

Community

TempeNews.com



3 people, nonprofit earn Don Carlos Awards

BY TRIBUNE NEWS STAFF

Four recipients whose service ranges from decades of civic involvement to mentoring foster youth through skateboarding will be honored next week with one of Tempe's longest-running community awards.

Tempe Community Council has named Dr. Judy Aldrich, Shrinithi Shaurya, David Gil and The Arc of Tempe as recipients of the 2026 Don Carlos Humanitarian Awards.

They will be recognized Oct. 19 during the 43rd annual awards program at the SRP PERA Club in Tempe.

Aldrich, 81, will receive the Don Carlos Humanitarian Award for more than four decades of involvement in Tempe organizations and civic efforts.

Shaurya will receive the Young Humanitarian Award; Gil will receive the Volunteer Excellence Award; and The



Judy Aldrich

Arc of Tempe will receive the Community Impact Award.

"The Don Carlos Humanitarian Awards give us an opportunity to recognize the many ways people make a difference in Tempe," Tempe Community



David Gil

Council Board Chairman Rabbanni Furqaan said.

"From a lifetime of service to the energy and ideas of a new generation, this year's award recipients remind us that strengthening a community takes many



Shrinithi Shaurya

forms."

Four decades of service Aldrich's selection recognizes a community résumé that stretches across

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History Society to honor 9 Tempe Legends

BY LAWN GRIFFITHS
Tribune Guest Writer

The Tempe History Society has named nine past and current residents 2026 Tempe Legends.

They will be honored at a dinner 6-8:30 p.m. Oct. 17 at Tempe History Museum, 809 E. Southern Ave., Tempe. Tickets are \$35 and are available by calling 480-350-5100 or through tempelegends2026.eventbrite.com.

In March 2004, a nine-member History Society committee held its first Legends Celebration and named 66 living and deceased persons for recognition. The list was not expanded until 2020 with induction of 18 Legends.

It has become an annual event. Over time 135 Legends have been named, about a dozen each year. Among eight cri-

teria that guide nomination and approval of recipients are lifetime accomplishments, enduring influence, exceptional achievements, inspirational as a role model, overcoming adversity and enduring influence.

The History Society was founded in 1969, with early ties to the annual Tempe Old Settlers Reunion, which brought together founders and families with roots in the city's history.

Four living Legends this year are Peggy Moroney, Cecil B. Patterson Jr., Antonia "Toni" Valenzuela Campoy and Mark Vinson. Five deceased honorees are Ralph C. Flores, David R. Merkel, Kevin Daly, Samuel "Sammy" B. Muñoz and Susie Sato.

Here is some additional background on this year's honorees:

• **Samuel "Sammy" B. Muñoz** (1935-



Samuel Muñoz

2024) taught 5th, 6th and middle-school grades in Tempe public schools for over 30 years. He was an innovative teacher who produced and wrote school curriculum and many musical plays as part of his classroom literature and arts curriculum. He wrote and authored the book,



David Merkel

The Summer of 53: The Bullion Plaza Story, plus a short documentary film, So Dear to the Miners in 2013 recounting the history of his hometown of Miami, Arizona.

• **David "Dave" Merkel** (1937-2025) was

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Ralph Flores

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more than 40 years.

She has been involved with the Kiwanis Club of Tempe, Boys & Girls Clubs of the East Valley and numerous community boards and commissions.

Her nomination described her as “a fixture and a force in Tempe” and someone who “doesn’t just show up, she makes things happen.”

Much of that work has centered on young people.

Aldrich has been a longtime supporter of Threadz, Tempe Community Council’s clothing closet for teenagers. She continues to volunteer regularly with the program at age 81.

Her work with Threadz has included helping provide students with school clothing and supplies, holiday gifts, mentoring, activities and other resources.

Aldrich also has a lengthy history with the Kiwanis Club of Tempe, including serving as its president, and remains an active member.

Her involvement with the Boys & Girls Clubs of the East Valley’s Tempe operations has included service as secretary, vice president and board president.

Those decades of work earned Aldrich the award that carries the name of Tempe founder Charles Trumbull Hayden, who was known to the community’s early Hispanic residents as “Don Carlos.”

The award bearing his nickname recognizes humanitarian service and has become one of the city’s longstanding civic honors.

Technology and service

Shaurya’s Young Humanitarian Award reflects a considerably newer form of community service.

She worked as an intern with the Mark Cuban Foundation AI Bootcamps hosted by DriveTime in Tempe, helping young people learn about artificial intelligence through hands-on instruction and mentoring.

The program was designed to introduce participants to a technology that is becoming increasingly prevalent in education and the workplace.

Tempe Community Council cited Shaurya for combining technology, education and service to create opportunities for other young people.

Shaurya, 18, graduated from Corona del Sol High School in Tempe in 2025. Her school recognized her as one of two Outstanding CTE Students of the Year from a graduating class of more than 700.

She is now a freshman at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, where she is studying computer science.

Her long-term goal is to become a computational neuroscientist, working at the intersection of computer science, neuroscience and human health.

Before graduating high school, she had already conducted research at several ASU labs involving computational genomics, neural dynamics and protein analysis.

She also attended the 2024 Mark Cuban Foundation AI Bootcamp hosted by DriveTime in Tempe, and then became one of two Arizona ambassadors for the foundation’s AI Bootcamp Alumni Network.

There, Shaurya helped lead AI literacy sessions for students and supported the Mark Cuban Foundation’s efforts to connect young people with hands-on opportunities to learn about artificial intelligence.

She later helped lead an AI literacy bootcamp in the Valley, mentoring 25 students through hands-on machine learning labs. She joined the foundation as an intern, continuing to work with students and educators on AI education.

In April 2026, she was one of three foundation students who presented to a national audience of educators through the DataPaths webinar series, highlighting her project using AI to predict treatment outcomes for colorectal cancer patients.

She has documented 300+ hours of community volunteering since 2022, including service at Tempe schools and community events.

She also served on the Tempe Mayor’s Youth Advisory Commission during the 2025-26 school year.

Shaurya founded Aztecs Who Code at the Chandler Public Library, a student-led coding initiative that brought programming education to more than 50 students, and she has worked extensively in AI education and mentoring.

The Arizona State Board of Education cited her for tutoring, leadership and creating opportunities for other students.

Her selection also comes with a \$2,000 scholarship from the Ramsey Social Justice Foundation.

Reaching foster youth

Gil turned an interest in skateboarding into a way to connect with Arizona foster youth.

Through the Swappow PLUS Foundation, he has contributed more than 1,400 volunteer hours, working with young people through skateboarding workshops and mentorship.

Tempe Community Council said the

activities give Gil a way to develop relationships with foster youth while helping them build confidence and consider possibilities for their futures.

His personal love of skateboarding became a vehicle for community service, with Gil using it to connect with young people who may have experienced instability in other parts of their lives.

His more than 1,400 hours of work with Swappow PLUS led to his selection for the Volunteer Excellence Award

Six decades in Tempe

The Arc of Tempe will receive the Community Impact Award after more than six decades of work with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families.

The organization provides social opportunities, support for families and opportunities for self-advocacy.

Its programs are intended to help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities develop friendships, become more involved in their communities and advocate for themselves.

Tempe Community Council cited both the organization’s longevity and its longstanding connection to the city in selecting it for the award.

This year’s dinner begins with registration at 5:15 p.m. Oct. 19 at the SRP PERA Club, 1 E. Continental Drive.

Tempe Community Council, founded in 1972, works with local government, nonprofit organizations, faith groups and residents on human-service needs in the community.

Information: tempecommunitycouncil.org/don-carlos. ■

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er whose child was facing the same diagnosis Lily once had. Drawing on his family’s experience, he was able to offer her hope and connect her with a critical resource.

“I started Taylor Insurance Brokers to offer people peace of mind when faced with life’s biggest challenges. I had a similar motivation to start Lily’s Pad. That’s what Lily’s Pad does: turns uncertainty into community,” Taylor said.

“Recognizing independent agents’ dedication to their communities and nonprofit partners is what the Make More Happen Awards are all about,” said Geri Tanzer, senior territory manager for Liberty Mutual Insurance.

“Taylor Insurance Brokers’ commitment to Lily’s Pad demonstrates the meaningful difference local businesses can make in helping children battling serious illnesses enjoy a safe place to play while their families find support, understanding and hope.” ■