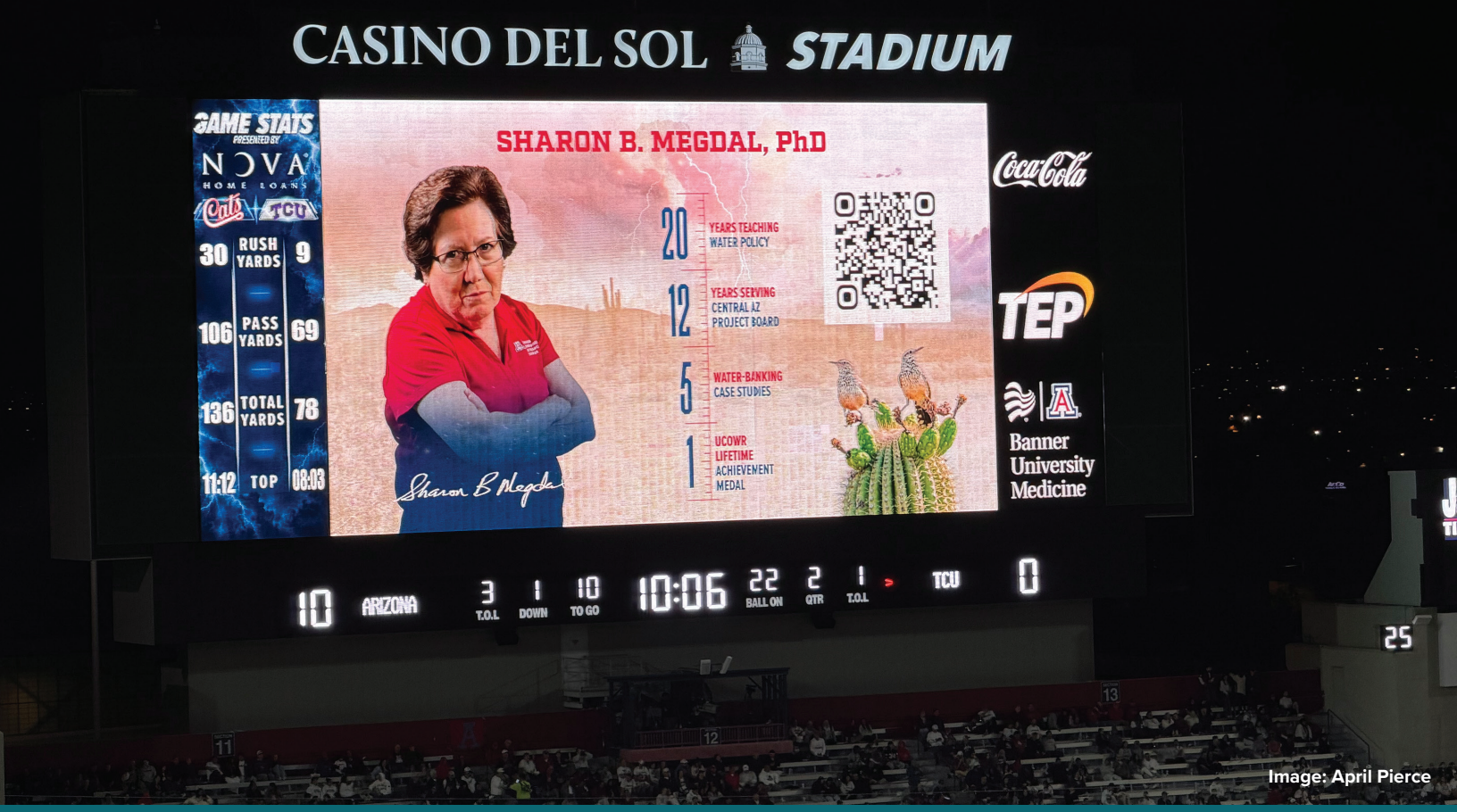


Image: April Pierce

Reflections: A Sandstorm Adventure

by Sharon B. Megdal
November 13, 2026

My involvement in the University of Arizona's Sandstorm programming was initiated with an August 27, 2026, group email stating: "Your names were given to us as potential participants in our upcoming Sandstorm events. University Marketing and Communications, Arizona Athletics and several colleges/departments across campus are teaming up to showcase the amazing environmental research happening at the U of A… There will be…a Sandstorm-themed football game on 11/6 where…we will be showcasing our strengths in this area throughout the tailgate and game. We're starting to plan production days where we can capture interviews with you solo and as a group, photos for marketing materials, and an evening on the field at Casino del Sol Stadium to capture footage for the hype video!" **Greg Barron-Gafford**, **Laura Condon**, **Elise Gornish**, **Zack Guido**, **Ladd Keith**, and **yours truly** accepted the invitation, although I think I can speak for all of us in reporting that we did not know exactly what we were getting into!

We were asked to show up for individual photo shoots, where we spoke some phrases for the camera. We were photographed holding footballs and helmets and looking tough. I had no idea how heavy football helmets are! Individual interviews about our backgrounds and our work resulted in an **individual profile** that revealed my unexpected, nonlinear pathway to becoming a water researcher and professional here in Arizona. A second profile connected to my work was included on the **Sandstorm landing page**. We convened one evening on the football field. With the lights on, we were asked to look like we were throwing a football (something I had never done) and swing or otherwise handle the Saguaro Sword, on which footballs obtained through turnovers are pierced. You can see me waving the sword in the very fun **hype video** referenced above, which was shown at the game at halftime. Though smaller than it looks when watching the players spear footballs they have

intercepted, it is very heavy. I could barely wave it. But there I am in the hype video looking OK! They even had me put on the black paint under my eyes, as seen in the photo accompanying my individual profile. (I was the only one who got to put on the black paint, which was hard to get off.)

They produced trading cards for each of us and showed them during time outs on game night. When my trading card was shown on the **big screen**, the game announcer said: "Sharon Megdal brings researchers, communities, and policymakers together to find practical ways to manage Arizona's most precious resource: water."



The **Sandstorm 2026 landing page** notes: "The Sonoran Desert is a competitive advantage. It shapes how we play, how we research, and how we solve problems. For nearly 150 years, the University of Arizona has turned the challenges of this place into opportunities to push further, work harder, and discover what's possible." Sandstorm is about thriving in the desert and adapting to the water scarcity, climate, and all else that is part of it.

For me, the hour-long roundtable discussion that the six of us participated in was an important part of the Sandstorm experience. The discussion, which was meticulously produced by the University of Arizona's amazing marketing and communications team, demonstrated how our work in and about the desert environment contributes to addressing challenges. It connects people to place and inspires hope for the future. Although not as much fun as the hype video, I hope people will view it. Our conversation helped us get to know each other. Importantly, it provides a glimpse of what six researchers at the University of Arizona are doing to learn about and contribute to thriving in the rich living laboratory that is the Sonoran Desert.



From left: Greg Barron-Gafford, Zack Guido, U of A President Suresh Garimella, Sharon B. Megdal, Elise Gornish on game night.

Finally, to top off my Sandstorm adventure, the football team was victorious in a comeback thriller!



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