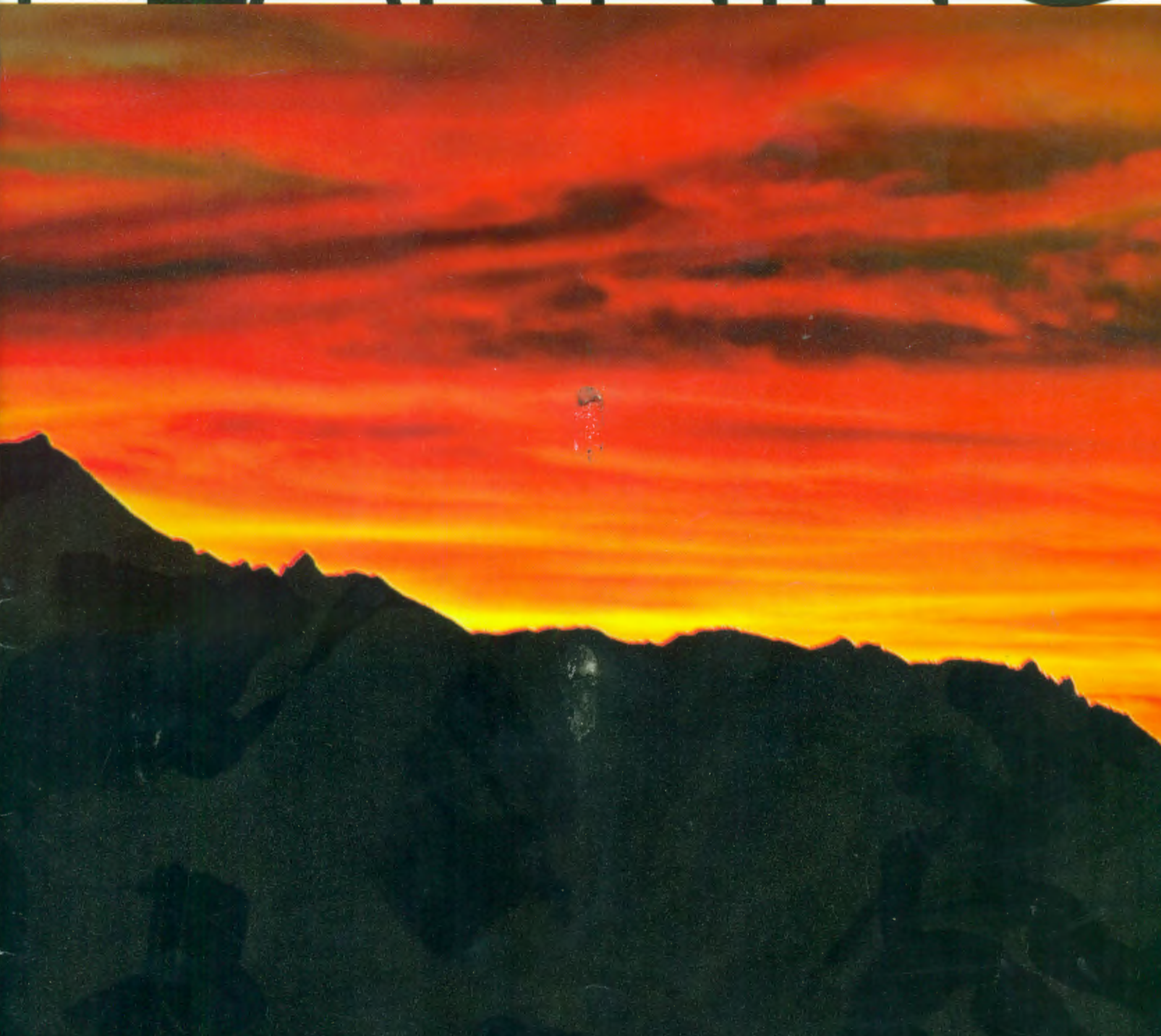


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PLANNING



SPECIAL ISSUE ON PHOENIX

THE LAND OF REINVENTION
ARIZONA'S COOL (PLANNED) PLACES
AN EYE ON EVERY DROP
MAKING SPACE FOR THE DESERT
BLURRING BORDERS



The Land of

REINVENTION

The sunsets will steal your heart;
the **PLANNING EFFORTS** will surprise you.

By ERIC JAY TOLL

VIRTUALLY EVERY EVENING, THE SUN PAINTS THE PHOENIX SKY IN FIRE.

HUES RISE FROM THE HORIZON IN WHITES AND YELLOWS, PINKS, ORANGES, AND REDS, DARKENING INTO PURPLES AND INDIGO. SEE ONE OF THESE SUNSETS AND YOU'RE AMAZED; SEE TWO, YOU'RE HOOKED.



THE FIERY SPECTACLE at day's end is one reason that this expanse of land, with more than 4.5 million people living between a quartet of mountain ranges, is known as the Valley of the Sun. The other reason is that this is the Arizona Sonoran Desert, a rugged land baked in summer heat and blessed with warm winters. ¶ Phoenix is a place where people come to start anew. It was named after the bird that rises from its ashes because the city rose from the ruins of an earlier civilization. While most Europeans still lived in mud hovels, the native peoples of the Southwest were building adobe villages—pueblos—with sophisticated irrigation canal systems, the routes of which Arizona's modern system has been built on. ¶ Where there's sunshine, there's optimism. A few years back, I interviewed Clate Mask, CEO of Infusionsoft, one of the Valley's homegrown startups. He made a comment that is the heart of why Arizona continues to overcome its challenges, bypass its political foibles, and open doors to success.

He said, "We took a place that's hot as heck, has no water, and turned it into the sixth largest city in America. If that's not DNA for success, I don't know what is."

People come to Arizona from all over the world, but there is a heavy feed from the upper Midwest and the Northeast, where cold winters persuade families and empty nesters to warm up in the Southwest. The mix of new residents is played out in Phoenix's four professional sports, where the visiting team's stands are filled with Arizona newcomers wearing their former hometown colors.

Geography of the Valley of the Sun

Things are bigger in the Southwest. As a writer, I've talked with people from around the globe during their visits to Arizona. The same comments permeate the conversations: The sky seems bigger and a deeper blue, the sunrise more expansive, and the commutes longer.

As planners, we speak in urban densities. In Arizona, size and distance are different measures than in other regions. We like our space in the West, our privacy, and doing what works for us. Planning in Arizona works in ways that don't always fit other patterns.

The Phoenix metropolitan area is bigger than Maryland, taking up more than 14,000 square miles. The distance from the most northerly city, Wickenburg, to the most southerly, the unincorporated community of Saddlebrooke, is 173 miles, roughly 30 miles farther than the distance from Independence Hall, Philadelphia, to the White House.

The Valley of the Sun is bordered by the Mogollon Rim (it's pronounced MO-ghee-yun) on the north, the White Tank Mountains on the west, the Estrella and South mountains in the south, and the McDowell, Superstition, and White mountains to the east.

Saying "Phoenix" means embracing the 22 cities in Maricopa County in a single word. While Phoenix dominates the market with its more than 1.5 million people, Mesa is hardly a suburb; its population (465,000) exceeds the population of Minneapolis, according to current U.S. Census estimates. The Phoenix metropolitan area scoots south to include Pinal County, but these satellite communities are not part of the mix when referring to "Phoenix."

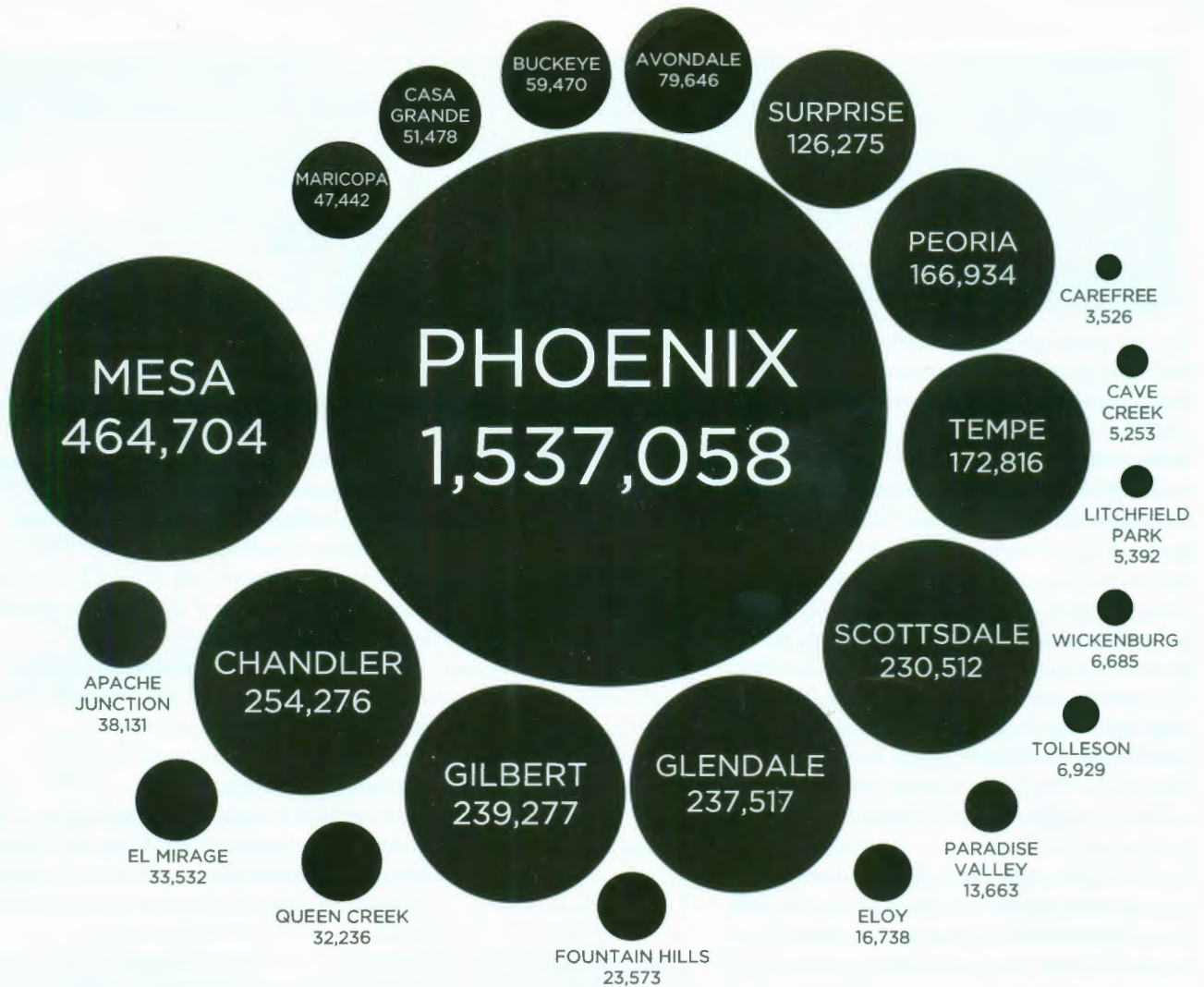
The geography is divided into Phoenix, the East and West valleys, and Pinal County.

The East Valley includes Tempe, Mesa, Chandler, Gilbert, Queen Creek, and Apache Junction. It is home to the Pima-Maricopa and the Gila River Indian communities. The tribes are descended from the Hohokam and Sinagua Indians—the ancestral Pueblos upon whose ruins the city of Phoenix rose. Scottsdale is sometimes considered East Valley and sometimes its own entity, as is Phoenix.

The West Valley includes Surprise, Peoria, Glendale, Litchfield Park, Tolleson, Goodyear, Avondale, and Buckeye.

Cave Creek, Carefree, and the Anthem community of Phoenix are considered the North Valley, but most people refer to those communities by name. There is no "south" valley.

Planning and "development services"—the preferred term in Arizona—comes from the passion and efforts of roughly 500 city



2014: City population estimates for the Phoenix Metropolitan Area (Maricopa and Pinal counties)

SOURCE: 2014 CENSUS BUREAU CITY POPULATION ESTIMATES

and county planners in the region. The city of Phoenix has over 100 employees, and is the area's largest planning department.

The recession devastated the ranks of planners in public and private sectors. Many of the jobs have yet to return. The Arizona chapter of APA saw its membership drop by more than 400 planners in 2008 and 2009.

Unseen below the sprawl is a land management system built on all sides agreeing, not legislation.

"People often just look at the city's vastness," says Leslie Dornfeld, FAICP, principal of consulting firm PLAN-ET. "Recognizing the importance of sustainability and environment has come from consensus between private-sector and public-sector planners. Cities have since adopted the agreements as policy, rather than regulation."

Since coming to the metro area from New York, Dornfeld has worked for Phoenix, Maricopa County, and the regional government, the Maricopa Association of Governments.

The Phoenix rising story

Phoenix is built on the banks of what was a wild and flowing river, Rio Salado or Salt River—both names are used—to serve an evolving 19th century agricultural market and nearby military fort. Early

settlers irrigated ranches using the canals built by the Hohokam between 600 BCE and 1450 AD.

The tradition of coming to Phoenix to start anew began with its founding by Jack Swilling, an itinerant, former Confederate soldier who was starting over.

Historically, young Phoenix grew as most western boom towns did: Brothels and bars outnumbered churches, a telegraph office opened, local newspapers and stores served the needs of ranchers and other settlers. Incorporated in 1881 with a population of about 2,500, Phoenix soon saw its first boom when the Southern Pacific Railroad arrived in 1887.

Two years later, a bright future was assured when the territorial capital was moved from Prescott to Phoenix.

The next growth surge in the Valley came from tourism when it was promoted that the warm, dry climate was a "cure" for those with tuberculosis, asthma, and other lung conditions. Real economic growth started in the 1950s, when household air conditioning became feasible.

In 1960, developer Del Webb opened a planned community for retirement age adults called Sun City. Built in circle patterns with parks, walkways, and shopping centers, Sun City was a big success following heavy promotion in the cold-weather states.

Webb's success led to the construction of numerous other planned communities, which started drawing new residents to Arizona. (Read more about planned communities, including Sun City, in "Cool (Planned) Places" on page 28 in this issue.) Essentially, the Phoenix economy was built on new home construction for people moving into the market.

As a child growing up in the Chicago area, I remember seeing ads in the *Chicago Tribune* offering free flights to Arizona communities to pick out retirement homes or start a new life in the Southwest.

Valley infrastructure

On the 20-mile commute I make each morning into the heart of downtown Phoenix, I avoid the freeway gridlock and take advantage of the wide arterial street grid. Early in the life of the Valley, the county surveyors started taking 100-foot rights-of-way along section lines. These "mile roads" form the basis of the grid that is obvious when seen from the air.

Across the entire Valley, this grid plays out with major collectors as the "half-mile roads." The grid moved traffic so efficiently in and around the satellite cities that Phoenix was the last of the major metropolitan areas to have a completed freeway—that is, expressway—system.

When I moved to Tucson in 1975, Interstate 10 coming from Jacksonville, Florida, emptied onto Lower Buckeye Road at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. Traffic moved along the street grid to the far west side of the Valley, where it headed westbound on I-10 to Los Angeles.

The Papago Freeway, which connected the east and west segments of I-10, was not completed until 1990. At that time, it was the most expensive freeway segment ever built. Delayed by voters opposed to a raised freeway that would split Phoenix, I-10 was ultimately sunk through the heart of the city.

To ensure it did not become a separation canyon, the nearly one-mile Deck Park Tunnel was built—the only urban tunnel on an interstate highway—between Third Street and Third Avenue. The 32-acre Hance Park, one of the city's larger urban parks, was built in 1992 as a "cover" over the tunnel, and is currently home to the central library, Phoenix Center for the Arts, the Japanese Friendship Garden, and other cultural institutions. A new master plan for the park promises a complete redesign and enhancement of recreational and cultural amenities.

A desert with the water it needs

Arizona set a cutting edge for planning when it passed the Groundwater Management Act in 1980. The law brought state control over the use of groundwater—something other states have copied, and some, like California, have never been able to adopt. The GMA required an urbanizing area to find assured 100-year water supplies. (Learn more about

HAPPY 25TH BIRTHDAY, DECK PARK TUNNEL!

Learn more about the tunnel, by-the-numbers style.

WATCH:
tinyurl.com/a8dymq5

VIDEO

3D FLY-THROUGH

Get a birds-eye-view simulation of the Loop 202 Freeway—also known as the South Mountain Freeway—the last critical piece to complete the Loop 202 and Loop 101 freeway system. Construction is set to begin this year, with the freeway opening to traffic in 2019 or 2020.

WATCH:
tinyurl.com/gqhjnjd

VIDEO

Arizona's water management innovations in "An Eye on Every Drop," on page 34.)

The act connected water budgets and land development intensity through the guaranteed water supply. It put the state's fast-growing urban areas into a mode where water conservation became a way of life. Cities now balance surface and groundwater use. More important, low-flow fixtures are a normal part of life. It also opened up the use of recycled water, and a number of communities have sold their treated wastewater for recreation and landscaping use.

The amount of water used in Arizona today is about the same as the amount used in the 1990s, when the state's population was notably lower. The GMA has been a resounding success. Water planners are now looking ahead to how Arizona takes water conservation to the next level in advance of crisis from climate change.

"We passed a groundwater management act while California couldn't," said Dornfeld. "The result is that Arizona does not have the water crisis California is facing, even though we're both facing essentially the same drought."

A number of Arizona cities participate in programs where surplus water from the Colorado River—water rights where the state is junior to neighboring states—is pumped into underground aquifers to save for a not-so-rainy day.

Funding the infrastructure we want

Phoenix area voters are unafraid of increasing taxes when the benefits are known.

The Valley is one of the few places in the U.S. that taxes itself to build its transportation network. Voter-enacted propositions starting in the 1990s funded three looping freeway systems (the 101, 202, and 303) that will see its last segment under construction this spring. A public-private partnership will design, build, and maintain the freeway under one contract.

In 2000, voters approved a 20-year tax to fund the first 20 miles of the Valley Metro Rail light-rail system. Opened in 2008, light rail has already hit its year 2020 ridership goal. Even as the light rail was completing its first phase, planning started for the first extension to central Mesa that opened in August 2015. A new line deeper into North Phoenix is slated to open in March, just before the National Planning Conference starts.

The same week the Mesa extension opened, Phoenix voters extended the 2000 transit sales tax to 2050 and increased the tax to pay for three more light-rail extensions within Phoenix and a 50 percent increase in bus service and new bus routes.

Planning for tomorrow started late

Arizona came late to organized planning. It enacted an Urban and Environmental Management Act in

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—JOHN WESLEY, AICP, PLANNING DIRECTOR FOR THE CITY OF MESA

**AWARD-WINNING
COMPREHENSIVE
MASTER
PLAN FOR
HANCE PARK**

Big changes are in store for Hance Park in downtown Phoenix.

EXPLORE:
tinyurl.com/jgyrop1
and hanceparkconservancy.org

PLAN

1974, but never made the link to mandate consistency between general or comprehensive plans and land development actions.

The planning system was modernized in 1998, when state law was amended to require cities and counties to adopt multielement general plans and bring zoning into conformance with land planning. Smart growth planning was under way within a few years.

One notable aspect of Arizona general plans is that they require voter approval, putting planners into a forum for the ultimate test of values. Some votes pass the plans on the first go; other elections have sent planners back to their keyboards. Only about nine of the 22 metro cities have seen general plans passed by voters. Scottsdale invested nearly three years into developing a plan voters rejected. Its revised plan will go to voters this year.



HANCE PARK'S NEW MASTER PLAN envisions a 32-acre downtown civic space unique to Phoenix, with native plants framing its corridors and providing shade from the hot sun. Sustainability is key: All plant material will be irrigated by recharge basins that are incorporated into the design. By capturing irrigation runoff and using cutting-edge technologies, water consumption will be minimized.

"I think the greatest accomplishment in planning has been the adoption of consistent general plans and zoning regulations," says John Wesley, AICP, planning director for the city of Mesa, one of the cities where voters passed the general plan on its first presentation. "Like others, our city council understands the importance of consistent policies and holds the line to not approve projects that don't fit. They get the general plan."

A life-quality magnet

Sunday mornings, I take a leisurely 40-mile bike ride that includes a 30-mile paved trail along the Arizona Canal in Phoenix, along the Crosscut to Tempe Town Lake, and up the Scottsdale Greenbelt to my home. Sharing the route are runners, walkers, and the occasional equestrian.

I'll pass two Frisbee golf courses; multiple baseball, softball, soccer fields, and playgrounds; and four golf courses. Arizona and Phoenix are geared for year-round outdoor living. It's what anchors life in the Valley.

The Phoenix area is home to the two largest city parks in the world. Scottsdale's McDowell-Sonoran Preserve, with more than 30,000 acres, is the largest. Phoenix's South Mountain Preserve is second with over 16,000 acres. The stories of the two preserves are classic examples of how Arizonans come together to accomplish what is needed. (See "Making Space for the Desert" on page 42.)

The two parks are another result of local voters doing what needs to be done. When residential development began encroaching on the slopes of the North Mountain in Phoenix, voters organized a self-taxing system to acquire the preserve lands.

Tomorrow

At this point, I have little interest in returning to the prairie of my childhood home. In the summer, when my friends in Chicago email to ask, "How can you stand the heat?" I will always reply, "You don't shovel sunshine."

Phoenix induces a feeling that personal reinvention is possible. It's the magic of desert, and desert sunsets: Tomorrow will be a better day. ■

Eric Jay Toll is a recovered planner. Following the Great Recession, he reinvented his life as a journalist and covers the economy, infrastructure, banking, and utilities for the *Phoenix Business Journal* (bit.ly/BizJrnIEJT).