



Viewpoint & Opinion

"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, it expects what never was and never will be." — Thomas Jefferson

Letters to the Editor

Deadline for letters to the editor is 5 p.m. on Thursday. All letters and faxes must include your name, residential address and a daytime phone number. Addresses and phone numbers will not be published, but are needed for verification of authenticity. Please keep your letters to 300 words or less.

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Likes Kollenborn

I have been reading stories about the Superstition Mountain written by Tom Kollenborn, and seldom have I been so enthralled by any subject. His stories are short, exciting and make you want to go visit the places that he writes about. However, the heat, lack of humidity as well as the terrain are factors that I will think twice about, well more than twice. Kudos to him and his stories. Incidentally; I read each of the stories on that Web page.

Deborah King, Leland, NC

School Budget Override

Mr. Tom Andrews' Letter to the Editor of last week unfortunately was in error as to the number of Apache Junction Unified School District (AJUSD) M&O override questions that have been defeated in recent years. There have been only two defeats — once in May, 2007, at which time less than 7 percent of the electorate went to the polls, and once again in November, 2007, when the question was brought back to the voters in the hopes of having a higher voter participation level.

Meanwhile, cost cutting in the following areas of our maintenance and operations (M&O) has been an ongoing process in the school district over the last two years, including the following cutbacks:

- A total of 93 jobs have been cut, across the board from administrators to custodians/maintenance/clerical to teachers.
- A hiring freeze was imposed in late 2008.
- All employees took a salary freeze for the 2009-2010 contract year.
- Almost all grass has been eliminated and school sites have gone to desert landscaping to cut water costs.
- Transportation services were eliminated for students living closer than one mile from school and almost all field trips have been cancelled.
- Student athletic and extracurricular fees have been imposed on parents.
- School operating budgets have been reduced.
- Departmental operating budgets have been reduced.

The AJUSD Gov. Board has decided to put an up-to-10 percent M&O Override question to the voters in the face of unprecedented cuts in state education aid creating the "perfect financial storm". The governing board and district personnel have made a commitment to excellence in education that they feel duty-bound to honor and would be hard-pressed to accomplish with current diminished funding levels. It is felt that the community deserves the opportunity to decide for itself if a top-notch education for our students is a priority or not.

Objective information, including the costs to taxpayers and expenditure plans and possible further cutbacks in programs and services, for the scheduled Maintenance and Operation Override question will be available to all voters. We urge all residents to become educated regarding this issue so that whatever way you decide to vote, you will be making an informed decision.

Betty Swanson, AJUSD Community Services Department

More on School Override

The editor pointed out that Mr. Andrews (letter to the editor, June 29, 2009) was incorrect in his recounting of overrides in the past. I suspect that there will be more letters like his attacking our board, our district, and our local officials. But it seems to be a trend that the loudest critics don't bother to get the facts. The school budget is a public record, balanced and voted on in public meetings, audited by independent state auditors, and available for inspection. How can you say you don't know what the money is spent on (unless you just don't want to actually see the budget)?

I have one thing in common with Mr. Andrews and that is I don't like taxes any more than the next guy. But having three children in the district, I care about the quality of education they are given. The students of today will become our civic leaders, mechanics, doctors, soldiers, nurses, engineers of tomorrow — the same citizens who will be taking care of us in our old age. Our future is worth the investment. The actual taxes for a household would be relatively low compared to the long term benefit to our society. I believe the district is trying to provide the most cost effective education possible in a very difficult economic time.

The fact is that the formulas used by the state to fund districts provides an inadequate level of funding. Many districts in Arizona are forced to bring O&M overrides to the public for a vote because the cost of education often exceeds the low level of state funding. The override is required by law if the proposed budget is larger than the state formula provides. The district has made deep

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Guest Commentary

By Thom Parker, Vice President
Apache Junction Police Officers Association
Fraternal Order of Police

We, the Apache Junction Police Officers Association / Fraternal Order of Police, are seeking public support regarding the current state budget situation as it has a significant impact on local municipalities, especially us here in Apache Junction.

We are writing to respectfully discourage the Legislature from diverting millions of vehicle license tax (VLT) proceeds and development impact fees from cities and towns. One of the legislative proposals under consideration, as a means to substitute for a state general fund obligation, is to divert city and town VLT funds to school districts. The Arizona State Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) strongly disagrees with this legislative effort.

In addition, the legislative budget proposal contains a major new provision that completely eliminates the ability of cities and towns to collect development impact fees for a

period of three years. Development impact fees are paid by builders and developers to pay for the construction of necessary infrastructure such as streets, sewers, police & fire stations, parks and other items that serve new developments.

This practice, which already has many statutory limits and rules for implementation, is based on the principle of growth pays for itself. Impact fees cannot be used for salaries or general operations, only to install infrastructure for new development. This prevents those currently living in the community for having to pay higher taxes to support new growth.

The great majority of public safety personnel in Arizona are police officers. Most police officers in Arizona are employed in more than 100 municipal police departments. Public safety is a core responsibility of cities and towns as it is here in Apache

The News Opinion Poll

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Last Week's Results: Question: Do you plan to participate in any of the "Day of the Cowboy" events set for July 25?

Yes 46.3%
No 53.7%

This Week's Question: Do you approve of the state legislature balancing the state budget using revenue funds from Arizona's cities and towns?

Yes No

Junction.

It is our understanding that public safety departments will be adversely impacted should these proceeds be diverted. At this time, diversion of the VLT and impact fees from cities and towns will make it very difficult to maintain police budgets. In addition, with the unemployment rate higher than before property crimes and violence have been on a rise and we cannot afford to reduce public safety personnel or their budgets in protecting our community.

We appreciate the difficult

job our elected officials are doing during this difficult financial position of the State of Arizona and thank them. However, public safety is the core government function at both the state and local level. We respectfully discourage the Legislature from diverting any funds away from cities and towns that are used to provide public safety funding and ask for public support in contacting and contacting your elected officials to oppose any funds being taken away from towns and cities.

Kollenborn's Chronicles

Read the Chronicles archive at www.SuperstitionMountain.info

Gold In West Texas

By Tom Kollenborn
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Dreams of finding a lost gold mine was in the minds of the "over-the-hill" prospecting gang from the "Land of Oz." Please let me explain!

Peter Gardiner, 68, is a retired homicide detective and British Embassy Security Agent from England, Robert "Bob" K. Corbin, 80, a retired Arizona State Attorney General and, the third member of the gang, yours truly, age 71. Believe it or not we could all see the headlines as we drove from Apache Junction to West Texas. "Retired Attorney General of Arizona, Retired English Detective, Retired Educator and Cowboy Discover Rich West Texas Gold Mine." Dreamers all we were as we drove across the barren and deserted desert land between Apache Junction and Van Horn, Texas.

This was Peter's second trip to Apache Junction in search of gold. His first trip involved the Lost Dutchman State Park in 1981. He had pin-pointed a gold deposit in the area that was actually a vein associated with the old Mammoth Mine. The vein proved valueless in the end and Peter returned to England empty-handed. However, while here in Arizona for the first time, Peter made several trips into the Superstition Wilderness Area on horseback. This English detective was fascinated with the west and the many stories of lost gold mines. Peter was introduced to Bob Corbin and heard more interesting stories about the Lost Dutchman gold mine. Bob Corbin and I have spent close to twenty years roaming around the Superstition Wilderness Area on horseback looking for clues to the old Dutchman's mine.

Interesting enough the Lost Dutchman mine brought the three of us together again some twenty-eight years later in the spring of 2009. Peter contacted me in January of that year about a lost gold ledge located in the Eagle



Left to right, Bob Corbin and Peter Gardiner meet with ranchowner "Kit" Bramblett for the first time in Sierra Blanco, Texas.

Mountains of West Texas near the Rio Grande River and south of Sierra Blanco. The gold ledge was located on a Texas rancher's land. It just happen the Texas rancher was also the county attorney of Hudspeth County, Texas. Peter called Mr. C. R. "Kit" Bramblett and introduced himself. He explained to Mr. Bramblett that he had located a rich gold ledge on his property and Mr. Bramblett agreed to allow Peter to visit his property and examine the site. Peter drew up a legal agreement according to the laws of England, but Mr. Bramblett thought Peter should use the laws of the United States and Texas. Peter agreed and then asked him if he could bring two friends along. Those two friends Peter identified as Mr. Robert K. Corbin and Tom Kollenborn. "Kit," as Mr. Bramblett liked to be called, said he had been riding this country on horseback for seventy years and couldn't imagine missing such a gold ledge in this country or on his property.

Mr. Bramblett's statement did not deter Peter in any way. He was determined to search the top of Eagle Mountain for this rich gold vein he believed was there. When I first observed the area upon our arrival, the Eagle Mountains appeared to be marine limestone. We stopped along to the road to Kit's ranch and



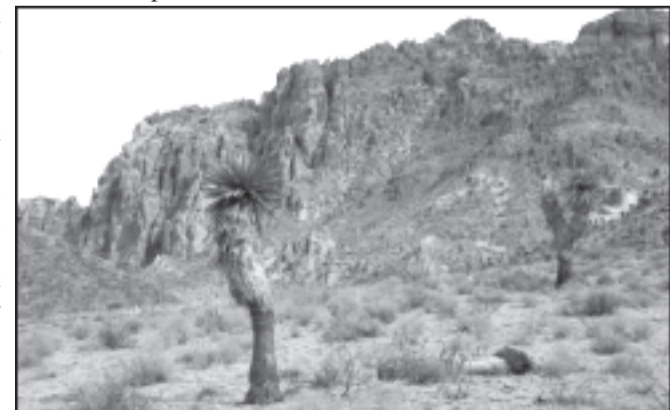
Tom Kollenborn

Kit's Ranch was 619 miles.

We continued our search based on an 1851 story of a railroad surveyor who went into these mountains southeast of Sierra Blanco and allegedly found a rich deposit of gold. Many of the locals thought he found his gold in the Eagle Mountains because of how rugged they were and inaccessible. These mountains were much like the Superstition Mountains of Arizona.

We continued our search for a couple of days and finally decided we were not properly prepared for such an undertaking. We were all over age seventy, except for Peter. As we departed West Texas and began our journey back to Apache Junction we realized how significant the trip really was. We made some wonderful friends in West Texas and heard a lot of wonderful stories of life along the Rio Grande River. The stories included cowboys, Texas Rangers, Native Americans and Mexican bandits. Yes, my friends we did find some real gold in West Texas in form of wonderful friendships.

We had all heard about Texas hospitality, but never realized how great it was until to met wonderful people like Kit and Jerry Bramblett of Sierra Blanco, Texas.



The rugged Eagle Mountains of West Texas.

Foothills Publishing, Inc.

of Apache Junction



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