

Building a vibrant Mesa through medicine, arts and philanthropy

ASU MIX Center's production shop named in honor of philanthropist and longtime arts advocate Ruth Tan Lim

By Sarah A. McCarty, ASU News
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Ruth Tan Lim — a board-certified pediatrician, philanthropist and longtime arts advocate — has dedicated more than four decades to caring for children and strengthening her community through creativity and education.

Lim's recent investment in ASU's Media and Immersive eXperience (MIX) Center in downtown Mesa reflects that same vision.

At a ceremony Monday, Oct. 6, the MIX Center unveiled the new name of its production shop in honor of Lim's donation, and Lim has also provided seed funding for the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts to establish a community artist residency.

"If we want to strengthen the community, we must provide more than housing, good roads and clean water," Ruth Tan Lim said. "We need rest, recreation and renewal. Theater, music and the arts make a place more vibrant — they make it whole."

"Dr. Lim is an extraordinary leader who demonstrates how arts support longevity, vitality and rich human relationships," said Renée Cheng, senior vice provost and dean of the Herberger Institute. "We are honored to host a space that bears her name."

One of the goals of ASU's newly launched [Changing Futures campaign](#) is empowering community resilience by fueling ideas, partnerships and resources to build stronger, healthier communities, and Lim's gift, along with others who contribute to the MIX Center, empowers the Mesa community.

The Ruth Tan Lim Production Shop is a space for students at the MIX Center, but it's also a space that is open to the community and serves the city of Mesa.

The community artist residency aims to empower the next generation of emerging creative leaders through a new artist residency program that invites local makers, storytellers and artists to drive positive change in Mesa.

Community artists will engage in a five-month, hands-on program that pairs studio-based learning and working time in MIX Center's fabrication lab and production shop with community engagement, mentorship and showcase. Artists will earn ASU microcredentials for their new skills and knowledge developed through the hands-on program, receive a stipend to support their work, and have access to the state-of-the-art facilities and resources at the MIX Center.

As a cascading mentorship component of the program, artist assistants — young adults from Mesa high schools or the working community — will be paired with artists to support projects and participate in workshops, with the opportunity to receive stipend awards and microcredentials for their learning.

By supporting the community artist residency and the production shop, Lim is helping create spaces where artists, students and community members can learn together, build together and bring new ideas to life — blending art, technology and storytelling in ways that enrich the entire community.

Below, Lim shares what inspires her and her hopes for what the space can bring.

Question: Could you share a little about your work as a pediatrician and your involvement in Mesa Arts Center?

Answer: I moved to Phoenix in 1980 — about 45 years ago. I was trained in New York City and am a board-certified pediatrician. I also practice alternative medicine, providing what is called functional medicine, which focuses not on disease but on function. I have maintained a practice in Mesa for 45 years with an office and staff. Because I have been here so long, I feel I should do whatever I can to help the community thrive. When I arrived, Mesa was growing, and as it matured and developed theaters and arts venues, I felt called to support those efforts — to help make them happen and keep them accessible to the community.

Q: What experiences or values guided you toward philanthropy and the arts?

A: Many years ago, when I traveled internationally, I visited Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna. Vienna has enjoyed long periods of peace, which allowed its people more time to cultivate music, theater and the arts. That experience stayed with me. Since Mesa is a peaceful community, I felt it was important to support the arts.

About 20 or 25 years ago, when Mesa Arts Center was being built, I decided to support it. I became a volunteer in its programs, which I thought were excellent. Later, when Arizona State University established the Media and Immersive eXperience (MIX) Center, I supported it as well. The MIX Center offers a pathway for students who may not want to pursue traditional academic careers but are passionate about theater and the performing arts.

Q: What inspired you to support the MIX Center Community Artist Residency and Production Shop?

A: That is where everything begins. The production shop is the space where students and community members can learn to build the foundations of a show. You cannot stage a strong performance without props, sets and design. The shop gives young people the chance to see that they don't have to be onstage to be part of the performance. They can contribute just as meaningfully behind the scenes.

Q: How do you hope this gift will strengthen connections between Arizona State University and Mesa?

A: We must come together as a village to support the community. Arizona State University provides the academic foundation, and Mesa gives students the chance to put their learning into practice. Together, they create hands-on opportunities that link education to careers in the arts.

Q: What excites you most about what the production shop makes possible?

A: The production shop is not only a place where props and sets are made — it is a place of opportunity. Some young people may not want to study performance or be onstage, but they like to work with their hands and learn. The shop gives them that chance. They can create props for theater productions or design work for public art, and in doing so, they still contribute to the performance in meaningful ways.

Q: Why was it important that the shop serve both ASU students and community groups?

A: Because it builds a pipeline. High school students, homeschoolers and those in community organizations can all enter into the arts trade through the shop. Partnerships with nonprofits can also make the program more sustainable by offering scholarships and awards that support students as they move into careers.

Q: What impact do you hope the community artist residency will have?

A: It is important that Arizona State University, higher education and community schools come together to create pathways. Students can move from high school into the theater and performing arts arena, and associate degree programs can make that journey affordable. Tuition at a major university can be costly, but certifications and associate degrees cut down the expense while still opening doors.

I believe in certifications because they allow students to build credentials in specific areas — lighting, sound and film. Even if someone cannot complete a degree, certifications provide recognition that qualifies them for jobs.

Q: Are there particular themes you would like to see the community artists explore?

A: That will be up to the curriculum leaders, but I hope there will be more opportunities for students to work with technology. Even though I am not technology savvy myself, I see how digital tools can improve performances and make the audience experience stronger.

Q: How have your experiences as a physician and arts supporter shaped how you give back?

A: For me, giving back is both service and enjoyment. I can support the community through my contributions while also enjoying the cultural opportunities that are right here in the Valley — without needing to travel far.

Q: What do you hope your legacy in Mesa will be?

A: I hope my legacy will continue through others, encouraging more people to join in so that the arts remain strong and lasting for future generations. I also hope the arts will be a force for peace in the community. Music and creativity can calm people and help create harmony.

Changing Futures campaign

This investment is part of ASU's [Changing Futures campaign](#). Fueled by philanthropic investment and unique partnerships, the campaign focuses on six key areas: enhancing education access, developing leaders, promoting sustainability, strengthening communities, advancing health and developing impactful technology.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Ruth Tan Lim stands next to a sign of the newly named production shop at ASU's MIX Center during an unveiling event on Oct. 6. Photo by Emma Fitzgerald/Arizona State University

Gallery



Production shop Coordinator Michael Armstrong (middle) explains an equipment demonstration in the newly named Ruth Tan Lim Production Shop at the ASU MIX Center in Mesa, Arizona, on Oct. 6.



Individuals observe equipment being used in the newly named Ruth Tan Lim Production Shop during the MIX Center Donor and Residency event on Oct. 6.



Hillary West (left), associate director of development in the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, and Ruth Tan Lim (center) check out the MIX Center production shop, which has been named for Lim, during the MIX Center Donor and Residency event on Oct. 6.



Production shop coordinator Michael Armstrong (middle) shows Ruth Tan Lim (left) her portrait being created using equipment in the shop, which has been named for her.