



VIEWPOINTS INSIDE

SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS STAND AS VALLEY-ALTERING INNOVATIONS

PAGE B11

Before sustainability was mainstream, forward-thinking Valley leaders were developing legacy projects, such as Indian Bend Wash, that enhanced our community's lifestyle.

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SECTION B

VIEWPOINTS



INDIAN BEND WASH



RIO SALADO PROJECT



ORPHEUM THEATRE



INTEL FAB PLANTS



METRO LIGHT RAIL

LEGACY BUILDERS

5 projects that changed the face of the Valley

By Bill Meek

Thirty years ago, the Valley of the Sun was a very different place. There were almost no freeways. Rivers and washes flooded roadways every rainy season. For two weeks in 1980, the only way across the Salt River was by train.

Back then, tourists were still looking for Jacob Waltz's gold. The Phoenix Suns played at the Arizona Coliseum. The Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station was not yet operating. There was no Mayo Clinic and no casinos and Joe Arpaio wasn't sheriff.

The population was one-third what it is today (4.3 million), but growing 8 percent a

year. New subdivisions and shopping centers were sprouting like weeds. In short, the Valley was fettered by the past but reaching toward a hazy future.

Against that backdrop, Valley Forward Association blazed a new trail among Southwestern communities with its Environmental Excellence Awards program (EEA), designed to encourage and reward environmental stewardship in public and private developments.

While we can count more than 400 award winners over the years, we also hope that a number of them were home runs — that they altered the face of the community and made it more livable. In that vein, we

looked back at the EEA record and came up with five outstanding examples.

The latest game changers will be spotlighted on Saturday at Valley Forward's 30th Annual Environmental Excellence Awards program, presented in partnership with SRP, at the Phoenixian.

Throughout this program's rich history, EEA winners have helped ensure a promising and sustainable future for our region. Their legacy projects are timeless.

Bill Meek was chairman of Valley Forward Association in 1979-1980 and initiated the organization's inaugural Environmental Excellence Awards program.

Read about 5 Environmental Excellence Award winners that changed the face of the Valley. Page B12

Top projects embrace sustainability

When Valley Forward launched the Environmental Excellence Awards three decades ago, the objective was fairly simple: to encourage first-rate planning, design and architecture in private developments and public places. We also wanted to reward innovative thinking and risk-taking that benefited our urban environment.

As time passed, our emphasis shifted subtly toward projects that enhance our collective understanding of the need for sustainable practices to preserve the Valley's unique lifestyle. This year's competition received a record 150 entries in 22 categories, indicating that people who design and build things are paying attention.

The *Arizona Republic* asked us to pick a few examples of award winners that we believe have stood the test of time. The legacy projects we've selected to spotlight also stand in testimony to forward thinking by Valley leaders who embraced the concept of sustainability long before it became mainstream.

— Bill Meek

INDIAN BEND WASH — 1981

Treacherous zone now a greenbelt

In 1981, the first year the awards were presented, we struck gold with completion of the 17-year Indian Bend Wash project.

The city of Scottsdale, aided by federal, state and county agencies, tamed a murderous flood zone that ran through the middle of the city. It was, and is, one of the best examples in the country of converting useless dirt into a major community asset.

During heavy rains, Indian Bend drained the mountains north of Scottsdale and sent water roaring south for seven miles to the Salt River. When running, most of the wash was impassable and occasionally a lethal encounter for an inattentive motorist.

After considerable wrangling, Scottsdale rejected a proposal to channel floodwaters through a huge concrete ditch and chose to build an engineered greenbelt housing recreation facilities that could spring back to life after a flood passed.



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Scottsdale's Indian Bend Wash project offers lakes, golf courses, tennis courts, bike trails and swimming pools.

When completed, Indian Bend offered lakes, golf courses, tennis courts, bike trails and swimming pools to residents. Of 1,200 acres in the greenbelt, more than 300 were devoted to city parks. Today, its banks are lined with apartments and condominiums and 60,000 people live within walking distance.

ORPHEUM THEATRE — 1997

1929 masterpiece restored to glory

Along with Heritage Square, the restored Orpheum Theatre offers proof in downtown Phoenix that the city has a history. The Orpheum is visited by thousands of people every year who attend musical and theatrical performances and take tours of a remarkable structure.

Opened in 1929, just ahead of the Great Depression, the Orpheum was an entertainment landmark, at once a vaudeville house and the most luxurious movie palace west of the Mississippi. Designed in a Spanish Baroque motif, the Orpheum boasted ornate interiors and intricate design elements.

Through the next five decades, the Orpheum experienced multiple owners, changing uses and painting, plastering and remodeling that obscured its past glory. In 1984, it was purchased by the city of Phoenix with the explicit understanding that it would be completely restored.

The restoration was a public-private



CITY OF PHOENIX

Over five decades, the Orpheum Theatre experienced multiple owners and remodeling that obscured its past glory.

endeavor that took nearly 10 years and cost \$14.5 million. The result is a fully functional and vibrant entertainment facility that provides a doorway to the city's past.

Enter the Orpheum and you will feel how Phoenix thought of itself in 1929 and, perhaps, how we feel about our city today.

RIO SALADO PROJECT — 1989

Plan changed character of Tempe

Turning the usually dry but sometimes flooded Salt River bed into a functional asset has been a community dream since the 1970s when a group of ASU architectural students envisioned miles of riverbed converted into a chain of lakes rimmed with residential, commercial, recreation and entertainment amenities.

The Rio Salado Project, as it was called, languished for nearly 20 years while the community argued about how to pay for it.

Then, in 1989, the city of Tempe offered its own scaled-down plan for developing the Salt River within the city's boundaries. The heart of the project was Tempe Town Lake, based loosely on the students' original concept.

In the years after its completion, Town Lake became the most visited site in Arizona after the Grand Canyon, but that's not the only measure of its impact.

Tempe is a small, land-locked city with no room to grow horizontally. Its future is to grow vertically as an



DAVID WALLACE/THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

In the years after its completion, Town Lake became the most visited site in Arizona after the Grand Canyon.

urban hub. The ASU campus has never provided enough impetus to support office towers that would house corporate headquarters, high-value residential space or supporting retail activity. Tempe Town Lake provided that impetus.

Today, Tempe is suffering brief setbacks with a parched lakebed and a dry real-estate market, but they will come back and Tempe's character has changed forever.

INTEL FAB PLANTS — 1997 AND 2002

Plants are models for manufacturers

It used to be in the Valley that a chip-fabricating plant (FAB) was pretty much a glass-and-concrete box where sand went in one end and silicon wafers came out the other. That began to change in 1996, when Intel built FAB 12 in Chandler.

Intel decided that it wanted to integrate its factory with the desert environment, emphasizing natural, drought-resistant vegetation that also depended mainly on reclaimed water. As a result, FAB 12 won a top EEA award for site development and landscaping.

Fast-forward six years. Intel moved on to FAB 22 and wanted to get to the next level in environmental technology. It turns out that potable water is one of the main consumptive uses in chip production, so Intel and the city of Chandler joined forces to reduce Intel's consumption of city water and increase the amount of water that could be returned to the groundwater supply for beneficial use.

For example, by applying several reuse and conservation strategies, In-



INTEL

tel sends 370 million gallons of process water to Chandler's treatment facility for future reuse and the plant takes 255 million gallons of reclaimed water from the city for use in its cooling towers, scrubbers and landscaping.

FAB 22 claimed an EEA award for environmental technology but also provided a model for other Valley manufacturers to follow in designing new or upgraded facilities.

Alternative transit may shape Valley development

The past, they say, is prologue. Our latest example has very little past but an unlimited future. It is the Metro Light Rail Project, which won an EEA President's Award in 2009 for special achievement in environmental excellence.

Light rail opened for business in December 2008, connecting Phoenix, Tempe and Mesa with 20 miles of street-level rail service. With a price tag of \$1.4 billion, it was the largest single transportation project in state history.

The long-range plan is for 57 miles of track to connect most of the urban hubs in metropolitan Phoenix.

Ridership has been brisk, although fares and operating schedules are a work in progress in the current economic climate. Will light rail solve the Valley's transportation problems? Let's just say it's not likely that a freeway commuter will notice a change in the daily grind due to light rail.

However, light rail has shown that Valley residents will embrace an alternative to the automobile if it is convenient and reasonably priced.

Light-rail ridership has demonstrated that residents in metro Phoenix will embrace an alternative to the automobile if it is convenient and reasonably priced.

nient and reasonably priced.

That means that light rail may contribute to a major change in the Valley's patterns of development as residential, retail and commercial improvements gravitate to light-rail corridors. That will increase density and contribute to a more sustainable future.



METRO LIGHT RAIL