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OTTO & EDNA WELLY FOUND  
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# BACKKUS MALL







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November 19, 2009

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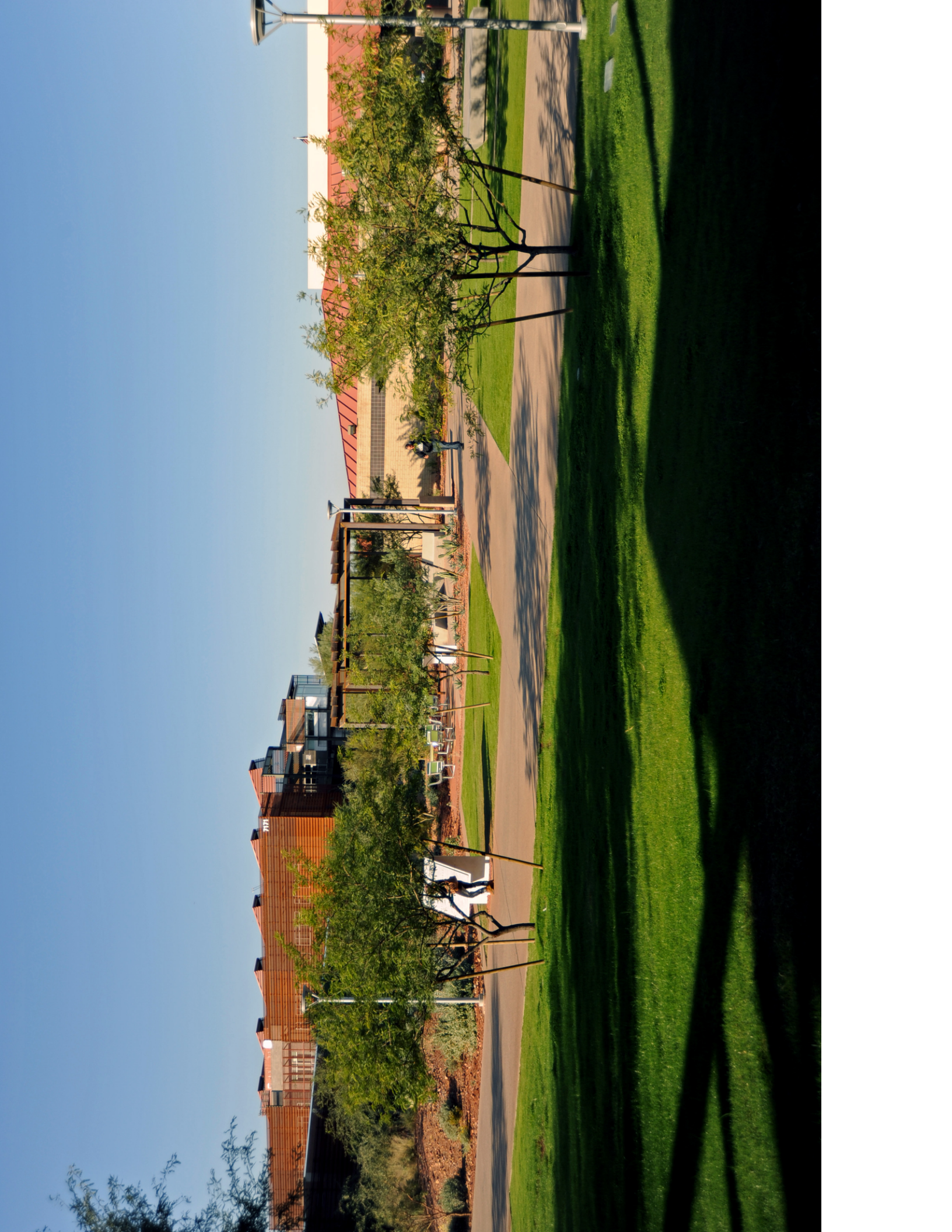
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**THOMAS and RUTH NESBITT**

*Thomas and Ruth (Fitch) Nesbitt were born, raised and lived their entire lives in Mesa, Arizona. Tom was a graduate of the University of New Mexico and Ruth received her college degree from the University of Arizona. Together they raised three children: Deborah, Jim and John Nesbitt.*

*After serving as City Engineer for Mesa, Tom started his own civil engineering construction firm in 1955, Nesbitt Contracting Co. Inc. grew to become one of the most successful family-owned construction companies in the Valley. In the course of its 50-plus years in business, Nesbitt Contracting paved many of the streets at Williams Air Force Base, now home of the ASU Polytechnic campus.*

*The Nesbitts' children are all graduates of ASU and they are pleased to name this plaza in honor of their parents. Incorporated into the Nesbitt Plaza is a section of sidewalk removed from a street reconstruction project at the former base. The Nesbitt Contracting stamp gives testimony to the family's connection with this site over two generations.*



## ELDON and ELONA COOLEY

Eldon Cooley was born in 1918 in Lakeside, Arizona. At the age of two his family moved to Gilbert where his father, Freeman, began farming. Eldon continued the family farming tradition in the East Valley. He married Elona Peel in 1941 and moved to Mesa where they raised six children: DeWayne, Ronald, Jeffrey, Chris, Linda and Maryann.

Eldon was active in Mesa civic affairs, serving on the Mesa City Council and as Mayor from 1972 – 1976. He also served on many civic boards, including the Boy Scouts, YMCA, United Way, Senior Citizens and the Farmers Co-op. In addition, he and Elona were very active in their church, serving in various positions and as missionaries.

Eldon and Elona were lifelong supporters of Arizona State University's sports, education and student leadership programs. All of their children attended ASU.



## CLIFF DOUGLAS

H.C. "Cliff" Douglas was born in Roll, Arizona, Yuma County, in 1930, and has lived in northeast Mesa since 1982. He is the owner and president of Harris Cattle Co., as well as AZT Nursery in Mesa.

His love of the desert brought him to the Desert Botanical Garden in 1987, where he served on its board and later was elected president. In honor of his years of service, he was appointed a trustee emeritus of the Desert Botanical Garden.

Cliff worked closely with Dr. Charles "Chuck" Backus, founding Provost of the ASU Polytechnic campus. Cliff is referred to as the "father" of the Polytechnic Desert Arboretum concept and donated nearly 500 of his company's trees for the project. The result of his vision was profiled in *American School and University* magazine in 2005.

Today, Cliff's trees provide shade in walkways and seating areas, and adorn the main entrance to campus.



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## **OTTO and EDNA NEELY**

Otto Neely was born in 1900 in West Texas and as a youth his family moved to Gilbert, Arizona, where he began his lifetime vocation of farming and ranching. He married the love of his life, Edna Trout, a teacher, in 1928. The couple had no children of their own but were known and loved by all, and became "Aunt Edna" and "Uncle Otto" to generations of Arizonans.

Throughout their lives they were committed to their beliefs of hard work, frugal living and caring for those in need or the less fortunate. As they prospered, they shared their good fortune with others. Their care and commitment to others lives on today through the Otto and Edna Neely Foundation.

The support of the Otto and Edna Neely Foundation continues to encourage young people to obtain a college education by providing scholarships, as well as enrich the beauty and quality of the Arizona State University campus.



## DR. CHARLES BACKUS

Dr. Charles "Chuck" Backus, a world renowned expert in photovoltaics, was the founding Provost for what is now known as the Arizona State University Polytechnic campus. His vision for the former Williams Air Force Base was one of an "academic mall" that would serve as an educational base for people of all ages.

After 36 years with ASU, Chuck retired in 2004, leaving a legacy that continues to help shape the Williams Gateway area. Under his leadership enrollment grew more than 40 percent. He secured capital improvement funds to renovate existing and construct new buildings on campus, and he chaired the planning process for a development project which proposed the creation of a university urban center near Power and Williams Field Roads.

Even after retirement, his community service continues to focus on economic and community development for the region. His love of the outdoors and dedication to conservation has influenced his input into future decisions about development near the Superstition Mountains and the management of his own cattle ranch in that area. Started in the mid-1970s, it is believed to be the first farm and ranch in the world to be solar powered.

Chuck's ability to bring together his colleagues and students, as well as academic and community leaders helped inspire this group to raise funds for the "Backus Mall" as a tribute to his foresight, dedication and consideration for current and future generations.





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BACKUS MALL



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NEELY PLAZA



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