

SanTan Sun News

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Mayor's swan song: City soaring like an eagle

BY PAUL MARYNIAK
Executive Editor

Mayor Jay Tibshraony on Tuesday delivered a sweeping vision of Chandler's accomplishments in the past year and its future in the final State of the City address of his tenure, citing numerous examples of why the city has become and will remain "the Innovation and Technology Hub of the Southwest."

Although he focused much of his address on recent and future business development, Tibshraony also extolled the city's stable financial condition, its

sophisticated public safety network and its vibrant neighborhoods and special events that comprise "world-class Chandler."

"Let's lay in on a theme I like to call 'Grown in Chandler,'" he said in his opening remarks. "Things that are uniquely Chandler or, at the very least, had their beginnings in the community — entrepreneurs, ideas, amenities. Those things that come together to form our city's personality, our character, our ethos."

He lavished praise on businesses that "encompass the entrepreneurial

spirit that has made our community so successful" and have "have captured niche markets with creative ideas and solid business plans."

"They come from places like retail and service, the tech sector, software development, Gangplank and our own innovations incubator as well as our higher education partners — Arizona State University and the University of Arizona — public safety teams, well-managed infrastructure and a solid financial position."

He said the city has been forging ahead with "a marketing strategy that

provides education on the investing process, the recruitment of angels and ongoing education and mentorship to budding business owners."

Those "angels" are investors the city is developing with the East Valley Partnership to "identify, educate and activate" new businesses.

While he was reviewing many of the big developments of 2017, Tibshraony also dropped some news into his speech.

He announced that Liberty Mutual Insurance is moving into the Chandler

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Even without a diamond, Chandler Compadres shine



BY JIM WALSH
Staff

The Chandler Compadres are hoping to raise \$1 million for disadvantaged children this year, even though they have not had a Cactus League ballpark as a source of revenue for more than 20 years.

While Compadre Stadium, with its distinctive blue roof and large outfield berm, has vanished and become a pleasant Cactus League memory, the Compadres have flourished and stayed true to their community service mission.

As the 2018 Cactus League season is set to begin in a matter of days, the resourceful Compadres will again continue

to make a more lasting impression even if they have a much lower-profile than during their baseball heyday.

Milwaukee Brewers Hall of Famers Robin Yount and Paul Molitor once played at Compadre Stadium. So did New York Yankees Hall of Famer Derek Jeter, who was once a teammate of basketball great Michael Jordan on the Chandler Diamondbacks, an Arizona Fall League team.

Baseball legends Willie Mays, Willie McCovey, Tony Oliva and Harmon Killebrew all participated in fantasy camps at Compadre.

Hall of Famers Jim Palmer and Ken

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Chandler's Compadres Staff Photographer

Compadre Stadium, shown in the top photo, closed more than 20 years ago but left Sun Lakes resident Frank Pozzocello, its former general manager, with memories for a lifetime.

Chandler still reaps spring baseball's economic benefits

BY WAYNE SCHUTSKY
Staff

Even without a Cactus League stadium, Chandler and Gilbert still reap some of the revenue driven by Major League Baseball's preseason.

The Cactus League has a significant economic impact on the East Valley — home to a total of three spring training stadiums in Mesa and Tempe.

Chandler and Gilbert see significant tax revenue spikes every March, an indicator

that both municipalities benefit from their neighbors' three spring training facilities.

Gilbert brings in an average of just over \$69,000 in bed taxes in March, according to numbers provided by the town. That average ranks second behind April's average of \$72,644.

"March has consistently been our best month for occupancy and overall demand, while having the highest average-

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Griffey Jr. filmed commercials there.

Frank Pezzorello, the ballpark's former general manager, said he even had Yankees legend Mickey Mantle scheduled for a fantasy camp at one point, but Mantle became ill and had to cancel.

Not a trace remains of Compadre Stadium, which had been located at Alma School and Ocotillo roads. The 65-acre site of the ballpark that once entertained thousands is now home to a sea of red tile roofs in the upscale Echelon at Ocotillo master-planned community.

The only reminder of that 11-year era is the nearby Snedigar Sports Complex, built in 1990 as practice fields for the Brewers. It remains a major south Chandler sports facility, with baseball, softball and soccer fields, along with a skate park and a dog park.

The Compadres did not settle for getting shut out when the Brewers moved to the Maryvale Baseball Park in 1998.

Without baseball as an obvious focal point, they turned to a series of other fundraisers — a golf tournament, a rock concert, a sports car giveaway, a state tax write off — and turned what once looked like a serious loss into a grand slam for disadvantaged children.

"When they lost the ballpark, they made a transition," said Ryan Foster, acting president of the Compadres and a member since 2008, referring to the organization's 60 life members, many of whom volunteered their time at the stadium.



Frank Pezzorello's home is loaded with mementos from Compadre Stadium, where he was general manager of operations.

Now, he added, "We have really grown the charity and increased revenues each year" even though none of its 40 active members date back to the baseball era.

The life members include Farmer Dwayne Dobson, realtor Bill Ryan and Pezzorello, the former stadium operations general manager and a past president of the Compadres.

"It took away a big revenue source," Foster said, when Compadre Stadium stopped functioning as a Cactus League facility after the 1997 season. "These guys could have easily wrapped things up and said, 'We have no source of revenue. But they didn't do that.'"

The big winners are such children's charities as the Boys and Girls Clubs of the East Valley, Chandler ICAN, Azcard and the Chandler Education Foundation. A graphic prepared by the organization lists



Before it was torn down, the shell of Compadre Stadium languished for several years before giving way to an upscale neighborhood.

donations rising from \$520,000 in 2014 to \$660,000 in 2015 to \$707,000 in 2016 and \$807,000 in 2017.

In contrast, the organization raised about \$50,000 in 1997, the last year that the Brewers played at Compadre, Pezzorello said.

The next major fundraiser is the annual Compadres Golf Classic at Talking Stick Golf Resort near Scottsdale on April 20, which features two premier 18-hole golf courses.

The tournament fields 80 teams with a total 320 golfers and raises money

Pezzorello said Cactus League baseball probably came to Chandler too early before the city had adequate hotels, restaurants and other attractions that would have appealed to tourists.

He has no doubt that today's more mature Chandler could support a team. It all started when former Chandler Mayor Jim Patterson, a real estate developer who founded Ocotillo, persuaded the Brewers to move from Sun City to Chandler. Patterson put together a partnership that spent \$1.6 million to build Compadre Stadium.

From the start, it was envisioned that the ballpark would be expanded, but that never happened. Instead, a rebuilding and renovation plan became the blueprint for the new Maryvale ballpark in west Phoenix.

Compadre Stadium got off to a tragic start when Tony Musser, the Brewers third base coach, suffered second and third degree burns over 55 percent of his body in a natural gas explosion on Feb. 27, 1986.

The explosion occurred when a worker turned on a heater in the coach's room, not realizing that there was gas in the line. Eight other players and coaches were injured. A player was knocked off his chair by the explosion, which also buckled the roof.

Musser survived after spending four months recovering in a burn unit, but he lost an opportunity to become the team's manager later that year because of his injuries. He eventually became the manager of the Kansas City Royals and spent a lifetime in baseball as a player and coach.

Things also got better at Compadre Stadium for a while after the explosion. "I'm still proud of it. I have so many memories," Pezzorello said. "The biggest part for me is the friendships. Ballplayers, volunteers, we had some great times."

He said the Cactus League has changed since those simpler times, with the role of community organizations such as the Compadres somewhat diminished. Still, some civic groups remain active in the East Valley, including the Mesa Hohokams, the Tempe Diablos and the Scottsdale Charros.

"All of those groups are still making money for their charities, but their roles are more limited," Pezzorello said. "I would say it was more community-oriented. We had hundreds of volunteers help us every day. It was like that at all the ballparks."

At Compadre Stadium, the volunteers

"did it all" for every game, parking cars, selling tickets and programs and serving as ushers.

Pezzorello said Compadre had about 5,000 seats and could accommodate another 5,000 fans seated on the berm.



Special to Santan Sun News

Ryan Foster is acting president of the Chandler Compadres.

"We broke 10,000 one year with the Cubs," Pezzorello said, noting attendance for one season exceeded 100,000 despite the small ballpark.

But the ballpark's popularity did not pay off for Chandler.

Dave Bigos, a city spokesman, said the lack of hotels and restaurants at that time contributed to fans driving to Chandler for the game and leaving.

Chandler saw little or no increase in sales tax revenues from baseball, making the extensive improvements requested by the Brewers seem like a poor investment, he said.

"The timing just wasn't right for the community, given where we were with the hotels and restaurants," Bigos said. "We must have 20 times the restaurants and hotels we had back then."

Although Foster is proud of his organization's perseverance, he said he wishes Chandler still had a Cactus League ballpark.

"We are creating our own revenue right now," Foster said. "With something like that, we could easily go into the millions." ■