

Scottsdale's longtime players losing influence



Laurie Roberts

In Scottsdale, you've never really needed a program to tell the players, the people who have long had entrée into city offices and the ear of the People Who Run Things.

These days, however, the influence of some of Scottsdale's long-established players is fading. Here are a few who may find City Hall not so quick to return their calls in 2009.

RICK KIDDER AND THE SCOTTSDALE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Dave Cruz/The Republic

Long a force to be reckoned with at City Hall, the chamber stumbled last year with its Campaign That Wasn't A Campaign. After pouring money into ads promoting the chamber-endorsed candidates — Mary Manross, Ron McCullagh, Suzanne Klapp and Betty Drake — the chamber's CEO, Kidder, insisted that it wasn't a political campaign at all and, thus, the chamber wouldn't be disclosing who actually put up the money to promote the foursome. (Two of whom went down in flames.) Meanwhile, Kidder proceeded to increase his pain by sending Jim Lane a nastygram, demanding that he provide "a full public apology" — "in writing ... within the next 24 hours" — for some newspaper ads that took aim at the chamber. Ads, by the way, that Lane had nothing to do with. Lane's response: "Instead of attempting to demean my campaign, I strongly suggest you resign immediately from your position with the Chamber and allow new leadership dedicated to unifying our great city to assume control." Three weeks later, Lane was elected mayor. Ouch.

CARLA AND THE PRESERVE TRADITIONALISTS



Dave Seibert/The Republic

For years, the city mantra has been that the boundary is the boundary. Never would Scottsdale give up an inch within the McDowell Sonoran Preserve to those who sought to turn it into yet another marvel of master planning. Then Carla, who has done more to make the preserve a reality than any other person in Scottsdale, was bounced from McDowell Sonoran Conservancy and Mayor Mary Manross, the preserve's earliest and staunchest advocate on the City Council, was defeated in November. Meanwhile, there is talk of building a 2,000-seat amphitheater within the preserve (excellent idea, wrong place) and there are whispers of bowing to the financial realities and giving up on some of the tantalizingly developable land still to be acquired. A few years ago, such talk would have brought pitchforks and torches to City Hall. And now? Now, incoming Mayor Jim Lane is suggesting that we consider running an aerial tram up to a restaurant to be built high in the mountains. "I think it could be a phenomenal attraction," Lane told me this week. "Just think about it. Think about it."

NEIGHBORHOODS



Charlie Leight/The Republic

Activists Pat Lamer, Sandy Cowen, Nicolett Lemmon, Tom Anderson and Rick Robertson have joined forces to oppose a substation in their neighborhood.

Pity the people in the path of what developers will invariably call progress. It's always been an uphill battle to fight them as they come into an area and want to change the rules because bigger is always better, don't you know? They're always better funded and they always hire John Berry, who has an astonishing track record of rezoning basically anything he wants. Now, they've got another ace in their pocket — the downturn in the economy. The

new development mantra: Take it or leave it and if you leave it, don't expect anyone else to come calling in this economy. And if our leaders are desperate enough to drop their standards, the citizens' fallback — threats of referendum — is gone. In years past, those seeking to put a council decision to a public vote had 30 days to get 1,961 voters' signatures on a petition. Given the November turnout at the polls, the number is now 11,625

BOB VAIRO AND COPP



Dave Seibert/The Republic

Once, Bob Vairo and his Coalition of Pinnacle Peak were essentially City Hall North. Anyone with political aspirations dared not cross the well-heeled citizens coalition that formed during the go-go growth days of the 1990s. In its heyday, Vairo and company regularly beat back developers. A nod from the group was the surest way to get elected. This year, COPP endorsed four candidates and not one of them won. Their mayoral candidate, Mary Manross, didn't even carry north Scottsdale. Then, in December, COPP opposed a plan to put five-story hotels at Bell Road and Loop 101. And lost. Maybe it's because the near-weekly rezoning wars that forged COPP into a

fighting force are a thing of the past. Maybe it's because the November election diluted the strength of its members. But COPP has gone the way of the guard it once dislodged from the halls of influence.