

# PINE

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## Becoming Billie Jo

NAU helped nurture her passion for the arts. Now see how one alumna is paying it forward.



**LIFE LESSONS**  
How the humanities  
make us more  
human  
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A photograph of Billie Jo Herberger, an older woman with short, curly blonde hair tied up with a red hair tie. She is wearing a leopard print blazer over a black top, orange tassel earrings, and a gold watch. She is standing on a staircase with a wooden handrail, looking upwards and to the right with a slight smile. The background is a blurred interior space with dark structural elements.

‘EVERY DAY  
BRINGS ME  
REASON TO  
CELEBRATE’

**Billie Jo Herberger embraces  
life and gives back to the arts**

# Growing up in the Pasadena sunshine,

Billie Jo Herberger (BS Health and Physical Education, '69) was the quintessential California girl. She loved surfing, swimming, and dancing—and was a cheerleader in high school, where her enthusiasm earned her the nickname “Miss Effervescent.”

Billie Jo also made the most of nearby Los Angeles. Accompanied by her mother, who shared her love of the performing arts, she traveled frequently to the city for theatre, music, and dance performances. The arts were already “a big part of my world,” she said.

## COMING TO NAU

Billie Jo arrived at Northern Arizona University in 1962. She loved its beautiful campus, and after growing up in a busy city, appreciated being a part of a small college town. “I liked everything about being at NAU,” she said,

to state championships and expanded the department's programs, adding yoga, tai chi, and swimming.

Billie Jo also started developing a water workout for her students—a program that she would eventually build into an international business called Billie Jo Exercise. Over the years, Billie Jo Exercise products would include records, cassettes, books, videos, and Billie Jo's Wet & Wonderful water exercise program.

She later expanded her business to Japan, bringing her unique water exercise program to luxury hotels across the country. She appeared in Japanese media, trained fitness instructors across the country, and even designed

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including “my professors, my new friends, the beautiful, snow-capped San Francisco Peaks, and the pine trees everywhere.”

NAU also nurtured Billie Jo's love for the arts. One of her favorite classes was a music course where she learned about the instruments in an orchestra, what roles they play, and how to recognize and appreciate their unique sounds. Dance class was another favorite. And she took advantage of the many cultural events on campus.

Above all, Billie Jo says NAU helped her discover her passions. “I got to be me at NAU,” she said. “I feel so lucky that I had the experiences that allowed me to secure my first job and to create opportunities that shaped my life.”

## FORGING HER CAREER

With her degree in hand, Billie Jo accepted a position as head of physical education at the Judson School, a K–12 boarding school in Paradise Valley, Arizona. During her eight years at Judson, she coached several softball teams

a swimsuit for Japanese women who preferred styles that were more modest than American swimsuits.

During her time in Japan, Billie Jo thoroughly explored and enjoyed the country and culture. Rather than being seen as a tourist, she was “the frizzy-haired blonde with the big smile,” she said. “It was fabulous!”

## OVERCOMING CANCER

In 1977, Billie Jo was diagnosed with malignant melanoma. The diagnosis spurred the fighter in her. She eventually conquered her cancer and used the experience to show others battling illness that they could triumph too.

Surgeries to remove the cancer left Billie Jo with visible scars. Instead of hiding them, she saw them as “battle scars” and proof she had vanquished the disease.

The unsinkable Billie Jo also overcame cervical and breast cancers, maintaining her optimistic outlook in the face of daunting challenges. For her, “every day brings me reason to celebrate!”

## SUPPORTING THE ARTS

By 1989, Billie Jo had already experienced enough for several lifetimes, but another stage was just beginning. That year she met Judd Herberger, from the Kierland-Herberger family. The two hit it off immediately. They married and have enjoyed a long and happy union.

Together, Billie Jo and Judd are leaders in Arizona's arts and cultural life, and they are generous supporters of NAU.

"Billie Jo and Judd, specifically, and the Herberger family in general, have contributed and continue to contribute to the growth of the arts in Arizona," said Valerio Ferme, dean of the College of Arts and Letters at NAU. "Their endorsement of the value that the arts have on our lives has influenced generations of young Arizonans, who have then carried their love and passions to NAU—passions that Billie Jo and Judd continue to transmit throughout the state in their philanthropic support."

Their financial support and stewardship benefit many important institutions,

"We both believe that the arts are important to our youth," Judd said.

By serving as honorary chairs for arts and cultural events, the Herbergers have also become advocates, encouraging others' participation and donations. Their efforts have inspired broader involvement and increased financial support that help sustain and grow Arizona's cultural institutions.

"If others can help," Billie Jo said, "we can be their inspiration."

Billie Jo has been inspired herself by the impact NAU has on the arts, the cultural community, and students.

"I am very impressed with NAU and the inspiring and wonderful opportunities for artistic enrichment on the Flagstaff campus," she said. "The new Kitt Recital Hall, the performing and visual arts programs, the leadership—they are all moving NAU forward in a wonderful and exciting way."

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including the Herberger Theater Center, the Phoenix Art Museum, the Phoenix Theatre Company, the Arizona Opera, Ballet Arizona, the Phoenix Symphony, Valley Youth Theatre, and Scottsdale Arts.



**Judd and Billie Jo Herberger at the opening of NAU's new Kitt Recital Hall.**

## CHANGING LIVES

The Herbergers' support has changed lives, bringing theatre, dance, opera, and design to those who would not have had the chance to enjoy them otherwise, and helping sustain Arizona arts for generations to come.

Their efforts include supporting organizations dedicated specifically to young people, such as Release the Fear, a nonprofit that uses the arts and other tools to help troubled youth by encouraging social and emotional growth and promoting civic virtues. The Herbergers also support Childsplay, a professional theatre company that creates productions just for kids.

## EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

The Herbergers host charity events and cultural outings across the state, and they enjoy spending time with their five children, five grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.

Over the years, "Miss Effervescent" has proven to be that and so much more. Billie Jo's drive has created a life full of adventure, success, and outstanding contributions to her community. She credits NAU with "starting me on my path in life." And for that, she said, "I am most thankful." ▲

**To learn about naming opportunities at the Kitt Recital Hall, email [development@nau.edu](mailto:development@nau.edu).**