

DiCiccio reflects on how he's represented Ahwatukee area

by **Cathryn Creno** - Nov. 12, 2010 08:15 AM
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Phoenix City Councilman Sal DiCiccio won a hard-fought race to represent the Ahwatukee Foothills along with sections of north and east Phoenix a little more than a year ago.

Citywide, DiCiccio is best known for his pre- and post-election attacks on what he views as too much red tape and wasteful spending at City Hall.

But the councilman also is an Ahwatukee resident of 24 years who made pledges to his home village. They included pushing state officials to discuss moving the planned South Mountain Freeway to the Gila River Reservation, motivating the Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee and start building trails with volunteer help at a new park, the South Mountain 620.

The Republic recently talked with DiCiccio about his plans that worked, and those that didn't, in the Foothills during the past year:

- **South Mountain Freeway:** During the election, DiCiccio was attacked by opponents for bringing up the planned construction of a freeway through Ahwatukee while holding a long-term lease on property nearby.

But with help from U.S. Reps. Harry Mitchell and Ed Pastor, he was able to encourage Arizona officials to talk to representatives of the Gila River Indian Community about

moving the planned Loop 202 south of Ahwatukee to tribal land.

Although the issue has generated personal controversy for DiCiccio, who still hopes to develop his leased land at 40th Street and Pecos Road, he views the talks as a success.

"The goal was just to get the state to look for an alternative to building the freeway," through Ahwatukee neighborhoods and the South Mountain Preserve, DiCiccio said. "We got them to look at another alignment and to talk to the Gila River Indian Community. That in itself is a success."

- **Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee:** After his election, DiCiccio replaced 10 people on the 19-member committee, which makes recommendations about development projects to the city.

"The people we have now are all dynamos," DiCiccio said in early February. But when he tried to get committee members to sign on and work with three struggling community projects - the Festival of Lights, the Kiwanis Ahwatukee Easter Parade and Spring Fling, and the Ahwatukee Foothills Chamber of Commerce's Red, White and Boom fireworks



show, the effort fell flat. Members wrote out checks, but few volunteered time.

"I was disappointed," DiCiccio said.

- **Small-business support:** City red tape can be infuriating, but few small-business owners think to call the District 6 office when they run into roadblocks, DiCiccio said.

So he teamed with the Ahwatukee Foothills Chamber of Commerce to start a welcome wagon program of sorts. DiCiccio, his staff and representatives from the chamber have visited about 300 **small businesses** and offered to help resolve confusion over permits, inspections and other issues.

"I think they are still a little surprised when we walk in the door," DiCiccio said. "We tell them to call anytime. And what I try to get across is that we appreciate them being here." - **Ahwatukee Local Explorer:**

Ahwatukee's free 19-seat circulator bus has a shorter route and stops less frequently than it did last year. A team of residents who support ALEX helped make the cuts after Phoenix lost \$9.2 million in state transit assistance funds earlier this year.

DiCiccio voted to save the city's circulators in the short term but said in the long run he can't support a transit program that does not bring in at least some money.

"**Saving** ALEX this year was a victory," he said. "I hate to be a doomsayer but I don't think ALEX will survive the next budget cuts."

- **Pecos Senior Center:** "Horrible" and "unacceptable" was the way DiCiccio described the proposed shuttering of senior programs at Ahwatukee's Pecos Community Center during last spring's budget hearings.

"We need to protect our seniors," he said more recently. "These individuals need social interaction."

The recreational program for seniors was saved, but a \$150,000 state-of-the-art kitchen that provided freshly-cooked meals to Ahwatukee seniors was converted into a warming kitchen.

At DiCiccio's request, city staff called for proposals from private **businesses** interested in running the kitchen, But there were no applicants.

- **South Mountain 620 park:** A non-profit group, Volunteers for Outdoor Arizona, mapped and built the first two trails in the South Mountain 620 at a cost to the city of about \$182,000. Much of the 247 acres of raw desert northwest of Chandler Boulevard and 19th Avenue will one day be a developed city park.

DiCiccio was among those who hoped the trails would be built primarily with volunteer muscle - Boy Scout troops and members of the Ahwatukee American Legion were among those who wanted to help.



But the project turned out to be too difficult for amateurs - the land was rocky and unstable and required heavy equipment. It still lacks a trailhead.

"It's going to take time to get this project developed," DiCiccio said. "The biggest thing was to purchase the land" earlier in 2009.

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