Lattie Coor remembered for dedication to improving the lives of Arizonans

Memorial held for 15th president of ASU, who transformed ASU into a research university

By Mary Beth Faller, ASU News
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Story highlights

Lattie Coor, president of ASU from 1990 to 2002, died July 16 at age 89.

At his memorial service, colleagues, friends and family remembered his deep passion for service.

Lattie Coor will be remembered for his deep commitment to Arizona and his passion for improving people's lives.

Coor, who was the 15th president of Arizona State University from 1990 to 2002, died July 16 at age 89. Under his 12-year tenure, ASU launched Barrett, The Honors College, established the Polytechnic campus and raised more than $560 million in the ASU Campaign for Leadership, increasing the number of endowed faculty chairs from six to 80. And, in a major milestone, ASU earned Research I status in 1994 from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

On Monday, colleagues, friends and family held a celebration of life for Coor in Old Main, on ASU's Tempe campus.

ASU President Michael Crow said that his predecessor was essential to the success of the university, having helped to win over the public in regard to its value.

“He focused on how to design a new kind of research university that would allow ASU to become evolved for service as opposed to evolving for separation,” Crow said.

Coor, an Arizona native, served as the president of the University of Vermont for 13 years before returning to his home state.

“He came back to the people that he and his family had been connected to,” Crow said.

“He was a fierce competitor for change. He became tremendously focused on building the people's university, and that's what we are. We are the people's university.”

Marlene Tromp, the former vice provost and head of ASU’s New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, said that Coor transformed her institution.

“Lattie matured a local college in an idyllic location into a university meant to serve a nation,” said Tromp, who is now the current president of the University of Vermont.

“Lattie understood that universities were not abstractions. They're communities of people brought together by a shared desire to learn, discover, teach and serve. And Lattie always sought to support people in that work.”

After leaving ASU in 2002, Coor invited Sybil Francis, Crow’s wife, to join him in launching the Center for the Future of Arizona, a nonprofit that uses research and data to create solutions.

“It was the people of Arizona who were first and foremost on his mind — how to make their lives better. What is remarkable is that he was not thinking about any single issue or problem that could be solved in a few short years. He was thinking about Arizona's future, about the kind of state it could become and how to create an organization that would keep working toward that future for generations,” Francis said.

One of Coor’s great legacies is The Arizona We Want, a project of the Center for the Future of Arizona that researches what matters to Arizonans.

“He understood that our state's future shouldn’t be defined solely by the priorities of any one governor, legislature or generation of leaders, but that it should be grounded in the aspirations of the people who call Arizona home and informed by their voices from every part of the state and every walk of life,” Francis said.

Craig Barrett, a longtime friend of Coor, said the two bonded over a deep love for the outdoors, sharing many adventures in hiking, biking, rafting, skiing and mountain climbing, and a love of education.

“I especially admired his ability to manage complex educational institutions, which I think are probably the most difficult thing in the world to manage,” he said.

Under Coor’s ASU Campaign for Leadership, Craig and Barbara Barrett donated to the honors college, which was named for them in 2001.

Coor’s loved ones shared warm memories of his affection and great skill as a listener.

Crow said that he urged Coor to run for senator.

“He always struck me as the ideal form of what you would hope your senator would be — committed to the people, listening to the people, synthesizing the views of people … organizing people to learn what they thought the world really needed to be, and then figuring out how to work for the people,” he said.

That ability to listen made Coor a great problem solver, said his son, Colin Coor.

“I went to him with my toughest problems. We would do these diagrams of how to get from basically point A to point B. He knew the details and then would follow up with me. And ultimately, I think that's part of my success and my sister's success,” he said.

Farryl Bertmann, Coor’s daughter, said his spirit of generosity will live on.

“He built a legacy through not only envisioning a better world, but by taking action to build a better world,” she said.

“The qualities we admire most in him — his strength, his humor, his vision, his kindness, his wisdom, and his fierce advocacy for access — are gifts he has left behind for us to embody.”

This story originally appeared on ASU News.

Main image



Sparky poses for a photo with a portrait of Lattie Coor, president of ASU from 1990 to 2002, who died July 16 at age 89. At his recent memorial service, colleagues, friends and family remembered his deep passion for service. Photo by Deanna Dent/Arizona State University

Text image(s)



ASU President Michael Crow speaks during a celebration of life held for former ASU President Lattie Coor at Old Main on the Tempe campus on Monday, Nov. 2. Photo by Deanna Dent/ASU



Farryl Bertmann, Coor's daughter, shared a moment of meditation with attendees during a celebration of his life on Nov. 2. Photo by Deanna Dent/ASU

Gallery



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On Monday, Nov. 2, colleagues, friends and family gathered at Old Main on ASU's Tempe campus to celebrate Coor's life and legacy.



Craig Barrett (right) shakes hands with University of Vermont President Marlene Tromp, both of whom spoke at Coor's celebration of life on Monday, Nov. 2.



Members of Coor's family, including his son, Colin Coor (back row, fifth from left), and his daughter, Farryl Bertmann (front row, second from left), gathered for a photo on the lawn of Old Main, on ASU's Tempe campus, following a Nov. 2 celebration of his life and legacy.