

UA provides Southwest academic nucleus

by Jeff Harrison

"The Southwest IS the center," asserts Joseph C. Wilder.

For the past 18 months, Wilder, director of the Southwest Center at The University of Arizona, has been preaching the gospel of the Southwest to the University and the community. After several fits and starts, the Center seems to have caught on as a permanent part of the UA landscape. Wilder has also assumed the role as chief merchant for the Center, unabashedly hawking the virtues of an academic nucleus for the region that is actually located in the region.

Wilder also has been either or both the principal benefactor and catalyst for a number of projects, including conferences on Yaqui deer music and the Columbus Quincentenary, support for books in pro-

gress, and receptions for local academics and community members. He juggles those duties with his continuing job as publisher of the *Journal of the Southwest*.

"There is a certain chauvinistic desire here to make the UA number one in that. We want to come out very strongly (as) the leader in Southwest studies," he says.

"We've had some changes. Last year, we threw a lot of stuff against the wall, did a lot of things and pulled the community together.

"This year, we're trying to fasten it all down, get stronger and get our staff in place."

Wilder added—and quickly filled—two key positions to the SWC staff last fall: Carmen Villa Prezelski, program coordinator; and Karen Seger, editorial assistant.

A native Tucsonan, Prezelski attended

the UA, and is the mother of twin boys, now UA freshmen. After eleven years as secretary to the head of Documentary Relations of the Southwest, Charles Polzer, at the Arizona State Museum, she welcomes the chance for a little personal growth in a new area.

Wilder says he's thrilled to have her on board.

"Carmen is absolutely and elegantly fluent in Spanish. This gives (the SWC) a whole other dimension we didn't have before, the capacity to get across the border."

Prezelski organized conferences in both Mexico and the United States while at DRSW. She also helped orchestrate the annual series of Kino mission tours run by the Southwest Mission Research Center.

She not only knows Spanish, she knows the people in Sonora. Her mother was born in Hermosillo and her father was a rancher near Cascabel. When author Joe Brown and photographer David Burckhalter needed contacts to start work on a book, Prezelski set them up with a family friend who is also a lawyer, historian and confidant of the governor of Sonora. Brown and Burckhalter received letters from the minister of tourism and a wealth of cooperation from other officials as they moved around the state.

"In November, Carmen attended an international conference in Hermosillo on the Sierra Pinacate region that gave her lots of contacts," says Wilder, "including helping to acquire articles that will appear later in a special issue of the *Journal of the Southwest* on the Pinacate.

"She's given us this dimension we have to have because when we talk about the Southwest as a region, we also need to include Northwest Mexico. Carmen is a very valuable person for us."

Karen Seger admits to a "speckled career" and currently divides her time between the *Journal of the Southwest* and a Ph.D. program in modern Middle Eastern studies.

"I was an archaeologist in the Middle East for 14 years, and at the end of that became more interested in 'live' people and began doing ethnographic work in the West Bank, Jordan, and recently on a United Nations project in North Yemen."

Seger chose to move to Tucson in 1981 because of its geographic similarity to the Middle East. Here, she has involved herself in such activities as Tucson Meet Yourself and the Tucson Festival Society, and is now the assistant music director of a new O'odham music festival. She also works as a volunteer for the Nature Conservancy in Canelo Cienega, where she



Pat C. Helgeson photo

The Southwest Center's Karen Seger, Joe Wilder and Carmen Prezelski.

spends her summers. Wilder views Seger as a key addition to the center.

"Publishing is a funny field. It's easy enough to find someone to copy edit a manuscript, put in commas and fix grammar and syntax. Karen is someone with really broad and deep intellectual interests, scholarly ability, education, training and maturity who can come in and can start to function as a publisher. That is what is hard to find, and what we've found here."

Wilder says he is up front about his wish to have Seger move from half time to full time, but adds "we're all under the same budget restraints."

Wilder still plans to move forward with several projects. One of them is a Southwest Center book series with The University of Arizona Press. Wilder wants the series not only to publish books from the region but to be able to support some of them through both the research and publication.

Bernard L. Fontana is general editor of the series.

"I wanted to get Bunny involved systematically in publishing. He is a fabulous resource who to this point has been untapped formally as the editor of a book series. He has a vast network to bring in material.

"We want books, good books out of the region."

A case in point is the book by Brown and Burckhalter, "The Face of Sonora." Wilder says there is presently no book in English on Sonora, and few in Spanish.

"You can't go into a bookstore and find anything. As a result, Sonora is like the Great Unknown, even to people living along the border and in the region. They know it is down there, but they don't really know what it is about."

Wilder says the center will also host two conferences in 1989, one on the phenomenon of the Jewish conversos in Mexico during the Spanish Inquisition. Another will focus on an investigation of historic evidence in preparation for an archaeological project to uncover the route of Coronado through Sonora and Arizona.

Ongoing projects include a research project on Yaqui oral literature by UA English Professor Larry Evers with Felipe Molina, and a book project on rural Sonora by Arizona State Museum ethnohistorian Tom Sheridan.

"Our real progress has been in all the publishing inroads we've made. We're starting to do some sensational publishing, truly provocative important publishing."

Eight to sponsor Festival

The University of Arizona's Southwest Center and Southwest Folklore Center will join six other community sponsors Jan. 28 to produce the first of what they hope will be an annual observance, the Waila Festival 1989. The 5 to 11 p.m. festival celebrates traditional music and dance—or waila—of the Tohono O'odham tribe.

Traditional O'odham foods will be served at the festival and a basketweaving demonstration is planned. The public will be able to purchase baskets directly from the artists and waila music cassettes from participating bands will also be on sale.

Other sponsors of the free festival, to be held at the Arizona Historical Society, 949 E. Second St., are the Arizona Historical Society, Tohono O'odham Arts Council, Tohono O'odham Elderly Program, National Endowment for the Arts, The Tucson Community Foundation's Brinkerhoff Family Fund and KXCI Radio Station.