

## Honoring a Legacy of Leadership: CRIT Chairwoman Amelia Flores Recognized with a Paver in the Women's Plaza

*Written in collaboration with the University of Arizona Office of Native American Advancement, Initiatives & Research (NAAIR) and Agnese Nelms Haury Program*

On May 20<sup>th</sup>, at the end of Day 1 of the [WRRC 2025 Annual Conference](#), the University of Arizona partners, conference attendees, and special guests honored Amelia Flores, Chairwoman of the Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT), for her leadership and contributions to her community, state, and region, and in particular for her role as a defender and protector of the Colorado River.



Earlier in the day, Flores was a conference speaker on the panel “Sharing the Colorado River,” where she conveyed the significance of the river to her and to the CRIT. The Colorado River closely ties to their identities as Tribes and people, she emphasized, and they have a spiritual connection and a stewardship responsibility: “This is our river. It is the embodiment of our past, our current, and our future. Yet we are not at the table negotiating how it must be managed.” Flores called for the other parties involved in managing the Colorado River to understand the values and histories of the Tribes sharing the river, as well as to engage in early and ongoing relationship building with them. She also called for directing the attention of everyone involved not just to who gets what benefit from the river, but instead to how to sustain the river for the future.

Dr. Sharon B. Megdal, Director of the [Water Resources Research Center](#) (WRRC), spoke of the many roles Chairwoman Flores has played, including as a leader of CRIT, co-chair of the Indigenous Women's Leadership Network, and member of the Women in Water Diplomacy Network. Megdal reflected on her first meeting with Chairwoman Flores at the 2015 Arizona Town Hall and on their continued engagement, including at Megdal's first visit to CRIT in February 2017, and as speakers at the UN Water Conference in New York and World Water Week in Stockholm in August 2024. Megdal thanked Chairwoman Flores for her leadership and for serving as a role model for so many.

Next, a short [video](#) was played, which introduced the [Women's Plaza of Honor](#) as a site of honoring. The video featured SVP Levi Esquerro of [Native American Advancement and Tribal Engagement Office](#), who emphasized that the Chairwoman is a Wildcat and shared the reason for choosing to dedicate a paver in the Plaza to her: “because she paved the way for future Tribal leaders.”

Chairwoman Flores took a moment to collect herself as she stepped up to the podium to express her appreciation. “This is very touching for me. ... I stand here today, and I'm filled with profound gratitude and humility for the honor of being recognized in the Women's Plaza ... It's not only a personal milestone, but ... a powerful reminder of the values that were instilled in me by my parents.” She concluded by acknowledging, “I stand here because of teamwork ... and those who believe in the potential of others. ... So I'm thankful to my Tribe ... my family, my friends, my mentors, and my colleagues. ... any success I have had has been made possible by the strength, wisdom, encouragement of you all. ... I want to mention the remarkable women who have come before me, and ... who stand beside me. Thank you all who believe and continue to believe in me.”

Of the paver itself, Flores noted, “This acknowledgement is more than bricks and mortar, material things. It is a living tribute to women who ... left the world a better place than they found it. And now to be among those — it’s an honor and responsibility that I will carry with humbleness and grace. Let this recognition serve as a tribute to every woman whose impact may not be recognized, but whose influence ripple[s] across generations. May we continue to lift each other up ... open doors for those who follow, and never, never stop creating spaces for women’s voices, stories, and and legacies to be honored. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.” Chairwoman Flores was clearly moved as she hugged SVP Esquerro and accepted a bouquet of sunflowers (her favorite) from Toni Massaro, Executive Director of the [Agnese Helms Haury Program](#).

Chairwoman Flores and guests then visited the engraved stone paver in the Women’s Plaza, which reads “Amelia Flores, Steward of the Colorado River.” [Miss Native UA](#) Daelyn Nez provided the blessing and land acknowledgment and thanked the Chairwoman for “paving the way for us all.” Nez later noted, “I was so honored to be a part of the recognition of Chairwoman Amelia Flores. She is such an inspiration. Her leadership, resilience, and unwavering commitment to her people have opened doors for future generations, not only through what she has accomplished, but through the way she carries herself through it all with dedication, humility, and grace.”

Toni Massaro congratulated Chairwoman Flores in the Plaza and thanked her for her vision, saying “The University of Arizona Agnese Nelms Haury Program is very proud to join our UA colleagues in recognizing Madame Chairwoman Flores for her extraordinary contributions of time, expertise, leadership, and wisdom over many years. She exemplifies what we hope for from all of our Wildcat alumni: dedication to making the world a better place for all peoples. But she is also truly exceptional in an area that is core to the Haury Program and to UA's land grant mission: the respectful promotion of Tribal resilience through education, research, and service. Warm congratulations and gratitude to Madame Chairwoman Flores, from the Haury Program team.”

Dedicated in 2005, the Women’s Plaza of Honor is located within the U of A Honors Village. The plaza’s design represents the phases of women’s lives, reflected through arches, benches, glass sculptures, falling leaves, and gathering spaces. The artwork on display celebrates women who have made significant contributions to the history of Arizona or have enriched the lives of others, with ongoing projects designed to honor the wide-ranging careers, families, and communities of Arizona’s extraordinary women.

The planning committee for this special recognition included the Native American Advancement & Tribal Engagement Office, the Water Resources Research Center, the Women’s Plaza of Honor (College of Social & Behavioral Sciences), and the Arizona Institute of Resilience.