

GOLDEN RULE MOMENTS



Paula Cullison DR. ALBERT CELOZA

Cullison supports community through grant organization

Dr. Albert Celozza
Special to The Republic

"We come together, each in our own way, to make a difference in the lives of others." These are the words of my friend Paula Giangreco Cullison, a builder and sustainer of networks of friendly relationships.

We gathered in Scottsdale one Sunday afternoon to celebrate the conclusion of the grant-making efforts of Arizona Women's Partnership, Inc. Paula created AZWP as an "all-volunteer philanthropic non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the status of Arizona women and empowering women's grassroots organizations through mini-grants and publicity. The organization is non-political and non-sectarian and is sensitive to the needs of underserved and disadvantaged women and their families. Proceeds are generated from fundraisers and through corporate sponsorships and private donations." Through Paula's efforts, the organization has distributed more than \$600,000 to over 90 small non-profit organizations that deal with critical is-

sues such as domestic violence, crisis counseling, homelessness, health, hunger, literacy, ESL, refugee support services, youth programs, etc.

My non-profit, the Asian Pacific Community in Action received one of the earlier grants that boosted our efforts in health education for Asian-American and Pacific Islanders in Arizona. AZWP's vote of confidence in our organization has led to grants from corporations and state and local government agencies.

At the reception, I spoke to Rekha Nair and Lauri Valerio of PLAN — Phoenix Legal Network, an organization that identifies itself as an "effort of passionate folks with deep connections to the immigrant community." One story resonated with my current interfaith efforts with the Arizona Interfaith Movement. They provided free legal representation to 24 local immigrant women in Arizona, including two Iranian sisters: Maryam and Shirin (names were changed for privacy). They had to flee their home country because of religious persecu-

See CULLISON, Page 14

Cullison

Continued from Page 8

tion. Maryam and Shirin first arrived in the US in 2021 seeking asylum.

After their conversion from Islam to Christianity their lives were at risk in Iran. (It is illegal to convert in Iran.) While seeking asylum through the International Rescue Committee (IRC), PLAN connected them to the two churches: Living Stream and University Presbyterian. These congregations provided them with support and housing for more than two years. By 2024, both sisters and their spouses were granted asylum. Maryam and Shirin's bravery and deep faith and the help of PLAN, AZWP, Phoenix faith communities and a whole network of supporters made their life in freedom possible. One of Paula's favorite expressions is that "It takes a village".

Paula, the daughter of immigrant parents from Italy, knows the importance of giving back and the necessity of developing a supportive network. Her

purpose-driven life is reflective of this. For over five decades, she has worked to promote social justice, human rights, peace, and environmental issues.

To this end, she has been successful in creating programs and events to focus an awareness on these issues. Her commitment is reflected in several of her volunteer efforts; most notably: the Arizona Women's Partnership; the In Celebration of Women Juried female art exhibits and The Year for All Arizona Women project which she then presented at the UN Conference for Women in Nairobi; UN World Health Day event on healthcare for refugee women; numerous ERA rallies; eco-feminism programs on the environment; coordinating one of the first Earth Day events in NYC; volunteering with the Cesar Chavez United Farm Workers Union boycotts.

Paula's international travel articles and photography exhibits are reflective of her belief that understanding other cultures is the way to peace. Thank you for the friendship and the Golden Rule moments.

Dr. Albert Celozza is the Executive Director of Arizona Interfaith Movement.



Lauri Valerie and Rekha Nair of PLAN - Phoenix Legal Action Network, Paula Cullison and Albert Celozza DR. ALBERT CELOZZA