



Tohono Chul
GARDENS • GALLERIES • BISTRO

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Celebration of the Life and Legacy of Roy J. Kurtz to be Held at Tohono Chul on March 25, 2025

[Tucson, AZ] - The Tohono Chul community will come together to honor the life and legacy of Roy J. Kurtz, a devoted patron of the arts and dedicated social worker whose passion for culture, creativity, and service—especially his work supporting veterans—left a lasting imprint on Tohono Chul and southern Arizona. Born on January 27, 1933, in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, to Roy F. and Dorothy V. Kurtz, Roy's life was defined by curiosity, generosity, and an unwavering dedication to the arts. A Tucson resident for more than 50 years, he passed away in Tucson on August 21, 2024, leaving behind a legacy that will continue to inspire.

“While Roy may no longer walk the paths of the gardens he loved, his spirit will forever be woven into the baskets he collected, the plants he nurtured, and the lives he touched. Not only did Roy donate his remarkable basket collection to Tohono Chul, but he provided a generous gift to care for the collection and to support Tohono Chul's future growth,” said Jamie Maslyn Larson, Tohono Chul President/CEO.

James Schaub, Tohono Chul's Director of Arts, said, “Apart from Tohono Chul founders Dick and Jean Wilson's original gift, no gift has been as significant in representing the arts and traditions of our region as Roy's donation. His contributions to Tohono Chul and the wider community will be honored for generations to come.”

Roy J. Kurtz's legacy is one of supreme generosity, kindness, and an enduring appreciation for the cultural and natural heritage of the Southwest. Roy's story began in the coal-mining country of Westmoreland County, where his family had settled after emigrating from Germany in the 1870s. Stationed in Stuttgart, Germany, Roy developed an admiration and appreciation for other cultures and began to see serious collecting as a way to honor and preserve them. Coming home to Pennsylvania, Roy took a position with the Westmoreland County Child Welfare Department that intensified his interest in social work. Backed by a scholarship and the G.I. Bill, Roy moved to Morgantown, West Virginia, to attend West Virginia University, where he earned a Master of Social Work degree that launched his 42-year career in social work. For the next decade, he devoted himself to child welfare. In 1972, ready for a change, Roy moved to Tucson to work with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. He spent over 30 years at the Tucson V.A., retiring in 2003.

Roy called Tucson home for 52 years. From the start, he collected objects of American Indian art with a keen eye and enthusiasm, amassing a diverse collection of over 1,000 objects from all over the Desert Southwest. Above all the art forms in his collection, Roy loved basketry the most. Originally drawn to their designs, shapes, and motifs, he became increasingly fascinated by the engineering of each piece. Intrigued by the idea that basketry signaled the birth of civilization and may have been one of the earliest forms of counting, Roy was drawn to the interplay of design, structure, and the mystery of time, which guided his connoisseurship. The Roy J. Kurtz Collection of



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American Indian Art, housed at Tohono Chul, features an extensive selection of baskets that celebrate the traditions of the Tohono O’odham, Akimel O’odham, Apache, Hopi, and Diné cultures.

In 2021, Roy began searching for a home for his treasured collection, and Tohono Chul came to mind. He recalled the early days when he could reach the gardens from Ina Road and held fond memories of the Haunted Bookshop and the Desert Corner Nursery. Roy was impressed by how the park had evolved over the years into the incredible place it is today. "Tohono Chul is a place to be proud of," he said. "I sincerely believe the collection will reach its true potential at Tohono Chul." After all, the very plants used to create his cherished baskets continue to thrive throughout the gardens.

Beyond his love of basketry, Roy was also an avid gardener, planting numerous native species throughout his property. As proud of his plant collection as he was of his art collection, he offered Tohono Chul the opportunity to select and transplant specimens from his landscape to the gardens. The first grouping from the Kurtz Plant Collection became a defining feature of Sami’s Courtyard in 2023. Just recently, mature saguaros have been relocated to the Monument Wall at the corner of Ina Road and Paseo del Norte, with dozens more plants set to enhance the gardens in the coming months.

Roy’s celebration of life will be held at Tohono Chul on Tuesday, March 25, at 10:30 am in Sami’s Courtyard. Friends, family, and those inspired by his generosity are invited to join in remembering and honoring a truly remarkable man.

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WHAT: Celebration of the Life and Legacy of Roy J. Kurtz to be Held at Tohono Chul

WHERE: 7366 N. Paseo del Norte, Tucson AZ, 85704

WHEN: Tuesday, March 25th at 10:30 AM

ABOUT TOHONO CHUL: Located in Northwest Tucson, Arizona, Tohono Chul is a renowned public garden that celebrates the cultural and natural wonders of the Sonoran Desert.