

Colleen Jennings-Roggensack Leading Lady

Written by Written by David M. Brown



Colleen Jennings-Roggensack has made promoting the arts an art. This spring, the Ahwatukee resident accepted a Governor's Arts Award for her 20 distinguished years as executive director of ASU Gammage, the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed performing arts center on the Tempe campus of Arizona State University. "What gets me up in the morning is the belief that culture connects communities and that the arts are a way of making the unfamiliar familiar and bringing us together," says Jennings-Roggensack, who is married to Dr. Kurt Roggensack, a volcanologist at ASU. Their 21-year old daughter, Kelsey, is a junior at Williams College and a six-time All-American swimmer.

Born in La Marque, Tex., she earned degrees at Oakland University in Rochester, Mich., and Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colo. A dancer and choreographer, she held positions at Dartmouth College, Western States Arts Federation and Colorado State University before coming to ASU. Appointed to President Clinton's National Council on the Arts, she is also a member of many performing arts boards and The Broadway League's Board of Governors.

Jennings-Roggensack's ASU Gammage mission has been challenging and increasingly wide ranging. Today, it is a "must" stage for national tours of Broadway shows, generating dollars for the box office and the community. The four-week return run of "Wicked" this year, for example, created more than \$28 million in economic impact, according to ASU Gammage. In two decades under her guidance, the historic venue—a rare self-sustaining business model in the arts—has delivered a billion dollars of economic impact to the local economy. "I have been a tried and true lover of Broadway since childhood, and my parents let us watch the Tony's in front of the TV with dinner," she says. Today, Jennings-Roggensack is Arizona's only Tony Awards voter.

She hasn't, though, just booked crowd favorites. A risk-taker, she has brought challenging, controversial works to Tempe like "Angels in America," "Spring Awakening" and Green Day's "American Idiot." In addition, the BEYOND Series has brought eclectic new performances from world artists. During her tenure, 22 works have premiered at ASU Gammage, and she has also established a Gammage Residency program for visiting artists to train ASU students and local performers as well as engage with the community.

Her organizational mission for ASU Gammage, in fact, is Connecting Communities—to inspire positive community changes through the arts. Begun in 2002, one 10-year program—"Journey Home"—helps incarcerated women at the Estrella Jail in Phoenix discover their identities through performance, visual arts, creative writing and storytelling. For her, art triumphs as much off as on stage, as the recidivism rate has significantly decreased for the participants, says the Maricopa County Sheriff's Department. "This program has allowed these women to develop creative tools that can help them make positive choices and encourages them to break the negative patterns that lead to incarceration," Jennings-Roggensack says. "We think it wins for them, it wins for the arts—and it wins for our community."

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"What gets me up in the morning is the belief that culture connects communities and that the arts are a way of making the unfamiliar familiar and bringing us together," says the executive director of ASU Gammage.

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