



JUNE 6-19, 2020 • VOLUME 30, NUMBER 11

# Streaks over Tempe light a path to hope

It was only days after the sad events of Sept. 11, 2001 that Wrangler News departed from its usual good news-focused front page to offer silent recognition of the tragedy of that attack on U.S. soil. With this photo by Billy Hardiman of police helicopters hoverisng over Tempe and Phoenix, we use our cover once again to express hope that the forces that divide our country can somehow find a way to respect each other and build new resolve to live together in peace.

#### The Editors

Exclusive interview with Tempe Police Chief Sylvia Moir starting on Page 4.



## **Tempe councilmembers OK contested Valvoline site** Neighbors clash on private-property rights vs 'Character Area' preferences

By Joyce Coronel

vacant lot in South Tempe will likely become home to a Valvoline lube shop, in spite of opposition by many of those who live near the site. Last November, residents of the upscale neighborhoods near the southeast corner of McClintock Drive and Warner Road rallied to persuade the Tempe City Council to vote unanimously against an appeal by the property owner. About 1,000 people had signed a petition expressing their displeasure at the

then-proposed development.

At the time, Diversified Partners was asking the council to overturn a decision by the city's Development Review Commission to deny a use permit.

Those familiar with the situation opined the city council's repudiation would not be the last word on the matter. And it wasn't.

Twenty-four hours prior to the council's May 27 meeting, area residents received an email from the city of Tempe advising them the property owner had filed a claim against the city for \$2.1 million plus legal fees. A negotiated settlement granting a use permit for the Valvoline project was to be voted on.

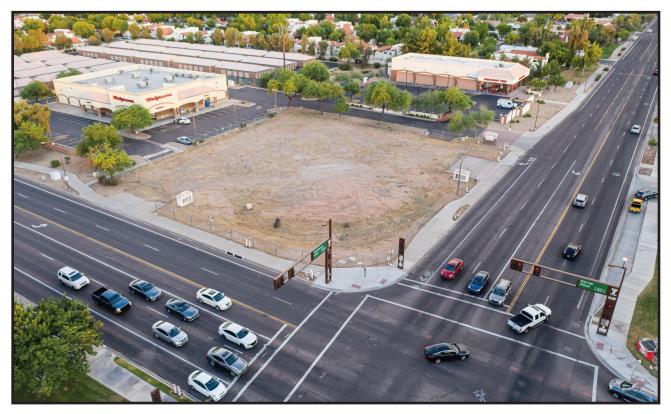
Kris Baxter, a public information officer for Tempe, acknowledged the city had received feedback from residents prior to the city council meeting.

They came in on both sides of the issue," Baxter said. Not everyone in the area, she said, was opposed to the project.

Ultimately, everyone on the council, except South

- VALVOLINE, Page 12

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Tempe City Council voted to pave the way for a lube shot on the empty lot that sits at the southeast corner of McClintock Drive and Warner Road. - Photo by Billy Hardiman for Wrangler News



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## Can it happen here? An exclusive interview with Tempe's top cop Killing 'reprehensible' but no foolproof answers to police brutality

#### **By Lee Shappell**

nation reeling from an unprecedented pandemic has been rocked once again. Outrage over the death of a black man at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer using inappropriate force while colleagues stood by and did nothing has been manifested in protests from coast to coast, including here in the Valley.

The pain is real. Racism lives. Police brutality lives. Opportunism that turns peaceful grieving into violent confrontations also exists. Our nation hurts. People are angry, about this, about other societal slights, and they're venting years of perceived systemic wrongs.

It has not turned violent in Tempe, yet. That might be due to the community being, perhaps, more progressive and diverse than others.

It might also be due to a unique police chief who, while not overseeing a perfect department, hasn't lost sight of the sanctity of human life.

*Sylvia Moir, who has presided over Tempe PD for three years, is unlike many other police chiefs.* 

In the wake of the activities of the past two weeks, Moir, whose professional background is mostly in California, agreed to a wide-ranging interview with Wrangler News.

*Some of her answers have been edited for brevity and clarity.* 

**Question:** What protocols do you have in place that might avert a situation like that in Minneapolis and the response to it in other cities across the country?

**Answer:** I can't even begin without commenting that the circumstances that led to the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis are jarring and reprehensible, not as just words but as genuine emotions about what I saw.

And seeing all those uniform police officers taking inappropriate action, seemingly standing around and not taking the initiative to safeguard a human being, is troubling, jarring and renews my commitment to do the tough work that is necessary to really address systems.

So part of that is what are we are doing in Tempe. As a police chief, I am responsible for strengthening the system and influencing the policing culture in my organization.

While we don't and can't ignore or dismiss individual officer behavior for accountability and the way they interact with folks, I suggest that today's police executives cannot hyper-focus on officer behavior. We don't ignore it, but we can't be hyper-focused on it because it may just blind us to our responsibility to strengthening the systems that impact policing outcomes.

As a chief, I create a strategy and policy to influence an organizational culture, our climate, because I'm the one who recruits and hires and trains and equips and creates accountability measures for our officers. They simply operate within that system. So remaining dual-focused is essential. We do not hire officers who are substandard and we have very strong screening tools to get the right people in. Is it foolproof? No, but we strengthen systems through accountability in hiring and training to reduce the probability that something like this will occur.

What most people saw in Minneapolis was an apparent absence of humanity. And it is so jarring to see apparent apathy.

**Q:** What about the fellow officers who just stood and watched and took no action to prevent this outcome?

**A:** That is unacceptable in Tempe. We teach initiatives. We praise it. We hold it up as an example when officers take initiative. Our policy guides us to render aid after force is used as immediately as possible. It is embedded as part of our training.

What we saw in Minneapolis didn't reflect those highest ideals of the sanctity of human life, which argues that we render aid even after force is used. That is part of our training in Tempe and essential to who we are.

**Q:** Is a knee on the neck an accepted practice in Tempe?

**A:** I have not seen where it is an accepted practice anywhere. In fact, we train to safeguard people from these circumstances where you're fighting for your life. We do not teach a knee to the neck, a strike to the neck, the throat or the groin, protected places where more harm can come than good.

There's two things: It's not acceptable, and individually it's equally unacceptable for officers to stand by and to dismiss or accept poor tactics and poor

— POLICE, Page 6

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### Police From Page 4

behavior.

What would happen here would be immediate accountability measures and we would be very vocal about what our plan is for the individual, and then we in Tempe will focus on the system to strengthen that, to reduce the probability that something somewhere occurs again.

**Q:** Is Tempe's reputation as a progressive, inclusive community a factor in being spared the rioting of your neighbors to the north in Scottsdale and to the west in Phoenix?

A: Our approach really afforded us an advantage. In Tempe, we planned and deployed folks very early. We had more assets than most people would think are reasonable but what we found was we did so much advance planning and deployment that when the protestors broke off of some of the more violent protests in Phoenix and they were looking for opportunities to loot, we had such as presence. They'd sent scout teams and we recognized that they were looking for opportunities, and we just didn't provide those. Largely, our reporting and our finding was that their efforts didn't take hold here because of our approach. We will continue that posture for several days just to safeguard our people, and the community and the businesses.

I do think perhaps it says something about our manner of policing. We feel very strongly about extending olive branches to people, giving them opportunities to rethink their outcome. But when it comes to criminal behavior, we are relentless but professional. I attribute it more to our policing culture than I do to an external culture of being progressive.

**Q:** You are highly respected in the profession, serving and holding office on several national policing boards and committees. How helpful is it to be exposed to other departments as you shape culture, transparency, community confidence, and, perhaps most important in this climate, giving voice?

**A:** Two things there: My presence on national boards and committees is my effort to not only contribute but to learn from those that also serve. It gives me a seat at the table that perhaps others don't enjoy to both contribute and to be a consumer of smart practices. I was taught long ago while policing in California that if you're not at the table, then you're on the menu, which is interesting and funny but it also guides how we include people in the conversation.

The other piece of that is our folks are seeing how Tempe measures up and identifying gaps. They're coming back and saying, 'Look, we do this really well with our training, our use of force, our transparency, how we engage.' That has really strengthened us.

Ćulture takes generations to alter in an

organization. I argue that climate is a more-rapidly evolving agile thing because climate is how we talk to each other, how we engage, how we communicate things that are rapidly altered. Culture takes a long time to influence but climate is more agile.

**Q:** When you got to Tempe, what did you think of the department? Were there things you wanted to change right away as you craft the department under your direction?

A: First thing, I didn't come in thinking I knew everything, or I had the best answers, or the most experience. I listened to people and I asked people across the organization, either one-to-one or small groups, and then more broadly in what I call 'peace chats.' I said, OK, what do we do really well from where you sit? What do we need to strengthen or improve? What do we need to stop doing altogether? And if you were chief for a day, what's one thing that you'd do right now? So I got the perspective of the men and women across the organization, whether they were serving in a patrol car, on a motorcycle, in a cubicle or at a dispatch console. I listened to them.

I saw an organization that hired fantastic people and had systems in place to hire and screen out those that didn't possess the qualities or values. I don't think that Tempe was ripe for wide-sweeping change. We did need to do a few things, and many of those things were about the culture in the organization: one that continues to reject an absence of officer compassion; that increased the probability that bad officers were identified and removed from service; that gave voice to employees internally and to the community externally; that appealed to a broader applicant pool; our transparency; perhaps considering influencing our training differently so that the sanctity of human life was first and foremost of those that we serve and those that are serving.

The remarkable thing that I've never seen in any organization that I served is the willingness and openness to try something new. Let's take something in say, Boston, and try to morph it and mold it to be something specifically Tempe. If it fails, that's OK. Failure was not accepted very easily when I arrived, but failure is really a launching point for something more enriched in terms of service and this broader policing endeavor in a way that is clearly unique. I can't put my finger on exactly how we got there, but we are definitely there.

**Q:** Can you give us an example of something that came out of those one-one-one meetings?

A: Sure. We have made mindfulness part of our culture. We are aware in the moment what is coming up so that we do not react, but we respond. We permit events to unfold before us. We understand the human condition and then we train to what might influence that human condition. People say, 'Oh, you're from

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California and that's just totally hippie-dippy, tie-dye stuff.' I argue that, yes, it was born out of some Eastern thought, but it does put us in touch with spirituality. It was also born out of rigorous academic and scientific study of what happens to the brain, what happens to the body. If it's good enough for those in the military and Special Forces, who are entrusted with complex and high-stakes environments, then it might just be right for those of us in the high-stakes environment of policing, and policing in this time where we are on display for everyone to judge. That is one of those things that came out of, 'Hey, let's try it.' Our folks are reporting back that they feel healthier, feel like better decision makers, and I think we're going to find in science that it really lends itself to us engaging with the community in a way that has been remarkable in how it is received.

**Q:** No system is perfect, and despite your best efforts, there have been a couple of high-profile issues with officers under your watch, specifically in the fatal shooting of 14-year-old Antonio Arce, who was running away from an officer, and the Tasering of Ivaughn Oakry, as he was holding an infant. Have new measures or training been put into place as a result?

**A:** Every isolated incident gives us opportunities to examine where the system or the individual failed. We are still in litigation, I believe, on both, but I can say what we have publicly talked about in the Arce case, that our officer acted outside of his training. He did not act in alignment with our values. What led to that action, I'm sure we may never totally know.

With Mr. Oakry, we saw officers engaging with him. We saw a very short interaction. In that case, the officer used a less-lethal device, a Taser, when he was holding a child. We knew through rigorous testing and science that there is no conduction from human to human. That was the very best they could do under bad circumstances. Officers took action to safeguard the other two children. Mr. Oakry made a choice, apparent on the video and by the assertion of those who were there, to pick up that child and use him as a shield. Our officers were put in an untenable situation. They had to make a very swift decision in that moment.

We don't ignore individual officer behavior and action but we also examine system and take advantage of those opportunities to strengthen the system. In both of those cases, and in thousands we don't see, I see over and over officers using the very best of what tools they have and inserting humanity.

We don't look for what's broken and research how to fix it with any greater weight than perhaps looking at what is done really well. We examine and deconstruct and reconstruct, to replicate it elsewhere. That perspective opens my research brain and my soul to considering an outcome that may be very different than what we believe it is going to be. Behavior signals underlying conditions. We have the capability to simultaneously examine these things from the crisis to what led to the individual's action, to deconstruct their entire portfolio and look at the systems that led to it. And then we strengthen the system.

We have experienced tragedies. We own them. We will not forget them, and we will not forget what damage might have been done to the trust we have built in the community.

**Q:** I have been to City Council meetings where inside and outside there were many people who believe that Tempe police use excessive force. How do you regain their trust?

A: I hear some of them say we don't have a use-of-force policy online. Well, we do. I don't try to change peoples' minds, I try to lay out the facts and let them discern and discover. And if they don't, I just continue speaking truth. I just request that they give everybody grace in this endeavor because it is not easy. Engaging with people is not without peril.

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## A daughter's memories of a dad who saw the best in others Fathers Day tribute to one wordsmith from another

#### **By Joyce Coronel**

W ith Fathers' Day right around the corner, my mind naturally turns to my own father, the man who taught me how to love, how to live and how to write.

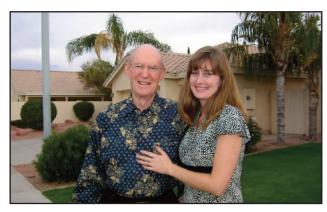
A soft-spoken man of integrity, Dad instilled strong values in his five children and raised us with a code of honor he learned at his East Coast boarding school. I can't remember him ever raising his voice at us and yet we were keenly aware of a definitive line in the sand we dared not cross. Our love for him was such that we wouldn't have wanted to disappoint him, and wanted nothing more than to make him proud.

He taught us what commitment meant and that we should do the right thing, no matter the cost.

Dad served in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War, spending his four years of service living in the damp and cold of King's Lynn, England, a scant 100 miles from London. Determined to raise his family somewhere with a more temperate climate after his service abroad, he and my mom and eldest sister settled in Phoenix in 1955.

Dad quickly turned his attention to earning a degree at Arizona State University, where he studied journalism, public relations and advertising.

As one might imagine, I grew up in a home surrounded by books, newspapers and magazines, just a short bike ride from the local library. Some of my earliest and best memories are of Dad reading stories to us, or better yet, telling multi-part tales he'd spun himself,



broken-up by cliff-hanger endings and his catch phrase: "To be continued—tomorrow night!" I still remember begging for a little more reading time

I still remember begging for a little more reading time before lights out. "Can I just finish this one chapter, pleeeease?" I'd wheedle. "How many more pages?" he would ask, holding out his hand to examine the tome. His quiet but firm answer was generally, "OK, but then get some sleep."

Dad was my first editor and he drilled Associated Press style into me when I was still in junior high. He was a real stickler for punctuation and grammar and, believe me, nothing slipped by the man. We may have been only writing an essay for our seventh-grade English class, but by golly, it was going to be stellar.

When my own stories began to flow, I would leave them on his chair to review after dinner, anxiously awaiting his approval. By this point in his career, Dad was vice president of advertising and public relations for a major corporation. I like to say that I went to journalism school before ever leaving home.

Understanding the sound bite before it was even known as such, he made liberal use of pithy statements intended to guide us kids through life's various twists and turns:

"Honesty is the best policy." "You can't run away from trouble." "There but for the grace of God go I." "This too shall pass." "Doll, it's the card you've been dealt."

He was an idealist and yet a pragmatist. He wouldn't countenance any sort of deception or unethical behavior and yet he wasn't haughty or given to judgment of others. He was a man of faith and mercy who spent the last 20 years of his life—his retirement—serving the poor and inspiring his children and grandchildren.

He didn't let us wallow in sorrow or self-pity but he acknowledged the reality of our feelings. He encouraged us and believed the best of us, even when we couldn't see past our struggles.

There have been times over the years since his passing that I've wished I could have one more conversation with him, just to ask his counsel. Yet deep in my heart, I know somehow exactly what he would say. He's still there, living inside me, showing the way.

Happy Fathers' Day, Dad.

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# Humility: Is this the story behind Tempe's enviable claim to livability?

Commentary by Don Kirkland



s reporters and editors, one of the lessons we learn early on is where to go for the information we need. While certain kinds of stories focus on everyday folks, the majority of what we write about involves talking with people at the top levels of management, whether it's an established local

company or a school or government organization.

And with the growing corps of media relations officers—PR people, in common vernacular—a lot of the comments we end up with are handed down from on high and distilled to make sure they're accurate and

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articulated in a way that helps ensure the boss hasn't stuck an embarrassing foot into her or his mouth.

So that's why we're fortunate to live in the community where we publish—the advantage of being able to interact on an everyday basis with ordinary Janes and Joes at a real in-the-trenches level.

In fact, that's exactly what happened one recent morning while I was navigating the neighborhood with Abby, my 4-legged 6 a.m. walking partner.

We stopped momentarily at the east end of Waggoner Park, where a lone city of Tempe worker was trimming broken branches from a tree that evidently had fallen victim to a mini-microburst that blew through the day before.

Although the tree appeared a bit sickly, the rest of the park looked like it could have been cared for by the landscapers at Buckingham Palace. It was so beautifully manicured, in fact, that I couldn't help but mention it to that early-morning, one-man work crew.

And that, as it turned out, provided an eye-opening look at how and why Tempe's infrastructure seems to be so well maintained.

The answer, I learned, is owed to the behind-thescenes oversight of someone named Ken Jones, who has a reputation for having maintained a quiet influence over this element of the city's vast holdings for two decades, more or less. Mr. Jones, we found out later from our always amiable Tempe media source Nikki Ripley, is not only chief financial officer but deputy city manager, as well a role that I'd never before seen combined into a single job and just may be one of the reasons that Tempe's parks, and likely other of its internal functions, operate so smoothly.

As the conversation with my new city-parks friend continued, I was struck with how a longtime employee at what some might consider a lower-echelon position had developed such a high level of respect, not only for his department but for those whose managerial acumen he felt had helped generate this kind of a working environment.

Whether my quick, barely post-dawn connection with this city crewmember offered a fully accurate picture of Tempe's strategic plan for management, or simply one man's view of the confines of his admittedly small workaday world, it upheld our nearly 30-year perception of quality leadership in the city we live in, work in and love.

One final note: When we asked Ms. Ripley if Ken Jones would like to comment on the thoughts of our new maintenance-worker friend, she said probably not. "I believe he would not want to be featured at all," she replied. "He really is a very low-key, humble guy."

Which perhaps is why Tempe understands that humility may be one of the ways a city can earn its employees', and presumably its residents', enviable loyalty.



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## Commentary ... by Jennifer Adams

# Tempe first to combine strategies to learn how water sources can affect our public health

Tempe has a long history of leaning forward into challenges. Our community is built on doing what some might think is impossible, like building a lake out of an empty riverbed. Innovation is part of our past, present and future.

For two years, we have been working with Arizona State University to detect opioids in wastewater to help us combat addiction.

When COVID-19

became a pandemic, we evolved that partnership. With ASU professor Rolf Halden and his team of scientists, we are tracking the presence of SARS CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in city wastewater.

More than 400 cities around the world get data about their wastewater from ASU.

However, Tempe is the first city that aims to combine wastewater data with other strategies to drive decisions about community health. We have created a website and dashboard to explain the project.

It is best viewed using Chrome at https://covid19.gov.

When you look at the dashboard, you will see the data presented as weekly averages of the coronavirus "signal" that researchers are picking up from sewage flowing through underground pipes. What equates to a strong or weak virus signal is still being determined. Samples are collected from five areas of Tempe and they cannot be traced back to any specific person, home or business.

While the science behind this project is certainly complicated, let me tell you what is easy to see and absorb: the incredible collaboration among city departments to make this happen.

We have all heard the widespread belief that government at all levels works in silos, right?

Well, I am happy to say that this



research is an example of the exact opposite – the leaders and employees within three city departments have done amazing work together.

Tempe Fire Medical Rescue Chief Greg Ruiz, Strategic Management and Diversity Director Rosa Inchausti, and Municipal Utilities Director Terry Piekarz deserve to be

commended for their openness to collaborate in new ways for the benefit of our community.

We know that not everyone has been tested for coronavirus, so the collection of this data could offer a more comprehensive, real time assessment of the presence of coronavirus in our community.

Questions about the wastewater data analytics program may be directed to Rosa Inchausti, 480-350-8999, or email rosa\_inchausti@tempe.gov.

As we work to reopen more city facilities to the public, this kind of promising data could help us make choices in the future.

Many facilities and services will reopen June 15, with others reopening later in the summer.

It will be valuable to consider this wastewater data, along with the CDC's criteria, and state and regional coronavirus guidance, for informing our reopening decisions.

Tempe will continue to work with businesses, scientists, residents and staff to find new ways to build an even better Tempe. Do you have ideas to make Tempe a better place? I would love to hear them. Connect with me by calling 480-350-8835, following me on my City Council Facebook account (JenniferAdamsTempe) or emailing me at jennifer\_ adams@tempe.gov.





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## Valvoline

From Page 3

Tempe resident and council member Jennifer Adams, voted in favor of the settlement and use permit.

"I wasn't in agreement with it because the neighborhood didn't want it. And what the neighborhood desires or wishes for—that matters to me," Adams said.

"Any time I can take the neighbors' side, I will. That's been one of my top priorities since I've been on council." South Tempe Realtor Nick Bastian lives near the site

and also weighed in on the project. He acknowledged many residents' desire for a type of

amenity on the site but pointed to private property rights as a concern.

"This is one of those ones where it's a little weird for me because I stand firmly in the middle," he said. "I think a lot of people would like something really cool or high end—maybe a wine or sushi place.

"I also really feel like the private-property-rights issue has to be looked at really carefully. When we start picking winners and losers just based on what the community thinks should go there, versus what an owner of a property is legally able to do, I think it becomes kind of a slippery slope."

Several years ago, the city of Tempe developed eight character areas, South Tempe among them. The character areas were designed to be one way the city conveys the vision and goal of each area.

City planners refer to the character areas when working with businesses and developers. That said, the character areas are guidelines—but not law.

The city's website, tempe.gov/, refers to the designated areas but cautions that although "we care

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Although many say Valvoline is not in keeping with Tempe's Character Areas, the city cautions that preferences do not carry the weight of law. — Photo by Billy Hardiman for Wrangler News

about what you want... we cannot violate the law or take away someone's private property rights."

Matt Smith and his family live within walking distance of the future home of Valvoline.

"Like a lot of South Tempe residents, we hoped for something that would build community, maybe a fun café or a restaurant, and Valvoline does none of that," Smith said.

In spite of the city council's vote in favor of the settlement and use permit, he remains optimistic.

"I don't think the city of Tempe has ever been held so accountable to the character areas plan. People showed up in force and they represented their community, and every step along the way, it's as if our voice got louder and louder.

"I'm very proud of that."

Ron Tapscott, who also lives near the empty lot, said he wasn't surprised by the council's vote.

COUNCIL

"The city of Tempe has a very long history of folding under pressure when lawsuits are threatened," Tapscott said.

In his opinion, there are two types of developers: those who are "very sensitive to neighborhood concerns and wishes and are involved in working with neighborhoods to alter their projects to be more in align with the sentiment of the community," and those that aren't.

"They didn't really want input from the neighborhood. They came in with a particular idea of what they wanted developed on that corner and then pursued it through the process," Tapscott said.

Now that the owners have secured a use permit for a Valvoline, they must seek a building permit.

What, if anything, can residents do? Not much, it turns out.

"What I was hoping for was to keep working with the property owners to come up with a compromise between the neighborhood and developer," Adams said.

"In Arizona, the property owners have a lot of rights. We were swimming against the stream on this one."

The email from the city of Tempe prior to the council meeting noted that both members of the Development Review Commission as well as city councilmembers "heard your concerns about the development and tried to fulfill the wishes of the area community by denying a use permit for the project." T

he lawsuit filed by the property owners changed all that.

Still, "property enhancements that had been recommended by staff that Valvoline had originally declined to incorporate into the project, such as setback service bays and improved paving near walkways, were agreed to," the email goes on to say.

The city will not pay out any money as a result of the settlement.

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Matt Smith and his kids gear up for a family bike ride in South Tempe.

# Former reality star discusses his biggest role: fatherhood

By Tony Gutiérrez

Rearly 20 years ago, Tempe resident Matt Smith was on the cover of "TV Guide," along with fellow castmates from the popular MTV reality television show, "The Real World: New Orleans." But when the father of six (including one on the way) tells his children about it, they're completely "unimpressed."

Which is probably the way Smith prefers it. Having a role on a show that pioneered the reality genre isn't nearly as impressive as his most important role: father.

"They're aware of my history," Smith says, "but they're more impressed I'm president of the HOA."

Occasionally, Smith's children may see him be recognized by an old fan who starts off trying to place his face. "It's so old-timey, it grosses them out."

His mother in north Georgia showed his oldest two daughters, aged 12 and 10, a few episodes on VHS tapes, but without a VCR in the home, watching old episodes isn't happening.

"Because of YouTube and social media, seeing yourself on a screen isn't impressive," he said. "They're not old enough to understand what 10 million viewers at 10 p.m. means."

Like most Americans, Smith has had to adapt that role in the last several months as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Living in quarantine presented its own set of challenges. Photo courtesy Smith family

Recalling the Italian Academy Award-winning film "Life is Beautiful," written by, directed by and starring Roberto Benigni, Smith notes how the main character creates a game so his child doesn't live in fear while interred in a concentration camp.

"That film stuck in my mind in the first few weeks," Smith said. "I wanted to make sure my children never felt the intense fear and anxiety that most of us adults felt."

As a result, the Smith family played a lot of games and did arts and crafts at home. The children have also taken an active role in cooking and have even taken an interest in the family garden. Since the family already home-schools, adjusting to a virtual education is one thing they didn't have to worry about.

"One of the things about COVID is we stepped up our gardening game," Smith said. "They play an active role in the gardening, planting, watering. Everyone's going out and checking that cucumber one more time."

Following Governor Doug Ducey's recommendations that Arizonans remain active during quarantine, he took his family on regular family bike rides. During this time, Smith said he noticed something unusual.

"South Tempe came alive," Smith said, noting that although stores were closed, residents would go on walks and bike rides.



SRP's director of distribution operations, Chris Reynoso, said the company is on the front lines when power goes out during monsoon season.

- Photo by Billy Hardiman for Wrangler News

## Triple digits, pandemic, monsoons pose power grid challenges

#### **By Lee Shappell**

t a time when the degree of difficulty in providing electricity to Tempe, West Chandler and the rest of the Valley is about to increase, Salt River Project gets a chance to power up its resources, along with its ability to energize a workforce that's spent years building its record of summer-season tenacity.

As triple-digit temperatures seem to arrive earlier and stay later each year, broiling heat, monsoons and nowthe effects of a global pandemic pose power-grid challenges for SRP.

Against that background, a reliable power grid is more important than ever across a sprawling metropolis that grows around the edges by a few miles each year.

Yet the lights stay on, for the most part. And when they don't, SRP is trained to deal with such outages quickly from two operations centers, one for generation and transmission, the other for distribution.

Chris Reynoso, 48, is SRP's director of distribution operations. His group of 104 employees get their toughest workouts during monsoon season. They're on the front line when power goes out, arranging first-responding field crews. Distribution-system operators, operation coordinators, specialists, troubleshooters and support group work 24/7.

"Even though the monsoon is kind of a summer issue, we prepare throughout the year," Reynoso said. "We do a lot of drills, a lot of training. We look at analytics based on storm time frames. We look at day and time. Usually what we see here is night storms.

"We do a lot of 'hardening' of the system. What I mean by that is we have proactive maintenance programs before storm season where we do replacements or change-outs as needed. A big thing is we also reinforce standards and operating procedures."

Preparing the system for the onslaught of summer heat is the job of Chris Hofmann, 47, who oversees transmission operations and this year is heading into his first summer with SRP after years with other electrical utilities in the West.

Hofmann's team spends the off season preparing for the effects of triple-digit heat. System upgrades are made. Cooling towers, substations and other equipment that gives SRP the ability to ramp up generation for increased summer load are inspected and maintained.

SRP's electric generation is complemented by power from a diverse portfolio of sources, including the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station. SRP also has the ability to purchase additional electricity for need from other



One of SRP's towers seen against the backdrop of an Arizona sunset.

— Billy Hardiman photo

sources, according to Hofmann.

"At the end of every summer, utilities take a look at events that occurred," Hofmann said. "SRP especially is working ahead of time, looking at anything that might cause a threat to a generator or to transmission. We're out there making sure that everything is ready. The last thing you want in the summertime, in our harshest environment, is to have something happen."

That might entail doing line patrols, pole by pole, looking for a tree brushing into a line or for a cracked insulator.

There is heightened vegetation maintenance around towers, poles and lines after a spark triggered devastating wildfires in Sonoma County, California. SRP is removing automatic-restoration schemes. When an event happens on line, a breaker will close. Sometimes with automatic restoration, sparking can occur.

In SRP's Distribution Operations Center, each work station has four monitors, displaying specific characteristics of the system. When an outage occurs, "smart metering" detects it even before calls begin to come in. A troubleshooter is dispatched to assess it.

"During storm season, it is just remarkable how this team responds," Reynoso said. "We have some very good, experienced individuals in here who work in a collective manner to meet customer needs."

The on-scene troubleshooter determines if the outage is as simple as replacing a fuse quickly, or whether a job order for a maintenance crew is needed. The goal is to beat the average down time of 4 hours.

Wind, lightning, rainwater seeping into underground lines are the leading causes of outages. This year, with the COVID-19 pandemic, SRP is taking measures to protect the health of those who staff its operations centers.

"Yes, we manage the system, make sure power is secured, but we need those people in those desks," Reynoso said.

Mask-wearing is mandatory. Safety glasses are worn. Social distancing is practiced. Plexiglas barriers are going up between work stations. Employees are tested weekly for the virus. Each operations center receives a deep cleaning every 12 hours. Outsiders are not allowed in.

"We've isolated all of these control centers that are critical operating areas," Hofmann said.

Reynoso added, "We know that storms are around the corner but we do want to put employee health and well-being at the forefront."

In Hofmann's Transmission and Generation Operations Center, which also is staffed 24/7, voltage changes or load increases are red flags on the system.

"Say there's an issue with a line. We can reroute around that event to minimize the impact to customers," Hofmann said. "We can make a switch manually while making repairs at the same time. It's fascinating how many items these system operators are monitoring at a time. They're critical to operating the heart of the system. It's almost an art form."

From a falling snowflake in the high country's winter, through meltdown into the lake system that provides not only drinking water to the Valley but also hydroelectricity, to the flip of your blender switch to prepare a cool beverage for poolside consumption on another blistering day, SRP's performance in delivering electricity is expected and taken for granted.

And that's just the way SRP wants it.

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## Commentary by Aaron Thompson Growing up black in a white America



Blacks and whites stand shoulder to shoulder in a protest over the killing of George Floyd.

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Editor's note: The killing of George Floyd sparked more than outrage and riots; it also called forth soul-searching on the part of Americans seeking to heal the racial divide. Aaron Thompson, a former longtime Tempe resident, posted the commentary below on Facebook and we feel it is a viewpoint well worth pondering as the nation struggles to deal with an issue that continues to wound.

I've been struggling with what to say and decided to share a bit of my story. First, take a look at the pictures: Many good police officers kneeling and walking with protesters in a sign of solidarity.

The other pics will make sense if you read a bit.

Side note: If you believe that the earth is flat or currently have time to entertain such notions; no need to read this—seriously.

Mom taught me to hold my tongue until I have something worthy to speak. Most of my life, I have balanced between two very different narratives in a country I love, a country built on an IDEA and the rule of law.

Laws and Ideas are powerful things, far greater than a million guns.

In 1992 I was helping supervise teens on a bus ride and field trip from Sedona, Arizona, for a church event. A young man turned to me unbidden and asked "What's the deal with the black people, why are they so unhappy"?"

(It was an honest question. He must

have caught the L.A. riots on TV and wanted to make sense of it.) I was caught without a reply, having become accustomed to submerging my experience and hesitant to espouse a narrative out of step with many people I worked and

was privileged to grow up in the safety of McCormick Ranch in Scottsdale where I only saw a police officer in my neighborhood once when the neighbor had a heart attack. I have wondered if the young man ever dug any deeper

lived among.

In addition, I



Photo courtesy Aaron Thompson

into the marrow and bone, or peeked beyond the curtain. He was a good kid, from a good family, a comfortable family surrounded by a narrative that could protect and propel him forward unchanged.

As a Catholic, my family has been able to make a home among various communities built on shared common bonds of faith and values, and for that, I am grateful.

Yet simultaneously, my family his-

tory and story carry the weight, scars, blessings and curses of being a descendant of Afro-Caribbeans descended from captive Africans held in the Caribbean from 1502 to 1886 during the Atlantic slave trade.

On my father's side, my family members were Afro-Americans brought to America in the bottom of a filthy slave boats as legal property.

My family history on Dad's side (Virginia legacy) is so wrought with brokenness, ruin, poverty and sadness it could only be the enduring blessing and legacy of slavery, Jim Crow and segregation.

Dad's single mother fled northward to Washington, D.C and New York City to seek opportunity and some freedom from the destitution, dangers and paralyzing "rules of law" celebrated in the South and quietly enforced throughout much of the country.

This has always been, well...awkward to share in mixed company and dinner conversations. but this is my history. You are not at fault for it, but it is my story and it is an American story like yours.

These riots did not begin with

the murder of George Floyd. They erupted in the face of continued and systemic injustice and indignity.

These riots include more than just blacks, they include poor and disenfranchised whites and many others. If you seek to more fully understand OUR shared American heritage, understand the rule of law and how laws were used post-slavery to disenfranchise and prohibit voting, property ownership and equal access to education for blacks.

Let's read a book together: "The Color of Law" by Richard Rothstein.

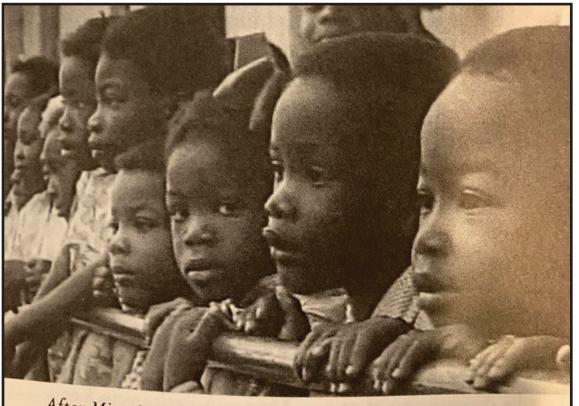
I'm reminded of a famous passage in the Bible: Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all."

I see good police kneeling, walking and standing with the poor and broken.

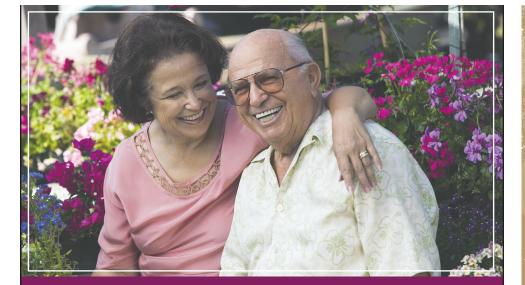
They are truly the servants of all. Colin Kaepernick knelt silently and early in peaceful protest against police violence against unarmed black males.

Maybe his protest was American after all.

https://www.facebook.com/ aaron.thompson.370515



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### Free virtual urgent care offered by Dignity Health

Dignity Health in Arizona, which operates Chandler Regional Medical Center and other area hospitals, has launched Virtual Care Anywhere, a free virtual urgent care service for anyone in the community experiencing mild to moderate symptoms of COVID-19.

Virtual urgent care visits are being encouraged as an initial care option for anyone who would like to discuss symptoms characteristic of COVID-19 with a health care professional.

As ambulatory and acute care facilities across the country experience an increase in the number of patients with COVID-19 symptoms, virtual health care visits can help providers meet demand while reducing potential transmission of the coronavirus.

The service is a safe and convenient way for people to speak with a medical professional for advice without needing to visit a physical care location.

To use the service, visit www.dignityhealth.org/virtualcareanywhere, download the Virtual Care Anywhere app in the Apple App Store or Google Play Store, or call 855-356-8053 and use the coupon code COVID19. The service has a fee of \$35 per visit, and the fee will be waived for any patient who thinks they may be experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. After requesting an appointment, a virtual care provider will contact the patient, typically within 15-30 minutes, although high demand may result in longer wait times.

The service is on-demand and does not accept appointments.

"Virtual urgent care visits are one way we will help patients with COVID-19 symptoms assess their options for treatment or testing," said Keith Frey, M.D., chief physician executive for Dignity Health in Arizona.

"Virtual visits allow for timely care delivery without putting other patients or our clinicians at risk for contracting the virus. While it's not intended to replace in-person care visits, it will help reduce patient volumes at care sites so we can serve those who need care the most."

Health care experts are recommending virtual urgent care for patients with less severe symptoms of COVID-19 such as low-grade fever, a cough or shortness of breath.

People with mild symptoms who are evaluated virtually by a medical professional can avoid interacting with others and ensure they receive the appropriate level of care in the right setting.

Anyone experiencing severe symptoms of a respiratory illness, such as a high fever or difficulty breathing, should call 911 or visit their nearest care site.

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Editor: Joyce Coronel

## Father

#### From Page 13

"There were social distancing traffic jams between pedestrians and bike riders."

He and his wife Candyce also had ageappropriate conversations with their children to help them understand what was happening in the world but not letting them give into fear.

"Our 12-year-old could understand more than our 5-year-old," he noted.

Prayer has played a big part in their lives, especially during the quarantine. Every night the family prayed for the safety of each individual and for their loved ones. Faith can provide comfort and guidance, Smith said.

"I'm not always going to be here," he said. "If I can teach them while they're young, then long after I'm gone they can have that comfort of a loving Father in heaven." The family was able to rely on that faith recently when Candyce suffered a miscarriage two years ago. Although they didn't know the sex of the baby before the miscarriage, Smith said it's comforting for their daughters to remember him as a little boy, and they named him Ambrose Emmanuel Smith.

"Being a parent is overwhelming, beautiful and exhausting all at the same time; it's easy for a young father to feel overwhelmed," Smith said. "But when you have a miscarriage, it makes you appreciate and cherish your children in a profound way. Even when you're exhausted, and they're wearing you down, you just love them so much."

During the quarantine, the Smith family joined other families in his area and across the globe in transferring their worship experience online. Like many other churches, their family church, St. Andrew the Apostle Catholic Church in Chandler, offered live-streamed services. While not quite the same, in a way the experience was very much like before the quarantine.

"We still showed up late. The one thing I learned pretty recently is I could press the pause button," Smith joked. "It's been good continuity for the kids."

Forced family time is an opportunity for a wake-up call for many fathers, Smith said. As life begins to open up in a postpandemic world, self-reflection is necessary.

"The pandemic has jarred our culture," Smith said. "When things get back to more familiar, every dad is going to have to answer the question: 'What part of how we used to live is worth going back to, and what part of how we used to live do we leave in the past?' "Some dads have really busy schedules, but if it comes at the cost where you have no family time, maybe it's time to dial that back."





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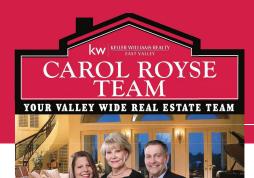
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