

Queen Creek State of the Town Address

Mayor Gail Barney

Jan. 16, 2013

As your Mayor, I have the privilege of delivering the annual State of the Town address on behalf of the Town Council. Each year this event coincides with the Star Students recognition, which I think is a great combination.

The Town Council and I have the opportunity to meet with dozens of students who have excelled in citizenship and leadership, and serve as role models for their peers. Every time we have a Star Students event, I am impressed with how amazing the children of Queen Creek are. They are the future of our community, and I think our future looks pretty good!

I'm also honored by all of the elected officials and honored guests who have joined us tonight.

In some ways, I would that describe 2012 was our community's comeback year. After years of economic downturn, 2012 marked the first time in several years that we were able to consistently report good news. Several projects that had been on hold were completed, and several more were started, which makes me excited for next year's State of the Town address! We also recently learned that Queen Creek has been named one of America's friendliest towns by Forbes Magazine. We may have already known that, but it sure is nice to be recognized on a national level!

During this past year, your Town Council has faced many difficult decisions, and I'd like to thank my fellow Council members for their time, teamwork and dedication. Each of us comes from a different perspective, but collectively we share the same interest in seeing this community thrive and be the destination for families and business. The questions we answer throughout the year are critical for the future of our town, and I appreciate the amount of thought each of you put into your decision-making. We've had a tough few years, but we've still been able to accomplish a lot.

As a Council, we are really grateful for the feedback we receive from residents. We take every e-mail and phone call seriously, and appreciate it when residents and business owners take the time to reach out and provide us with information, ask questions, or give us their thoughts on an issue. We represent each of you, and we always want to know what you think.

I'd also like to express my support to staff for their efforts in providing residents with top-quality services. The Council recognizes the additional work placed on each of you, including the many years of staff reductions, frozen wages and declining benefits. Many organizations would find it difficult to continue to deliver superior services. Your work

was recognized in 2012 by high satisfaction numbers from residents in the community survey. The rankings on that survey showed that our community also appreciates the hard work being done by staff. Your assistance in delivering on the goals of this Council is a major factor that keeps Queen Creek a place that many people and businesses enjoy calling home.

The role of local government is critical to the day-to-day life of all Queen Creek residents, influencing everything from road and fire safety to local shopping opportunities. It's critical that we all work together to achieve the common vision of a Town, based on a solid foundation of quality standards and values. With that, I'd like to highlight some of 2012's accomplishments.

Budget

Our community started the year, once again, in a challenging economic climate, but has seen a bit of a turnaround with regard to growth. For this fiscal year, the Town Council adopted a budget of \$59.8 million, which marks the first budget that did not include any reductions in service or staff for first time in five years. We have spent a great deal of time seeking out new opportunities, partnerships, and continued planning for growth, ensuring that the Town of Queen Creek remains financially sound, fiscally responsible and that we continue to live within our means.

We took the time during the recent slowdown to automate several functions of the Town, saving both time and money for the future, and continue to seek ways to streamline processes to make this easier and quicker for our residents and customers. If there is one lesson local government has learned from the Great Recession, it is that we need to always be in a state of continuous improvement, always looking for the ways to deliver our services at the best possible price that adds value to our residents and community as a whole.

Cost Savings and Alternative Funding

Some of the examples of our continuous improvement and efficiencies: the Town continues to find alternative ways to pay for projects, and during 2012, we were successful in finding a variety of partnerships and other ways to save taxpayer dollars.

One of the big partnership projects that was completed this past year was the channelization of an existing storm wash area from Chandler Heights Road to Riggs Road, and the east branch from Hawes Road to Ellsworth Road along Riggs Road. This project was in partnership with the Flood Control District and Maricopa County Department of Transportation and cost just over \$10 million. It encompassed two point two miles of earth-lined channel with rock slope protection and a 50-foot bottom width, built for equestrian travel. The project also includes multi-use trails, wildlife observation areas, and aesthetic enhancements that blend the new infrastructure into the natural environment. This was a major accomplishment, and I'm proud of all the staff and partners that put in so much hard work to get it completed.

We submitted a House Bill in the State Legislature to make sure municipalities will not have to make dual contributions for public safety staff that have already retired from public safety prior to July 2011. The Legislature passed the bill unanimously, and the Town will now save several thousand dollars of unnecessary contributions for our more experienced staff.

In addition, because of the Town's efforts, other municipalities across the State will save well over \$2 million. Also, despite nation-wide increases to major medical insurance benefits, the Town was able to minimize its cost increase to single digit average over the last three years.

You may also have noticed improvements in Town Center along Ellsworth Road between Ocotillo and Rittenhouse roads. These improvements, although temporary, added a pedestrian path and widening the road. As funds become available, more permanent improvements will be made.

In 2012 we initiated a partnership with the Queen Creek Unified School District for the Town's fuel purchases, which saves us nearly \$10,000 each year. School security has also been our focus. We continue our partnership with Queen Creek Unified School District in sharing the costs of a SRO or School Resource Officer at the Queen Creek High School. Although this partnership started years ago, we continue to see the value of reduced calls for service as a result of the SRO's presence on campus.

Because of generous donations by the Queen Creek Little League Baseball and the Queen Creek Heat Softball, the ball fields at Desert Mountain Park now have new scoreboards and shade structures.

Volunteers generously donated thousands of hours of their time, talents, and energy making a difference in our community. The dedication of these volunteers helps provide vital services to our community, including roadside, trail, wash system and park clean-up and improvement projects. During 2012 volunteers installed landscape, signage, bike racks, and fencing, and assisted with special events, youth, teen and adult recreation programs.

I'd also like to recognize the countless hours volunteers donated towards the Roots 'N Boots Family Rodeo. This was our second year being involved with this event, which is run now by the Friends of Horseshoe Park, and it is quickly becoming not only a community-wide, but region-wide event. These volunteers have a passion for Queen Creek, and their work saved taxpayers well over \$100,000.

Growth and Economic Development

Queen Creek worked toward and achieved several significant goals this year aiming to ensure the community's future financial stability and providing services that residents said they want.

The award-winning Queen Creek Incubator program continues to grow and was relocated this year to the former Parks and Recreation building, providing additional space for tenants and training. This program emphasizes employment growth for our community by helping business owners, home-based businesses and those contemplating starting a business as they grow their company within Queen Creek. This facility also serves as the home of the Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce and tourism office. If you haven't come out to visit yet, I encourage you drop by and take a tour.

Our Economic Development staff also implemented a new program to assist commercial businesses in Town Center as they make improvements to their façades. We've already had several locally owned businesses take advantage of this program, and I'm eager to see what 2013 will bring!

Our tourism-focused marketing campaign continues to draw visitors to the community, and recently expanded to include a "rediscover your community" promotion. I'm excited to see the photos that our residents are posting to the Facebook page, and happy to see our residents finding new restaurants, shops and destinations to visit right here in Queen Creek. The Council also approved a partnership with Old Town Queen Creek Alliance during 2012, and I encourage each one of you to pay a visit to this heritage district to check out the businesses in our Town Center.

You may also have noticed a change in the decorations in Town Center. This past year a new pedestrian street light banner and American flag program was started, offering all Queen Creek businesses an opportunity to promote their community events in Town Center.

One of the highlights of our tourism marketing, Horseshoe Park & Equestrian Centre welcomed events on 178 days of 2012, generating tens of thousands of visitors to our area. A variety of events and shows were held at the park including Roots 'N Boots Family Rodeo, Arabian, reining cow horse, team roping, cutting, bull riding and gymkhana. I'm excited to see what's coming up in 2013 at the park, and thank all of the staff for their hard work. The calendar is very full for next year, and most of the events are free for spectators, so I invite you and your family to come out and see how much fun we have at Horseshoe Park!

The Town also continues its involvement as a part owner of Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport. This partnership is helping to shape the future of this region with the East Valley's largest employment center. We are actively involved with our partner communities in the planning of the East Terminal expansion, including increased aerospace opportunities in and around the airport, which will create new development and employment opportunities for Queen Creek.

Resident Experiences

This past year saw many opportunities for residents to engage in community activities, encouraging our long-standing small-town tradition.

The Town continues to provide opportunities for residents to live, play, and learn in more than 80 recreation classes each quarter, sports programs for each age bracket, our popular senior program and special events throughout the year.

The Town hosted an ice cream social in June and a pancake breakfast in November. I was very pleased to see so many residents take advantage of these opportunities to ask questions about Town issues, get information about current projects, learn safety tips, and enjoy time with friends and family.

During 2012 we made improvements to the Town's website and continued to develop our Facebook and Twitter sites, providing opportunities for everyone to participate in the community conversation. If you haven't already checked out the sites, please log on and visit them today. You'll find information, event calendars, photos, and lots of valuable community information.

The community continues to embrace conservation and recycling, with residents attending several workshops that were hosted by our Utilities Department, and becoming the first community in the nation to offer a curbside textile recycling program. Residents recycled nearly 17,000 pounds of material in just the first two months of the program, which exceeded all expectations. We also received local and national media attention for this innovative program, which was very exciting. Queen Creek was even honored by the Maricopa Association of Governments for best practices in solid waste management!

Over the past year the Fire Department completed an assessment evaluation with the Insurance Services Office, where the department received a new ISO rating of a four. This new rating went into effect in April, and will help reduce insurance costs for both commercial and residential property owners in the town.

The Queen Creek Fire also completed advanced Citizen Emergency Response Team training for the northern region of Queen Creek Disaster Response System. Faith-based organizations were utilized to provide volunteers training in shelter management, search and rescue, medical treatment, and Ham radio communications.

During 2012 several customer service improvements were made, including starting an automated phone payment system which allows customers to pay their utility bills over the phone any time of the day.

The Development Services Department streamlined the process for approving home building permits while maintaining their level of service. More initiatives are underway in

2013 in this area and I look forward to discussing these value-added services in next year's State of the Town. This will be extremely important as we see growth come back to our area. We're already issuing more than 50 permits per month compared with 10 to 15 in 2011.

We also saw new traffic signals installed at the intersections of Rittenhouse Road and Village Loop South, as well as Sossaman Road & Chandler Heights Road, and the addition of more than 25,000 feet of sidewalks in the Town Center area. More traffic signals are under design for this year as well.

As I close this list of 2012 accomplishments, I wanted to take time to thank our partners in the community at-large, such as Rio Salado, Chandler-Gilbert Community Colleges, the Banner Ironwood Hospital, providing much needed major medical services to Queen Creek and this region. Also, we recognize our friends in Maricopa and Pinal Counties, and adjacent cities and towns. They are our key partners in advancing the interests of not only Queen Creek, but our collective interests to promote this community and region for the betterment of existing and future generations. The more we think regionally, the better value we can provide in local government services.

A Look Ahead to 2013

Queen Creek continues to look ahead and plan for the future, and I'm excited about all of the things I see on the horizon for 2013! Economic development, maintaining sustainable revenue streams and continuing with services that our residents expect will be our priorities as we start a new calendar year.

As development returns to Queen Creek, businesses are also seeking new homes in our area. In 2013 we will see the opening of Banner's new medical center and the new Communiversity in Town Center – Queen Creek's first community college. We will also continue to evaluate the development opportunities for the 20 acres owned by the Town in Town Center. Hopefully we'll have some exciting news about that area soon!

In 2013 we will see the development of a county island fire district, extending seamless, life-saving care offered by the Queen Creek Fire Department to those living in county islands within Town boundaries, as well as the acquisition of the H2O Water Utility. This purchase would save the Town approximately \$12 million in capital improvements that would otherwise have been necessary in the next few years, as well as bringing needed additional capacity, infrastructure and price stability for both the Queen Creek and H2O systems.

The Council and I are very excited about the Passport to Discovery event scheduled for Feb. 16. This family event combines art, culture, science and fun in an all-in-one community festival! I would also like to take this opportunity to invite local businesses to contact our Recreation Division to find out how they can get involved. This is also another opportunity for our residents to volunteer their time to help bring this event to life.

We will continue to look for ways that technology can provide convenience to our residents and local businesses so they can efficiently conduct business with the Town. We plan to continue these efforts in 2013, improving access, convenience and, hopefully, participation.

Additionally, 2013 will see a continued strengthening of our regional partnerships with our counties and adjacent cities and towns. Queen Creek recognizes that together, we can make a difference in the region and make positive contributions that are in the best interest of the State of Arizona. Ensuring that the state legislature continues to find value in cities' and town's ability to deliver front line services to those who are closest to all our residents, is imperative.

Finding common ground among our partners allows us to stretch limited resources, and maintaining a positive dialogue with the community at-large, including the residents in the surrounding community of San Tan Valley is also important for the future.

This year we have six new state legislators representing Queen Creek. We look forward to working with them and demonstrating the value in cities' and town's ability to deliver front line services to residents. Queen Creek supports many of the recommendations that came out of the Governor's Transaction Privilege Tax Task Force, however we have already started meeting with our new legislators to discuss the significant fiscal impacts of a handful of recommendations which we do not support.

Conclusion

These are only a few of the highlights from last year and a glimpse of 2013. I'm constantly amazed at what we can accomplish when we work together, and am excited to see growth and excitement for the future returning to Queen Creek.

I want to thank everyone for their continued efforts, both large and small, that add to the success of this community. So much is given on a daily basis, and I would like to extend my appreciation for all that could not be mentioned tonight. It is our residents' dedication to their hometown that keeps Queen Creek such a wonderful place to live! Thank you.

2012 Volunteers

January

- Valencia Young Single Adult Ward: Melissa Wells, representing the Valencia Ward, was presented a certificate of appreciation for the volunteer project she coordinated with 30 other volunteers. The group cleaned along Ellsworth Road and the retention basin at Ellsworth & Chandler Heights Roads, as well as trimming bushes and trees on a section of public trail.
- Life Link Church: Kari Sleezer, representing Life Link Church, was presented a certificate of appreciation for her coordination with other volunteers to paint the curbs in the Town Hall area. The group provided 20 hours of service.

February

- Recognition of the Queen Creek Crime Prevention Posse: Mayor Barney and Emergency Management Coordinator Joe LaFortune presented Certificates of Appreciation to Queen Creek Crime Prevention Posse members who served 150 or more hours to the community during 2011:

Bill Evans, Walter Burks, Brian Messenger II, John Dussault, Tim Morgan, Chris Hossele, Dave Williams, James Smedley, George Vasquez, Roger Hyles, Ramsey Lopez, Mike Bryant, Phil Solis, Steven Conklin and Fernando Azuri

Dave Williams provided information on the activities of the Posse and thanked the Council for on-going support.

- Eagle Scout Recognition – Kimball Jones
- Recognition of the Roots N' Boots 2011-2012 Queens: Codi Ross, Missy Dipper and Ashley Metzger were recognized for representing Roots N' Boots, Horseshoe Park & Equestrian Centre and the Town at rodeo activities across Arizona. Ms. Ross will be the 2012 Roots N Boots Junior Queen and Ms. Dipper will be Rodeo Queen.

March

- Queen Creek East Stake: Forty-five Scouts and 20 leaders were recognized for providing 32 hours of service cleaning Desert Mountain Park.
- Hayden Woodard coordinated 29 volunteers to provide 180 hours of service harvesting the fruit from Town-owned trees and delivering the edible fruit to the Family Resource Center, Amadeo Church and St. Vincent de Paul, three food banks providing service to Queen Creek.

June

- Connor Schnepf with Troop 825 was recognized for his work and coordination of installing new benches and flower pots at the Town Hall fountain which was donated by Ray Schnepf, Connor's grandfather.
- Dallin Michael Heward with Troop 6183 was recognized for his work and coordination making improvements at Desert Mountain Park by installing irrigation lines, planting trees and spreading over 100 tons of decomposed granite.
- Independent Life Services, each volunteer was recognized for their continuing project of cleaning trash and debris from Queen Creek Wash.

- Iglesia de Dios Casa de Vida, the group was recognized for painting the playground structure at Founders' Park.

July

- Josh Rapisura – from TEAM #6610 for his Queen Creek Wash interpretive sign project. He coordinated 65 volunteers and spent 124 hours on the project.

November

- Webelos II Den Leaders, Dragon Patrol Pack 738 was recognized for trimming vegetation and cleaning up the equestrian trail in Queen Creek Wash near Desert Mountain Park. The Pack provided more than 40 hours of service hours.
- Eagle Scout Jacob D'Wayne Jones, Crew 9668 was recognized for building eight structures with individual compartments to hold helmets, gloves and other items for ball players and coaches at Desert Mountain Park. He organized a group of 35 volunteers and provided 250 hours of service hours.
- Central Christian Church was recognized for providing 225 volunteer hours with 90 volunteers cleaning and improving playground areas, shrubbery, painting of curbs, fire hydrants, bike racks, BBQ grills and exterior doors at Desert Mountain Park.