been revitalized thanks to Cal State Fullerton's presence and Dean Samuelson.

The fulfillment of Jerry's greatest dream culminated on January 13, 2006 with the dedication of a new 102,000 square foot performing arts center (recently named the Joseph A. W. Clayes III Performing Arts Center). After decades of negotiations with the state university system Jerry won their approval for his concept of a 1,200 seat venue comprised of three spaces – a concert hall and two theatres. He was intimately involved with every detail over the years to bring the project to fruition – overseeing the various design incarnations and campaigning for funds, both public and private. The center includes an 800-seat concert hall, a 250-seat studio theatre, a 100-seat black box theatre, three dance studios and rehearsal, studio and technical spaces that allow the theatre, dance and music programs to expand and explore new artistic directions. Due to Jerry's unceasing commitment and efforts Cal State Fullerton now has state-of-the-art facilities to match the top rated performing arts programs – all resulting in more performing arts offerings for the public which includes visiting professionals and student ensembles.

Beyond effectively carrying out, for four decades, the demanding responsibilities of dean of one of the most diverse colleges at CSUF, Jerry served as President of the California Fine Arts Deans Association; Arts Advisor to the Chancellor of the CSU system; Founder and Emeriti Board Member of Pacific Symphony; producer and committee member of major Cal State Fullerton fundraising and community events such as the 50th Anniversary Celebration, Concert Under the Stars, Front & Center at the Honda Center, and Carol Candlelight dinner and concert.

Submitted by

Milly Heaton
Director of Development
College of the Arts
June 28, 2013

Jerry Samuelson

An Appreciation

Those of us who had the pleasure to know and work with Jerry over the years, have all become better people for it. He was not only a brilliant administrator and a wonderful colleague, but also a good friend. And as good friends do, we have learned many lessons from him. I can't relate them all, but I would like to touch on three of them.

Lesson 1: Keep Things in Perspective

When I began working with Jerry some years ago, I quickly began to admire his positive attitude, his enthusiasm and his ability to solve problems. You rarely saw him frustrated, with the exception of the occasional computer malfunction of one of his software applications, which could elicit the occasional "expletive deleted."

I used to wonder, "How does he do it? How does he manage to negotiate so gracefully the incredible frustrations that can accompany his job? How does he keep things in perspective?"

And then, I learned his secret. Just as Mary Lou has never met an Irish film she didn't like, Jerry was probably this nation's biggest fan of The Godfather movies and The Sopranos. Jerry had learned how to let any potential frustrations of the moment simply evaporate by vicariously watching the work of those two "Ur-Administrators," Sonny Corleone and Tony Soprano. Such is the healing nature of art, and how it can help us keep things in perspective.

Lesson #2: Always Look Forward

Did you ever try to walk with Jerry to a meeting? You didn't just "walk" with Jerry, you tried to keep up.

That long, tall stride always moving forward.

It is a metaphor for his work over his 34 years as a Dean. Whether as a cheerleader to all of those around him, overseeing the building of the Visual Arts Center, helping found the Pacific Symphony and creating the Grand Central Arts Center and the Performing Arts Complex, he never spent time looking back. He was always eager for the new challenge, the new adventure. Although he honored the past, he found far more tantalizing the possibilities of the future.

Lesson #3: Always Have Time for Family and Friends

Not too long ago, the Los Angeles Times ran an article about a group of UCLA students who decided to get together for a dinner party in 1964. They had so much fun they decided to do again the following month. By the time of his retirement, Jerry and Mary Lou had celebrated 45 consecutive years of monthly dinner parties with those friends.

This was so typical of Jerry and Mary Lou. Despite the myriad of activities they were engaged in they always made time for their kids, their grandchildren and their friends. Lesson learned.

We still appreciate Jerry for all that he did, and for the lessons he taught us so well:

Keep things in perspective,
Always look forward,
and
Always have time for family and friends.

Joe Arnold
Dean, College of the Arts
June 26, 2013