

State of the Town of Queen Creek, Arizona
By Mayor Gail Barney
January 18, 2012

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.

Each year 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.

In 2011, we honored 82 students, and just tonight we recognized 45 more. 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.

This year has marked both my second year as mayor and the second year for this Town Council. We've seen considerable change for our community, and as I re-cap 2011's accomplishments, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Council members for their teamwork and dedication. We face difficult decisions that are critical for the future of our town, and I appreciate the amount of thought each of you puts into your decision-making.

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 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. Their assistance in working with this Council is a major factor that keeps Queen Creek a place that many people enjoy calling home.

We've had a tough few years, but we've still been able to accomplish a lot, and I'm excited about our future as a community!

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.

Despite our small size, Queen Creek is considered a leader among local governments. We're looked to as trend-setters in many ways, which is something each and every one of us should be proud of. With that, I'd like to highlight some of 2011's accomplishments.

Budget

Our community continues to face a challenging economic climate, with yet another year of reduced budgets. For this fiscal year, the Town Council adopted a budget of \$60.8 million, nearly a 33%

decrease from last fiscal year. This \$60.8 million budget includes \$6.5 million for new capital purposes.

The organization was restructured again this year, collapsing departments and re-evaluating our priorities. Constantly seeking new opportunities and lots of advanced planning has ensured that the Town of Queen Creek remains financially sound, fiscally responsible and living within our means.

Cost Savings and Alternative Funding

The Town continues to find alternative ways to pay for projects, and during 2011, we were successful in many of our applications and requests for grants and assistance programs, some of which I would like to highlight:

The Development Services Department completed the construction of Victoria Lane between Ellsworth Loop and Ellsworth roads. This project was paid for with a grant for \$180,000 from the Maricopa County "Small Cities Transportation Assistance Program."

The department also completed the bidding process for Phase II of our Intelligent Transportation System that will connect an additional 16 traffic signals and 13 closed-circuit television cameras for traffic monitoring. Designed to make traveling through the community easier and more efficient, funding for this project was obtained through the Maricopa Association of Governments. The total cost of this project was more than \$1 million, but by receiving grants from the Federal Government, the Town's cost was less than \$100,000.

An Intergovernmental Agreement was negotiated for the installation of a trail in the Queen Creek Wash from Desert Mountain Park to Ellsworth Road. This agreement will provide us with 95% of the funding needed to complete the project.

We received two Highway Safety Improvement Program grants from the Maricopa Association of Governments and the Central Arizona Association of Governments. One grant provided pavement markings on Hunt Highway and Empire Boulevard from Power Road to Gary Road, and the other will provide a traffic sign inventory and management system.

The Town received nearly \$140,000 through the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program, a federal grant for energy efficiency projects. These funds were used to provide solar water heater rebates in the amount of \$750 to Town residents. The program lasted for six months and had 37 participants. The remaining funds were used to make the Town's computer systems more energy efficient, which will save about \$7,000 per year on our utility bills.

Staff in the Recreation Division generated \$10,000 in sponsorship funds for programs like Youth Soccer and Trunk or Treat. Residents, staff and local businesses also donated hundreds of pounds of candy for the Trunk or Treat event.

We saved both money and the environment by recycling old asphalt from the Ellsworth Road project, saving more than \$50,000 in milling costs for dust-related projects, and by installing new eco-friendly irrigation systems at Founders Park, Desert Mountain Park, Horseshoe Park, the Queen Creek Library and the Town Hall Complex. The new systems will save thousands of gallons of water per year.

Another money-saving agreement was negotiated with the Queen Creek School District to share the cost for fuel, saving the Town \$40,000 over the next five years.

Volunteers donated nearly 7,000 hours of their time providing vital services to our community including: roadside, trail, wash and park clean-up projects; construction of sidewalks and bird houses; installed landscape, signage, bike racks, and fencing along trails; they painted fire hydrants and playground equipment; planted flowers; and assisted with special events, youth, teen and adult recreation programs. Their talents, energy and passion saved taxpayers nearly \$135,000. We'd like to offer all of the 2011 volunteers our thanks, and will include a list of these dedicated folks onto the printed State of the Town Address, available on the Town's website.

Town staff also partnered with judicial systems that provide alternative sentencing options for trail and/or probation clients, which generated more than 470 community service hours to assist with general maintenance of parks, trails, and roadsides. This program saved taxpayers well over \$9,000.

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.

Town staff implemented the already award-winning Queen Creek Incubator program. This initiative 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. A new "Ombudsman Program" was also instituted to help businesses. We thank the Economic Development Commission for all of their assistance in developing this program, which is aimed at promoting Queen Creek's business-friendly environment.

The Town Council approved the directional and homebuilder sign program that you can now see throughout the community. These signs will help visitors to our area locate regionally-recognized destinations such as Town Center, Horseshoe Park and Schnepf Farms, as well as new subdivisions in our community.

I'm very excited about our new, tourism-focused marketing campaign, which includes several partnerships with local and regional organizations. These partnerships allow the Town to actively market these venues and their respective events, letting visitors know about all the activities and events taking place in Queen Creek. We're already seeing the fruits of this campaign, seeing Queen Creek featured as a destination in the November edition of Sunset Magazine, as well as in several international newspapers, magazines and blogs.

One of the highlights of our tourism marketing, Horseshoe Park & Equestrian Centre welcomed events on 215 days of last year, generating tens of thousands of visitors to our area. A variety of events and shows were held at the park including Arabian, reining cow horse, team roping, cutting, bull riding and gymkhana. I'm excited to see what's coming up in 2012 at the park, and thank Tim Lynch and his team at the park for all of 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!

Two hundred barn stalls were added to the park this past year, improving our services to event promoters, and expanding our revenue-generating options at the park.

This past year also marked the first-ever Roots N' Boots Pro and Family Rodeo. This very successful event provided fun for the whole family, and will take place again in 2012, this time hosted by the Friends of Horseshoe Park, on March 30, 31 and April 1.

As we welcome all these visitors to our area, I'm also proud to announce that from Cloud Road to Empire Boulevard, Ellsworth Road is now six lanes of free-flowing traffic. This is a pretty drastic difference from its former two-lane, no street signal road! Providing safe and efficient travel through Town, the Ellsworth Road project was a major accomplishment for our community.

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 its role within the region by providing more than 50 recreation classes to more than 2,000 participants each quarter. We also had a number of residents participate in sports programs and events. This year even saw Jonah Franco, a Queen Creek resident who competed in our local NBA Dribble Dish & Swish event, advance all the way to the National Finals. We're very proud of you, Jonah!

The Town hosted an ice cream social in June and a pancake breakfast in October. 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.

Queen Creek continued to be innovative in 2011 in its communication with residents. Along with many improvements to the Town's website, we continued to enhance 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.

With roots in agriculture, it's exciting to see our community embracing conservation and recycling. The Utilities Department hosted several workshops in 2011 to help residents with landscape irrigation, pruning and maintaining of their landscaping, as well as a Smartscape certification class. It's great to see our residents saving both the environment and the money in their wallets!

We also celebrated a milestone marking the first year of Queen Creek's curbside trash and recycling services, and I'm proud to say that residents recycled more than 2,000 tons of material. That is amazing considering the size of our community, and it means that we've reduced carbon dioxide emissions equivalent to more than 800 passenger vehicles! The program also collected approximately 530 tons of bulk trash through more than 5,000 residential accounts.

We continue to develop our public safety and emergency services for the community. In 2011 we joined the cities of Mesa and Gilbert and the Apache Junction Fire District in establishing a Regional Ambulance Transport Agreement with Southwest Ambulance. This means that wherever you are in the East Valley, the ambulance that's closest to you will answer your call for help. This is a major improvement to our safety services, and we're excited to be part of this innovative agreement.

Queen Creek Fire crews provided fire prevention classes for all 3rd grade students in the Queen Creek School District, making sure our kids know what to do in an emergency. This was also a chance for them to see our firefighters in their full gear, since that can be a scary sight to a small child.

The Fire Department also completed a HAM License Training Session in October as part of our Disaster Management Program. Thirty people passed the licensing exam and have joined the Community Emergency Response Team's HAM radio auxiliary, which can assist in a major emergency.

As I close this list of 2011 accomplishments, I wanted to take time to thank our partners in the community at-large, such as the Banner Ironwood Hospital, providing much needed major medical services to Queen Creek and this region. Also, our friends in Maricopa and Pinal Counties, including our adjacent cities and towns who we recognize as 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 2012

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 2012! 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.

The Town Council and I are very excited about the Passport to Discovery event scheduled for February 11th. This family event combines art, culture, science and fun in an all-in-one community festival! "Amazing Arizona" will be featured at the 2012 festival in honor of our beautiful state's centennial celebration. 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.

I know the Town Council and staff often receive requests for new traffic signals throughout Town, and I'm excited to announce that we have several new traffic signals coming in 2012! We'll be adding signalization to the intersection of Cloud and Rittenhouse and Village Loop Road South and Rittenhouse. We're also adding a left turn lane from 198th Street onto Rittenhouse to help keep drivers safe.

We'll be making improvements to Ellsworth Road between Ocotillo and Rittenhouse to make traveling through our Town Center easier and more attractive. And we don't even need to wait long for that project, because it'll be starting later this month!

Queen Creek will continue to work toward the goals of our Economic Development Strategic Plan, including launching the Communiversity for local higher educational opportunities, bringing health facilities into the Town, assisting in retaining and expanding local businesses, and supporting further development of the Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport and related businesses. We're especially excited about the Communiversity, which will provide a wide variety of higher education programs for residents. The Town has partnered with Rio Salado on the project, and we anticipate it opening in the fall of 2013.

Emergency and disaster response have been high priorities for government agencies since 2001. Queen Creek will continue this year to work with neighborhoods, churches, businesses and our government partners to prepare the community to respond to emergency situations in a comprehensive, professional and caring manner.

We continue to look for ways that technology can provide convenience to our residents so that they can efficiently conduct business with the Town. For example, the Town has made strides to offer a greater number of services online for customer convenience such as making utility payments and registering for recreation classes. We plan to continue these efforts in 2012, improving access, convenience and, hopefully, participation. Additionally, we will continue our efforts to work with the private sector to expand telecommunications and broadband services in the community to better serve residents and help attract new businesses.

Additionally, 2012 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, those that are closest to all our residents, is imperative.

Finding common ground among our partners that allow us to stretch limited resources will be important, such as continuing partnerships on transportation, public safety, wastewater and library services.

Also, maintaining a positive dialogue with the community at-large, such as 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 2012. I'm constantly amazed at what we can accomplish when we work together, and am excited that we're starting to see the light at the end of this tunnel of a recession.

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!

2011 Volunteers

January

- Webelo Pack 738 planted trees and shrubs at the entrance to Founders Park.
- Eagle Scout Jonathon Rogers created a rest area along the Sonoqui Wash Trail that included benches, shrubs, hitching post and granite.
- Boy Scout Troop 610 Leader Ian Somes led a group of 23 volunteers that cleared an equestrian trail along the Queen Creek Wash.

February

- Queen Creek Crime Prevention Posse: Ron Koldon, Walter Burks, John Dussault, Tim Morgan, James Deddo, Chris Temple, Phil Solis, Steven Fogel, Roger Hyles, Peter Van Tiem, George Vasquez and Dave Williams.
- Queen Creek Mounted Posse: David Dumont Jr., Lyn Staples, Shelley Irwin, Connie Burns, Sue Murdoch, Michael Barriga, Coy Bronson, Debbie Carey, Ophalia Colahan, Judi Johnston, Lynn Maring, John Scot McLaughlin, Terry Roberts, Jennifer Roberts, Dempsey Short, Lori Yeager, Aliko Triant, Bill Scalf and Regina A. Raichart.

April

- Eagle Scout Jacob Johnson constructed a new sidewalk at the Queen Creek Library.
- Casa De Vida Church cleaned and painted the decorative sidewalk at the ball field plaza.
- Rock Point Church group painted 177 hydrants over two days.

May

- Eagle Scout Nick James led a group of volunteers in the construction and installation of 13 birdhouses along the Queen Creek Wash Trail.
- Cub Scout Pack 738 and leaders cleaned along the Queen Creek Wash near Desert Mountain Park

June

- Project Challenge cadets and Dean Shinever, Neighborhood Preservation provided a community service clean-up including removing rubbish materials and painting of a home. The following are the names of the cadets:
Cassandra Alonzo, Jared Begay, Adonis Bennett, Cody Bloomer, Nicholas Brown, Stephen Callaway, Marcos Chavez, Tyler Chester, Raul Contreras, David Cordero, Juan Farias, Marco Farias, Christopher Flowers, Brianna Fuchs, Nashea Gonzales, Tyler Griffen, Brandon Hodgson, Jaycee Horner, Hayden Hurst, Kayla Jacobson,

Dylan Kee, Jesse McDaniel, Charles McDowell, Joan Medina, Jon Merrill, Austin Merrill, Jackson Nyago, Justin Oliver, Denny Palomino, Jullian Palomino, William Peters, Nathan Phifer, Skyler Poe, Jeremy Sanders, Sebastian Sikes, Lee Smith, Jacob Valentino, Thomas Yohon.

September

- Eagle Scout Addison Cox: Addison Cox from Troop #82 organized and led a group of 28 volunteers to clean and paint 67 fire hydrants in the Rancho Jardines neighborhood. The group provided 140 hours of service.
- Independent Life Services: The volunteers from Independent Life Services helped clean trash along a mile section of Rittenhouse Road. The group was also recognized for providing on-going service throughout the year.
- Girl Scout Troop 995: The Girl Scouts were recognized for planting the Town Hall flowerbed.
- Pakistan Information and Cultural Organization: They were recognized for painting fire lanes at the Library and Recreation Annex.

December

- Eagle Scout : Caleb Calhoun; Austin Judkins; Brent Rasmussen and Dillon Benevides
- Eagle Scout Jonathon Schaefer Troup #137 organized and led a group to clean and paint fire hydrants. Forty-five volunteers spent 198 hours painting 105 hydrants in the Cortina neighborhood.
- Eagle Scout Jacob McClure Troop #388 researched and developed bike racks that were installed along the Queen Creek Wash Trail at four rest areas. He organized a group of 53 volunteers that provided 178 hours of service to the project. The bike racks are located along the wash between Power Road and Desert Mountain Park.
- Webelos Pack 738 was recognized for their service project cleaning up the Queen Creek Wash near Desert Mountain Park. The 15 scouts and 11 adults spent 2 ½ hours picking up trash, helping to keep the area clean and safe.
- Ms. Clouse's class at Queen Creek High School and Mrs. DeChristofaro's class at Perry High School provided the artwork on the Town Council Holiday Parade float.