

## PINAL COUNTY LIFESTYLES

DECEMBER, 2011

The French have a saying (“*Plus ça change, plus c’est le même chose.*”) the more things change, the more they stay the same. I certainly thought that 2011 was a year fraught with change, high drama, and interesting developments. But here’s the way I started my *Pinal Lifestyles* column a year ago. “This year has been quite the rollercoaster ride: between the stuttering economy, continued blows to the housing industry, fluctuating fuel prices ... what seemed like a brutally hot summer, and unemployment figures that don’t seem to improve – it’s been a year. In the meantime, it’s now 31 days and counting (or 24 days and counting, depending on your age and responsibilities for things under the Christmas tree) until the end of 2010.“ Still seems to mostly fit the year just past.

However, having made that observation, I’m going to contradict myself by citing a number of significant developments and events in 2011. The Pinal County Board of Supervisors adopted an austerity budget for the FY2011-12 that featured a 17% reduction in the total budget and left the County’s tax rate (the 31% that the Board of Supervisors directly controls) at last year’s level (\$3.99/\$100 Assessed Value).

As part of that budget balancing act, we had to accommodate a demand from the State Legislature that the County send the State of Arizona \$2.6M -- on top of additional costs and program shifts that moved more and more responsibility for State-mandated programs into the County’s budgets. Last fiscal year those shifts necessitated by legislative “fixes” to Arizona’s budget amounted to 27 cents of each Pinal County tax dollar levied to support the County’s budget.

Mid-year, western Pinal County heard about a really unusual and new development called Phoenix Mart. Using a Congressionally authorized program that incents foreign capital investment in U.S. areas of high unemployment, an Arizona company (Az Sourcing, LLC) put together a large group of Chinese and U.S. investors interested in coming to the Casa Grande area. The Phoenix Mart concept calls for the construction of a 1.5 million square foot commercial center that will include convention space, some warehousing, office space, and mostly display space for some 2,000 vendors aimed at the wholesale markets in the Americas.

Named after the Phoenix Bird (a powerful symbol in Chinese mythology) the development is scheduled to open for business by May of 2013 and employ some 3,000 Arizonans in various full-time jobs. I am pleased to have played a small role in bringing Phoenix Mart to western Pinal County.

Even as the House of Representatives passed a bill authorizing the swap of land between a multinational copper company and the federal government that would clear the way for the Resolution Copper mining venture in Superior, a proposal to mine copper (using an *in-situ* leaching process) on land in Florence faced intense local controversy with uneven results.

The spring and summer season for local agriculturists began with nature forcing a “do-over” for most cotton growers which forced a late start for the season. However, even though there was a scramble for enough water to complete the 2011 crop, record prices and yields put some smiles on many farmers’ faces.

The dialog concerning Union Pacific Railroad's proposal to construct a large (950 acre) classification rail yard near Red Rock heated up this past summer with intensified negotiations taking place all Fall. Pinal County stepped up and became actively involved in the dialog because the project will be located in unincorporated Pinal County with the prospect of hundreds of millions of dollars in construction expenditures and hundreds of new jobs at stake. The Arizona State Land Department is trustee for the desired land and will have to put the land up for auction in order for the project to proceed. But the issues are complex and bringing the parties together for a successful resolution has been a challenge.

So as you can see there were some things of note in 2011 – some of which will, in my opinion, ultimately result good, positive changes for Pinal County. Speaking of good things, I hope you all have enjoyed the “Casa Grande in History” series that's appeared in the *Casa Grande Dispatch* during the latter half of 2011. Writers Susan Edmond and Brian Kramer have done an excellent job in taking us all back through western Pinal County's history. I'm particularly appreciative of this series as it helps remind me that we didn't get to where we are today by accident: men and women of vision and determination worked hard to set the stage for us. And that's our task today for our children's children's sake.

So despite the gloomy start to this column, I chose to be cautiously optimistic about the year to come. Not because I see the world and Pinal County through rose-colored glasses but because I see and work with people of passion (about what they're working to accomplish), dedication (to the cause of helping those who can't quite reach the goal line), commitment (to a goal of making this a better place), and determination (to focus on the mission without regard for credit). I can't help but think with these residents, that we will come out on the other side in style.

In closing, may you all enjoy the blessings of the season. May you and yours have cause to celebrate and rededicate yourselves to doing good deeds and prospering in the New Year – may 2012 prove to be a “better” year.

***David Snider***

Pinal County Supervisor District 3