



Kate Zaneis School donates items to Southeastern for library display

October 10, 2022

To help recognize the upcoming induction of Kate Zaneis into the Oklahoma Higher Education Hall of Fame, a display case honoring her has been set up in the Henry G. Bennett Memorial Library at Southeastern Oklahoma State University.

Most of the items in the display case, which include photographs, paintings, certificates, diplomas, and other materials, were recently donated to the University by the Kate Zaneis School in Wilson, Oklahoma. SE library director Sandra Thomas and assistant to the director/acquisitions & collections specialist DeAnn Prince oversaw the establishment of the exhibit, which is located on the main floor of the library.

In 1935, Zaneis was appointed as the ninth president of Southeastern State Teachers College — the first female to head a state college or university in the nation.

The late Zaneis will be honored with 10 other inductees, including Buddy Spencer, businessman and SE Distinguished Alumnus, who will receive a special merit award.

The 28th annual induction ceremony and banquet is scheduled for Nov. 1 at the Oklahoma History Center.

“We are honored that President Zaneis and Mr. Spencer are receiving this award,” said Southeastern president Thomas Newsom. “Both of them are deserving of this recognition after having made such long-lasting contributions to higher education. We also appreciate the Kate Zaneis School, which is celebrating its centennial this year, for its generosity in donating the many historical items to the University, which we are proudly displaying.”

Although Zaneis only served as president from May 1935 to July 1937, she accomplished a great deal, including overseeing a 33 percent increase in enrollment, obtaining Public Works Administration funding for facilities, equipment, and athletic field improvements, increasing funding for student work programs, and in 1937, securing an appearance by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt for a speech on campus and overnight stay at the President’s home.

Born in 1887 in Springplace, Georgia, Zaneis moved with her family to Ardmore, Oklahoma, and graduated from high school there in 1907.

She later served as principal of Lincoln Ward School in Ardmore. In 1915, Zaneis became the superintendent of Lone Grove High School and Rexroat Consolidated Schools, and not long after, was on the summer teaching faculty at Southeastern State Teachers College (STC).

In 1920, while pursuing her bachelor’s degree at STC, Zaneis was elected as Carter County superintendent to work on rural school consolidation.

Later, as a member of the State Board of Education, she successfully achieved approval of sabbatical leaves for college faculty members. In 1935, shortly before she received her master’s degree from Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State University), Zaneis was named president of STC.

In her later career, Zaneis served as the director of education for the Oklahoma Department of Public Safety. She also worked on the school lunch program through the Department of Public Welfare and later through the Department of Education.

Zaneis died on September 9, 1973, in Ardmore.