

STATE AND LOCAL

# Former student leaves artistic legacy to A&M

By WENDY JOHNSON  
Reporter

The Benz School of Floral Design is only one portion of the legacy M. "Buddy" Benz left Texas A&M when he died in 1980.

He also willed to A&M an eclectic and "dearly cherished" art collection that includes sculptures, paintings, prints and containers from various periods in history. For example, there are Renaissance paintings and bronze vessels dating from the time of Christ.

Emily Twitty, curator of the Benz art collection, says, "Benz was an old Aggie who started the first school of floral design in Texas."

She says it's the oldest continuously operating floral design school, and it was the first program in Texas to be certified.

"It's sort of like a short, glorified trade school," Twitty says. "It is really good for hands-on experience."

James L. Johnson, director of the Benz School, is Benz's hand-picked successor, Twitty says. Johnson was one of Benz's students when Benz taught floral design in his Houston home in 1958.

Twitty says Benz also established the only Endowed Chair in Floral Design in the United States and possibly the world.

The school has classes in basic floral design and the business aspects of floral design. Students learn what the experts look for when they buy flowers, how to decide on the price mark-up, what the shelf-lives of various flowers are, and what to carry in a floral shop. Students also learn the appropriate flowers and designs for weddings, funerals, parties and other events.

The courses last two weeks and are offered four times a year. A \$500-fee is required and pays for all materials except the textbook and housing. The school limits enrollment to 20 students.

The services of the Benz School are available to the University and to the community. Johnson has arranged flowers for the Memorial Student Center Wiley Lecture Series, the MSC Student Conference on National Affairs, MSC Hospital-



Photo by ANTHONY S. CASPER  
"The Geisha Girl"

ity, the Board of Regents and other groups.

"The school makes enough money to perpetuate itself, but where we really make the money is in the books," Twitty says. "They're really profitable."

Benz willed his San Jacinto Publishing Co. and the copyrights to all his books to Texas A&M.

He wrote four books about floral design — the only floral design books that have ever warranted

more than one printing, Twitty says.

Benz's book "FLOWERS: Geometric Form" is considered the Bible of the floral design industry and is in its ninth printing, Twitty says.

Benz made his money in flowers and did not return to A&M for 20 years, Twitty says. She says it is rumored he would not return until a professor he disliked had left.

Benz became a Distinguished Alumnus in 1973, Twitty says, and he regarded it as the highest honor he had ever received.

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