

## PINAL COUNTY LIFESTYLES

SEPTEMBER 2011

Hello September – come on cool nights and cooler days! Classroom adventures are in full swing all over the county even as school district governing board members, district administrators, and faculty gnaw on their fingernails as they work to provide a quality education for our children with fewer resources than previous years.

The theme for *Lifestyles* this month is education – getting it, keeping it, making it relevant, and staying with it. Last month I closed with some observations and information about the second annual Celebrating Women of Today & Tomorrow, which takes place on Saturday, September 17 at Cactus Middle School. The United Way of Pinal County, with the help of a number of community sponsors, will bring Mother-Daughter teams together with the goal of strengthening those bonds and providing them information that will be crucial as both the girls and mothers transition through middle and high school years and beyond.

The Celebrating Women event is very inspirational and I encourage you to learn more by calling United Way (520.836.0736 or 1.800.390.0736) or go to <http://www.unitedwayofpc.org>.

As many of you may know, I'm both a recovering public librarian and a governing board member (Casa Grande Elementary School District). Furthermore, both my parents were active teachers – my father at the college/university level and my mother at the high school level. So I come by my passion honestly and as a result of a lifelong avocation. In my experience, people generally think of education in terms of “learning” or memorizing discreet facts: i.e. the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, etc.

However, although there are times and circumstances where those specific factoids are useful (and maybe critical as in during an appearance on Jeopardy), for the most part education is more about learning how to learn and gaining familiarity with subject area frameworks and systems. You know, instead of feeding a hungry person a fish dinner, teach him/her how to fish. And just because someone's completed a specific grade or degree program shouldn't mean that their education and/or learning process is finished. I, for one, intend to keep on learning things until I'm in a retirement home ... and even then, who knows?

In last month's edition of *Lifestyles* I briefly talked about the Pinal County strategy of actively partnering with local economic development entities and our local cities and towns in pursuit of new industrial and manufacturing jobs for our county. One of the specific projects I had in mind is called the Red Rock project – a.k.a. the Union Pacific Railroad's proposal to build a classification yard near Red Rock. The classification yard (the second biggest, most important kind of rail yard any rail system operates) will supplant UPRR's Tucson yard and bring several hundred existing and new jobs to Pinal County after the \$200M construction project takes place on 950 acres.

The Board of Supervisors approved a Comprehensive Plan amendment for the project in 2006 and it's been hanging fire since then. This Board of Supervisors and virtually every local Pinal government (and economic development entity) is supportive of the Red Rock project: ancillary

and transportation-related businesses and industries invariably follow these major rail yards. The proposed site is on state land and UPRR has been discussing the matter with the Arizona State Land Department for some time – in fact, that discussion has been underway since 2007.

When the Red Rock project came before the Board, the proposal involved presentations by both ASLD and UPRR since not only did the UPRR site involve state land, but ASLD had a total of two significant parcels of state land that required major amendments of the Comprehensive Plan. Those sites – one involving 10,462 acres and including the proposed UPRR site and one involving 4,260 acres on the west side of I-10 just south of Picacho Peak – were placed into various categories of urban, industrial, and rural community designations.

The staff report at the time said: “The major impetus behind this amendment request is UPRR’s intent to develop a major switching yard ... As part of its planning process with UP, the ASLD added additional property surrounding the proposed switching yard into their planning area and this amendment request ... and provide for future economic development and jobs.” It was self-evident to most at the time that ASLD saw the Red Rock project as a “game changer” for the entire area with visions of transportation-related manufacturing, distribution, and employment centers spreading from the UPRR site in concentric circles.

Unfortunately the discussions between UPRR and ASLD have languished in the intervening years. The State of Arizona has apparently cooled to the concept that UPRR first advanced to the point where the very real possibility of UPRR relocating the yard to New Mexico has surfaced. The Red Rock yard will be a dynamic catalyst for economic development for Pinal County and Arizona in my opinion. I and the larger Pinal community will be actively calling on the Arizona State Land Department and Governor Brewer to step up to the plate and move forward in the coming days, weeks, and months.

***David Snider***

Pinal County Supervisor District 3