

# RECOM

Retired Employees City of Mesa

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RECOM Executive Board

## Message from the Board

Hello, I'm Jo Ferguson and I retired from Mesa's Planning Division as a Senior Planner in 2004 after 25 years with the city. Prior to coming to Mesa I worked for the City of Ogden, Utah and for ADOT. I initially joined RECOM to maintain connections with other retirees and to keep informed of any changes to our benefits. But, like the other RECOM Board members I decided to serve on the Board to do what I could to help retain those benefits and assist with keeping other city retirees informed.

My husband John, (also a city retiree) and I have volunteered for the Mesa Arts Center since February of 2005 as ambassadors, tour guides and ushers. We greatly enjoy the opportunity to continue to stay involved and contribute to our community and the city; to be able share our knowledge and skills; and then there's the added bonus of meeting so many great people.

There are over 600 active volunteers at the Mesa Arts Center that provide a cost savings to the City of close to \$1 million dollars annually.

I'd like to take this opportunity to give you a mini-tour of the arts center campus. The Mesa Arts Center is a 212,775 square-foot performing arts, visual arts and arts education facility spread over seven acres.

The campus consists of the theater complex containing four theaters, the Mesa Contemporary Arts building (MCA) which houses five subterranean art galleries, and two arts studio buildings that house 14 classrooms plus administrative offices, and a delightful gift shop known as "The Store". It's the only campus in Arizona, and one of the few in the nation that emphasizes all three arts at one location.

The design of the four-theater complex was inspired by the beauty and geography of Arizona, and each theater features a brilliant desert color. The four theaters share a continuous lobby defined by a glass wall. The glass lobby walls open to exterior gardens, walkways and an arroyo water feature.



The main box office is located at the north entrance of the lobby and is open 7 days a week. The capacity of the theaters ranges from seating for 99 in the smallest to 1600 in the largest. Each theater carries the name of a major donor.

The 99 seat Anita Cox Farnsworth Studio Theater is the smallest, although it is the most versatile. It is a “black box” style theater with an area of 1600 square feet that has the ability to be arranged from an intimate setting for jazz or nightclub seating, to a 3-sided or theater-in-the-round configuration.

The next largest theater is the Nesbitt Elliot Playhouse. The 250 stadium style seats in the Playhouse are raked at a steeper angle than the other theaters so that children can see over adults in the audience. It’s a playful space, with a purple and orange dot pattern inspired by desert wildflowers on the walls, fabric, and carpets. This theater is the home of Stageworks, the Arts Center’s own multigenerational stage company previously known as Mesa Youth Theater.

The Virginia G. Piper Repertory Theater with 550 seats on two levels is the next largest theater. It is designed to reflect a cool desert garden with trellises lining the walls and a color scheme emphasizing different shades of green. Unique features of this theater are stage ramps that wrap the audience on the first level and provide entrances and exits for the performers. This theater has a radius design, hydraulically controlled, orchestra pit that may be used as part of the stage, for seating, or at its lowest level as an orchestra pit. The Piper Theater hosts local companies such as Southwest Shakespeare and Arizona Theater Company as well as Performing Live events.

The stunning 1,600 seat Ikeda Theater is the largest of the Mesa Arts Centers theaters. It is named for Mesa’s Ikeda family who donated \$1 million dollars toward the building of the Mesa Arts Center.

The design of the Ikeda Theater was inspired by the colorful canyons of Arizona. Recessed LED lights with a possible 980 lighting combinations light the articulated walls. This elegant theater features copper railings, beech wood floors, and seats imported from France.

As in the Piper Theater, the orchestra pit may be positioned at different levels for use as added stage area, extra seating, or a pit for the live orchestras that accompany many of the Broadway style shows appearing in the this theater. The Ikeda Theater is the home venue for the Symphony of the Southwest (formerly Mesa Symphony), Ballet Etudes, and the Metropolitan Youth Symphony, as well as hosting internationally touring performers and local user groups.



The campus has a 700 foot long promenade, known as the Shadow Walk, which extends from Main St. to 1st Ave. and connects all the buildings on the campus. The Shadow Walk’s name is derived from the many Teflon-coated fiberglass sails positioned above the plaza and walkways, and on the face of the theater lobby.



The “Arroyo”, a 300-foot water feature, runs the length of the theaters. All water features on campus use recycled water. Three gardens along the Shadow Walk feature colored glass panels and different types of Arizona cacti. The northernmost garden is the location for the free “Out to Lunch” concerts held Tuesdays and Thursdays in the spring and fall.

The Mesa Contemporary Arts includes 5 visual arts galleries that host an ongoing series of changing exhibitions in a variety of media. A courtyard located just outside the lower entrances to the MCA galleries hosts artists’ receptions, “Sound in the Ground” concerts and membership events.



The two Studios buildings house 14 visual and performing arts studios and classrooms, the registration office and administrative offices. Classes offered through a partnership with Mesa Community College include: ceramics, glass, drawing and painting, printmaking, jewelry, sculpture, photography, multimedia, acting, drama, dance and music.

“The Store” at the Mesa Arts Center carries a great selection of works created by MAC instructors, students and local artists. All proceeds benefit the Mesa Arts Center, and best of all sales are tax-free!

Our free guided campus tours are offered Wednesdays at noon, and you can reserve your space by calling 480-644-6626. I hope to see you soon on a tour; or strolling on campus, visiting art exhibits, or attending a performance. And don’t forget, you can find virtually anything you want to know about the Arts Center by visiting the web site at [www.mesaartscenter.com](http://www.mesaartscenter.com).

## Guest Speakers

And what speakers they were – all twelve of them! On February 20<sup>th</sup> RECOM hosted the three mayoral candidates and the twelve district candidates for a lively presentation and Q and A session at 1:00PM in the Main Library.

Unfortunately most of RECOM’s members must have voted early by mail since very few attended the session. A bit embarrassing – since we wanted to show the candidates that RECOM was a force to be reckoned with. That may not have been evident from the 20 or so people who were in the audience. 20 out of 650 – well you know how to do percentages, right?



Frank Mizner acted as MC or referee if needed, and asked the questions prepared by the Board and submitted by audience members. Luckily he didn’t need to referee – not even close! In fact, he set such a cordial tone by thanking all candidates for running and for their service to the community that the general atmosphere among candidates and audience was – well – extremely cordial. National campaign managers take note!

Since the election results are well known by now, we will highlight only a few of the questions and the answers by the candidates who won – so that you can see what they do after June 1. Not all candidates got to answer each question since we only had two hours – and there was no provision for overnight parking in the library parking lot. Of course there is still the run-off between Mr. Smith and Mr. Griswold as well as the one in District 5 between Ms. Higgins and Mr. Austin.

A genuine concern for the City in the future rather than tearing down past and current City policies was the theme of the candidates’ opening statements.

The mayoral candidates agreed that the City had fine foundations and had done good things in the past. But that was then and this is now.

Scott Smith wanted to make the City a “place to be proud of.” Rex Griswold felt the City needed a strong, accessible, engaging leader that would provide a “face” that the outside world could identify with Mesa – like Herb Drinkwater was in Scottsdale.



There were more than a dozen questions, ranging from light rail, to Mesa’s business climate; from Pawn shops to a vision for the City. The first one was near and dear to our hearts: **“Would you be willing to sign a pledge promising never to cut, reduce, or eliminate city sponsored benefits of current retirees? – while you are on the council?”**

Council candidates **Phil Austin, and Dina Higgins** said that they could sign such a pledge because a promise is a promise and the City should honor its promises. Mr. Austin added: “You (the retirees) kept your commitment to us. We need to keep ours to you.”



All the other candidates said they could not sign such a pledge because they didn’t know what the future would bring.

All said they would keep the City’s real or implied promise of healthcare benefits for retirees in mind, but could not pledge never to change them substantially or never to eliminate them.

The question on what can be done to discourage **pawnshops and payday loan stores** from setting up shop in Mesa sparked a variety of answers.

Mr. Richins believes that Council Use Permits should be employed. Mr. Griswold pointed out that we have the legislature to thank for these types of businesses since it was the legislature that made 500% interest rates legal in AZ. In other states, he says, people who charge that kind of interest collect on the loans with lead pipes!



Mr. Smith would raise the level of discourse – would encourage desirable business by giving them help in maneuvering through the red tape of regulations and requirements and making them welcome – and of course **not** helping undesirable businesses.

From the sleazy to the sublime? The question on the Mesa Arts Center got a bit of a rise out of the candidates.

**Would you be in favor of privatizing the MAC? Yes or no by show of hands.**

They wouldn’t raise their hands! Imagine that! They said “No fair! There is no “yes” or “no” answer to such a question.” After a while, everybody chuckled and we did get an answer.

Basically, nobody wants to sell it now, but everybody agreed that a public private partnership would be the best solution.

Mr. Kavanaugh pointed out that this is essentially what we have now. There is a partnership between the City and the MAC Foundation of which Mr. Kavanaugh is a very active board member.

**On light rail into downtown**, Mr. Smith was happy it was extended into Mesa, but takes a “wait and see” approach to extending it downtown, Mr. Griswold thinks it should be extended into downtown Mesa, probably along 1st Ave. – where it will draw high rise buildings, and denser population. It will go right past the new court building, the MAC and nearby City Hall. He thinks it will be an economic engine.

Mr. Kavanaugh is delighted that it will extend into downtown and thinks it is good for the MAC.



A couple of questions that essentially were **property rights questions** got a uniform response that indicated candidates, favored the rights of the property owner after all city regulations were satisfied. All candidates would include the neighbors in discussions – but generally property rights prevailed.



Mr. Smith’s son, who up to that point had attended 18 of the 20 forums held in the city, declared it one of the best organized and liveliest of the forums he had attended.

RECOM thanks all the candidates for their time and members for their attention and courtesy.

## Reports

Since this was not a regular meeting, we did not have reports from any of the officers.

## Program Committee

The next regular meeting will be held in the Community Room of the fire station at Mesa Dr. and 1st Street on Wednesday, **March 19<sup>th</sup>** at 9:00AM The speaker will be

Pat Esparza, Director  
Mesa Life Options

an organization which aims to help retired folks lead interesting and active lives, by making them aware of community activities, hobbies and travel.

There will also be an opportunity for anyone who would still like to run for a position on the RECOM Board of directors to be nominated from the floor.

The **April meeting** will be held on Wednesday the 16<sup>th</sup>. RECOM elections will take place at that meeting. The speaker will be John Bemish from Home Depot. He will be discussing home improvement, including classes offered and other help for do-it-yourself projects.

Our very own John Gendron came up with catchy title suggestions for this presentation that included “leaking, sagging and bulging” and we think it referred to items in one’s **house**. But since we weren’t sure, we omitted his suggestions!

## Announcements

Anyone interested in submitting articles or pictures of interest to the membership for publication in the newsletter is welcome to send them via email to [bseperich@aol.com](mailto:bseperich@aol.com). Anyone interested in being newsletter editor should notify John Gendron at [jsgendron@yahoo.com](mailto:jsgendron@yahoo.com)

## Upcoming Events

The Board is planning to offer a pre-retirement seminar in June. More details on this in the next newsletter.