

# **Queen Creek State of the Town Address**

## **Mayor Gail Barney**

### **Jan. 15, 2014**

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 and Citizen Leadership Institute annual reunion, which I think is are all a great combination.

The Town Council and I enjoy the opportunity to meet with both the leaders in our community and the future leaders who are excelling in their schools. I am always impressed with how amazing the children of Queen Creek are and how engaged the adults are with the town.

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

This has been a very busy year for Queen Creek as we get back into growth mode. We've seen strong interest in our community from both commercial and residential developers, our residents have been actively "rediscovering" their community and keeping their shopping local, and we've extended our excellent public safety services to our neighbors in the county after they formed the Queen Creek County Island Fire District.

The Town Council has debated a wide variety of issues throughout the year, and I'd like to thank each of them for their time, teamwork and dedication. The issues that come with growth are complicated, and although each of us brings a different perspective, by working together we are able to achieve great things for Queen Creek. I appreciate the amount of thought each of you put into your decision-making and how you all think about our residents with each and every decision you make.

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. Every single one of our staff members works hard to deliver on the goals of this Council, and we continually hear about your outstanding customer service and friendly attitudes. You help make Queen Creek a place that many people and businesses enjoy calling home.

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 important that we all work together to achieve the common vision of our Town, based on a solid foundation of quality standards and values. I'm proud of what we've achieved over the past year and look forward to another terrific year. With that, I'd like to highlight some of 2013's accomplishments.

## **Budget**

Queen Creek's comeback started in 2012 and continued into this past year. For this fiscal year, the Town Council adopted a budget of \$117.4 million, which included a number of major projects that had been on hold due to the Great Recession. We sought out new opportunities for partnerships and continued planning for the growth that we see continuing. Our biggest goal has always been to ensure that the Town of Queen Creek remains financially sound, fiscally responsible and that we continue to live within our means.

One of the biggest goals we achieved in 2013 was the purchase of the H2O water company. As the population of Queen Creek grows and infrastructure ages, the Town was reviewing the needs for capital improvements to enhance and expand water capacity. In just a few years the cost of these improvements would have been roughly \$11.9 million. Rather than raising fees or taxes to pay for these expansions, the acquisition of H2O greatly reduces the need for capital improvement to expand current water capacity. The purchase assures ample water supply for the future for the Town of Queen Creek and the region.

During 2013 the Town Council also approved \$10 million in capital improvement funds to address Town Center drainage and transportation needs. We've been waiting for quite some time to get this work going, and I think residents will be very pleased with the both the work that has been completed and all that's coming in 2014 for our Town Center.

## **Diversified Funding and Volunteers**

As a town, our goal is to have sustainable funding sources to meet the needs of our growing community. As the state legislature has changed rules surrounding the collection of development impact fees and sales taxes, the Council has sought out ways to diversify the revenue sources used to pay for things like roads, parks and utilities. Additionally, since the start of the Great Recession in 2006, we have restructured our business model, reducing our long-term costs but maintaining value to the community. The rating agencies continue to laud Queen Creek as a high investment grade and the Government Finance Officer's Association has recognized the Town 10 years in a row with its Distinguished Budget Presentation Award, its highest recognition of Excellence.

Our efforts to encourage residents to shop locally have been very successful, including the Rediscover Your Community campaign, our Shop Queen Creek contests, and the

online promotion of members' specials and sales. We're excited about how many of you are choosing to visit the new businesses coming into Queen Creek, and the loyalty you've shown to our long-term business owners.

The coming year will bring quite a bit more retail to our community, so please continue to patronize these businesses that help make our community complete. When you shop locally, your sales tax dollars are used to pay for public safety, street maintenance and recreation programs all of which are a priority!

Our Development Services team has spent the past year working to streamline the process for obtaining permits. Having a reputation for being "business friendly" is important for our community and helps bring jobs and high quality commercial investment to Queen Creek. Making it easier for folks to build in our community enhances our reputation and ensures the town has more stable revenues. While we've worked hard to enhance the process, we anticipate even more improvements coming in 2014. Our goal is clear: we want to continue to be the community of choice for high quality investment.

In addition to bringing in funds to pay for needed services, the Town was also privileged to work with a variety of volunteers who generously donated thousands of hours of their time, talents, and energy to make a difference in our community and save town funds. 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 2013 volunteers installed landscape, signage, bike racks, and fencing, and assisted with special events, youth sports and the senior programs.

I'd also like to recognize the countless hours volunteers donated towards the Roots 'N Boots Rodeo. This was our third year being involved with this event, which is run by the Friends of Horseshoe Park, and it continued to be not only a community-wide, but region-wide event. Not only did this event increase our community's reputation, the volunteers who work on this project have a strong passion for Queen Creek and their work saved taxpayers well over \$100,000.

### **Growth and Economic Development**

The award-winning Queen Creek Incubator program, located in Town Center, continues to help local businesses grow. This facility also serves as the home of the Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce and tourism office. The facility recently began offering drop-in hours, so I would encourage you to visit if you're thinking about starting or expanding a business here in our community.

Our Economic Development staff was very busy this year with requests for proposals for the town-owned 20 acres in the heart of our community, for an entertainment anchored, mixed-use project. They hosted the first-ever Economic Summit to provide the development community with information about our community, and provided façade improvement assistance to three businesses in Town Center. To top it off, this

year we finalized a development agreement with Vestar, the owner of Queen Creek Marketplace, for the development of a 14-screen Harkins movie theater. I know many of you have been eagerly awaiting that news, and we're looking forward to the groundbreaking ceremony in February!

One of the highlights of our economic development and tourism programs, Horseshoe Park & Equestrian Centre welcomed events on 260 days of 2013, generating tens of thousands of visitors to our area. A variety of events and shows were held at the park including Roots 'N Boots Rodeo, Arabian shows, reining cow horse, team roping, cutting, bull riding and gymkhana. The facility also hosted non-equestrian events like flat track racing, which drew quite a crowd! I want to thank all of the staff for their hard work. Working at a commercial event venue requires long hours, typically on the weekends and on holidays. The staff at the park shows a tremendous amount of dedication to the success of Horseshoe Park and the Queen Creek community, and I'd like to let them know how much the Council and I appreciate them.

The Development Services Department also processed permits for 610 new homes in 20 new or revived subdivisions in the community. Virtually all of the subdivisions that went vacant with inactivity during the Great Recession are now very active in the permitting stages. One development, Hastings Farms, is consistently in the Phoenix region's top five of most active closings. That's a lot of development and a lot of new residents that we get to welcome to our town.

### **Partnerships**

This year was a milestone for public safety in our region with the development of the Queen Creek County Island Fire District. The Queen Creek Fire Department began providing emergency medical and fire services to these unincorporated areas of Queen Creek after the fire district was approved by the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors. This non-contiguous area is approximately six square miles within the Queen Creek town limits and serves around 4,000 residents.

The Fire Department continued its agreement with the State of Arizona Land Division and provided wildland fire support in the form of our brush truck and water tender. The department supported five different wildland fires, including the tragic Yarnell Fire. We were also very grateful to offer the assistance of our Chief Marketing/Public Information Officer to assist the Yarnell Fire efforts with media, logistical and community outreach support. The City of Prescott, who handled the media relations locally were very grateful to Queen Creek for the assistance.

Our engineering team worked with the Maricopa County Flood Control District to develop a plan for the East Mesa Drainage Area that provides maximum benefit to the Town and protects the land on northeast part of our community. This project is vital in ensuring that our employment lands in the northern tier are given a chance to succeed as the region rebounds with the aerospace sector at Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport.

Speaking of Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, the Town continues its involvement as a part owner of the 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 Council and I were excited about the number of participants in the Citizen Leadership Institute, the level of conversation taking place on our social media sites, and how many folks came out to our ice cream social and pancake breakfast events! These events continue to attract more and more residents each and every year.

The Town continues to provide opportunities for residents to live, play, and learn in more than 90 recreation classes each quarter, sports programs for each age bracket, our popular senior program and special events throughout the year. We even added several new classes, including boot camps, Zumba, karate, tennis, horseback riding, and mommy-baby sign language.

The community also continues to embrace conservation and recycling, with residents attending several workshops that were hosted by our Utilities Department, as well as the recycling events that are held throughout the year. The utilities team has also created a variety of educational materials to help residents save water and money on their landscaping.

The Development Services Department made significant advancements in their efforts to streamline the process for approving home building permits. They modernized the Town's building codes completed a service fee study to ensure that the Town is recovering a greater proportion of the costs of the service ensuring to the greatest extent possible, that existing residents are not disproportionately subsidizing the costs associated with new growth. Development Services is a very important part of the services we offer, especially during this time of increased growth. To put it into perspective, in the depths of the Great Recession during 2011 we were issuing 10 to 15 single family home permits each month, and now we're seeing more than 50 per month. That's a lot of growth, and keeping the community growing in the right direction requires strategic planning and lots of forethought.

We continue to invest strategically in areas of the community. A new traffic signal was installed at the intersections of Rittenhouse and Cloud roads and we are currently in design and construction of two more traffic signals. One will be located at the intersection of Ocotillo and 220th Street and another located at Germann and 188th street. The Town installed a new library access road off of Victoria Boulevard and installed an additional 1,200 lineal feet of sidewalk in the Town Center area. Last year

we also started design for several big road projects that included: Rittenhouse Road east of Sossaman; Ellsworth Road from Ocotillo to Rittenhouse roads; Ocotillo Road over the Union Pacific Railroad; Ocotillo Road from Ellsworth Loop to Heritage Loop Roads; and Ocotillo Road from Power to Higley. Most of these major road projects are scheduled to begin construction in the early spring and late fall of 2014. The Town is also getting ready to complete another two miles of the Queen Creek paved trail system that will go from Desert Mountain Park to the Crismon Road alignment. The trail project is scheduled to begin construction in early 2015.

Innovation is always at the top of our minds here at the Town, but 2013 saw a number of technological advancements of note, involving the work of our Workforce and Information Technology and Fire Departments, including the installation of an Electronic Patient Care Records system for field paramedic reporting for real-time patient record-keeping. This improves the ability of our paramedics when responding to a call for service involving a medical situation. It allows timely and more accurate information on patient care to be immediately sent to the emergency rooms.

As I close this list of 2013 accomplishments, as I try to do each and every year at this time, I wanted to take time to thank our partners in the community at-large, such as Rio Salado, Chandler-Gilbert Community Colleges, Banner Ironwood Hospital and the Banner Medical Center, our Chamber of Commerce, Boys and Girls Club and Queen Creek Performing Arts Center. 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 2014**

This next year is guaranteed to be an exciting one as Queen Creek celebrates our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a Town. During this time of growth and expansion, I'm thrilled to announce that we have an entire year of community events, engagement and fun to look forward to, especially as we see businesses such as Harkins Theater, In and Out Burger and other exciting new businesses coming to town. I look forward to providing more announcements in the coming year.

2014 will be a year to welcome new friends to our town as we help them understand where we've come from and where we're headed. An important document for reference whether you have lived in Queen Creek for some time now or are new to the community is the 2014-2019 Corporate Strategic Plan. Starting with the Council's annual retreat and planning session in late summer, we update the 5-year plan with new and amended goals for the next five years. There are ten Key Result Areas that focus our time and resources for the organization and community.

This next year will bring us news of what kind of development we'll see on the Town-owned 20 acres in the heart of our community in Town Center; the opening of the

Communiversity at Queen Creek, located right next door to our library; the opening of our first dog park and a splash pad this spring; and even more events at our parks.

You may have already heard about the opportunity to provide your thoughts on new entry monuments that will mark the entryways in Queen Creek – if not, please check out the options at [QueenCreek.org](http://QueenCreek.org). 2014 will also bring an opportunity to design a flag celebrating this milestone anniversary. We'll have scavenger hunts and contests throughout the year, a new peach-themed event in Town Center this spring, and a Founders Day event in September. With all these new residents in our community, we place a priority on connecting the new faces with our long-time residents through opportunities to come together as a community in various positive events. We will continue to look for ways to engage our residents and businesses, further expand our community conversations on social media, and seek out technology that makes it easier for residents and businesses to conduct business with the Town. During 2014 we will be improving access, convenience and, hopefully, participation. Technology enhancements and breakthroughs will be an ongoing theme of the new year. The online, 24/7 Town Hall is an important service and one of such high value that we have placed on the convenience of doing business with your local government. If you are not already connected with the Town via Facebook or Twitter, please do so as we have expanded use of social media sites. This includes providing daily news updates about the Town, informing residents about opportunities for participation in local government meetings, info about our services and programs, traffic closures and special events as well as emergency information. This is more important this time than ever as we continue to see the contraction of our local news media and their ability to provide news and event coverage for Queen Creek.

Additionally, 2014 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 vital.

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.

### **Conclusion**

These are only a few of the highlights from last year and a glimpse of the excitement headed our way in 2014. I'm excited that I have the opportunity to celebrate this milestone anniversary with all of you, and am always impressed with what we can accomplish when we work together. The growth and celebration coming in 2014 will lead to another wonderful year for 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.