

Scottsdale Mayor Mary Manross
State of the City Address
Jan. 10, 2001

Thank you for the warm reception. It's great to be with you on such a beautiful evening. Scottsdale is truly a special place - and we are going to keep it that way!

Scottsdale's unique character first beckoned me in 1972 when our family left the congestion, pollution, and frantic pace of Southern California searching for a better place to live and raise our children.

Scottsdale was everything we wanted. The roads seemed nicer and cleaner here, uncluttered by blaring billboards and other commercial signs. Downtown was just that - a focal point of the community with its distinctive Southwestern architecture, interesting shops and galleries, pedestrian walks, a distinctive civic center mall taking shape, ideal for community events ... and there was a small-town feel.

The ranch homes, the parks, the wide expanse of desert and mountains rising in the north - all of it blended into a friendly and unforgettable character. I turned to my husband, Larry, and said, "This is it. We're home."

For all of us gathered here tonight or watching on television, I hope this remains home - not just in a physical sense, but in a spiritual way. Together, we represent the "pulse of the community", its values, its character, and its concerns.

I stand before you tonight,... a new generation of leadership for Scottsdale, poised to lead our community into the new century, cognizant of the past and the roots of our uniqueness.

As your mayor, I pledge to do my best to preserve and enhance those things that make Scottsdale special and to marshal all of our resources to resolve those challenges we face.

When I look out into the audience, I see only residents -- not: male or female, young or old, black or white, rich or poor, north or south.

As your mayor, I will represent all of you. I feel fortunate to be working with colleagues who believe as strongly as I do in open government for all.

I'm a mayor who fights for ideals -- as well as legislation, One who works to turn rancor into reasoned debate, a mayor who does not speak from the rear of the battle, but who leads from the front.

Someone who listens....

Yes, Scottsdale is a great community, but we CAN get better! And that starts with listening!

It's time to "Begin anew."

Over the past 50 years, Scottsdale has been known for its unparalleled citizen involvement, deep concern for the environment, and willingness to question the status quo. These are all very commendable attributes, which we must retain into the future.

However, Scottsdale's "fast-forward" mode in the 80's and 90's -- with so much growth - - has brought the need to evaluate not only what worked, but what changes we need to make.

Winston Churchill once said, "If we quarrel between the present and the past, we shall be in danger of losing the future."

Today our concern must be with the future. Obviously our world is changing, Scottsdale is maturing, the old era is ending, the old ways no longer apply.

The decade of the 80's began with a commonly held perception: By aggressively promoting growth, our citizens would enjoy an ever-improving quality of life.

As the last decade unfolded, this conviction began to fade. Many voices, including mine, began to question the direction the city was headed. We have created a wonderful community, but we are surely now at a crossroads.

Today, we have had to reassess that original hypothesis. We must deal with all of the impacts of growth. Growth will continue, but with much more deliberation and more concern about its impact on neighborhoods and the environment. We've got to keep Scottsdale special!

In recent months, with the support of our city council, we have begun the transition from "fast-forward" to "past-forward" - taking a step back to look at the successes and failures of the past, and to ensure that the things we do today and tomorrow are consistent with our history, our values, and our character.

These are the types of questions asked in today's exercise - and you can see the results on the boards in the atrium. We thank you for your participation, and I can assure you that we will read and take note of every one of your comments.

These are the same kinds of questions the Council struggled to answer this past fall when we held our workshops to establish broad goals for the future.

We agreed on a Mission Statement and goals to guide us. This is a major step forward, one that is necessary to ensure effective government. Failure to reach a consensus would have left us polarized and ineffective.

Our Mission Statement reflects our values and defines the essence of our role as the city government for Scottsdale:

This is what is important to us:

- *Practicing open government
- *Providing quality services
- *Preserving our Southwestern character
- *Managing growth in harmony with our desert
- *Enhancing our neighborhoods
- *And holding quality of life for residents and visitors as the most important consideration

You can count on your new Mayor and Council to strive to achieve these goals!

President John F. Kennedy made a profound statement: “To state the facts frankly, is not to despair the future nor indict the past.”

Clearly, as the president said, we must be honest and forthright about our challenges if we hope to make real progress!

We need some straight talk on the conditions which existed within the city which led citizens to bring a new team to City Hall last spring.

We also need to identify the progress we have already made in addressing those challenges and we must state our goals for the coming months and years.

The negative impacts of growth have become painfully apparent. Recently, high profile referendums left us polarized as we faced one controversy after another.

Council meetings had become increasingly volatile. The downtown needed new direction...but which direction? The Smitty's at McDowell and Granite Reef lay abandoned and Los Arcos was in limbo. The Galleria continued to sit idle.

Our preservation program was moving forward, but the challenge of preserving the 16,600 acres of critical state land was unresolved.

The Desert Greenbelt Project also continued to generate controversy -- between government agencies and among the very people it was designed to protect.

The public was ready for change -- poised for a new direction! This was the lay of the land. These are the issues the new Mayor and council inherited.

These are the issues, which will, in large measure, depending on their outcomes, determine the future of our city.

My goal as the newly elected Mayor has been to address the issues directly, to bring order, civility, respect, and new direction to our city.

With your help we will meet these challenges! In fact, we have already begun!

I am listening. Your City Council is listening. I pledge the doors to City Hall will be open wider than ever before. The voice of every Scottsdale citizen will count -- must count -- if we are to preserve what's great about our past and weave it into our future.

One way we can embrace that past and ensure a great future is through preservation. Preserving the Sonoran Desert and our beautiful McDowell Mountains is the key to slowing growth, maintaining our Southwestern character, and protecting our tourism industry. We must act now. If this natural splendor is destroyed, it can never be recaptured.

In 1995, Scottsdale faced a test of our collective vision. We had to act or the McDowell Mountain wilderness would vanish under the heels of development. Critics scoffed and said such a large and aggressive undertaking couldn't be done. But once again, our community foresight and can-do spirit came through. Today, we have the chance to create one of the finest, most unique nature preserves in the world.

In just five years we have acquired more than 80 percent of the lands originally targeted for preservation in the McDowell Mountains. I am committed to completing the McDowell Sonoran Preserve by adding 16,600 acres of state trust lands.

Once this is accomplished, approximately 57 square miles of Scottsdale's scenic desert and mountains will be set aside to be preserved in perpetuity -- one third of the entire city, an area larger than the city of San Francisco. It will provide a peaceful refuge from the challenges of the day, a place of beauty ... to wonder at nature and truly renew our spirit.

When combined with developed open space, such as parks and golf courses, our total open space will total 74.5 square miles. Scottsdale will be the least densely developed city of its size in the United States!

But more work needs to be done. Those 16,600 acres of state trust lands are absolutely critical to our city's future. They are within our designated preserve boundary, but are yet to be preserved!

If those lands develop, they'll literally become another city, bringing as many as 50,000 new people, pollution, traffic, school over-crowding, and more stress on our resources. Is this something we need - or want?

Absolutely not.

It would compound every problem we currently face. There is another way!

Those precious open spaces will link our existing McDowell Sonoran Preserve with the Tonto National Forest and the county's McDowell Mountain Regional Park. We can maintain a complete ecosystem, ensuring that healthy populations of wildlife roam these lands for generations to come.

Imagine the value of such vibrant open space, within our city, for our children and future generations. Imagine its value to visitors and tourists who come to visit the "Old West" in a world increasingly congested and urbanized.

Tonight I issue a call to action to our community. We must mobilize as never before. We must make every effort to acquire these lands!

Next month is an important step in the process. Our community has applied to the state to have those 16,600 acres of state land designated as conservation lands under the Arizona Preserve Initiative. If we achieve this designation, we will have an opportunity to acquire the land and to determine our own future.

To paraphrase President Ronald Reagan, We are too great a city to limit ourselves to small dreams; the time has come to control the seemingly uncontrollable!

President Reagan's words apply to us today. The time has come for the State of Arizona to allow the City of Scottsdale to determine its own future!

Tonight I call upon each of you to make your voice heard on this critical issue. The public hearing with the State Land Department is at 6 p.m. Feb. 15 at Desert Canyon Middle School.

Your support is critical!
Stand up and be counted!
Let's work together and seize this dream!

There is another challenge before us that goes hand in hand with preservation. I call it revitalization - breathing new life into established areas of our city, including our downtown. This is Scottsdale's newest frontier: nurturing our roots so we can reach our full potential while preserving our past.

We have our share of challenges when it comes to revitalization, just as all communities do. But we also have some good news to share with you.

In voting down the Canals of Scottsdale referendum in 1999 our residents sent a clear message: revitalization and redevelopment are fine, but don't destroy our history in the process.

Your new Mayor and Council are listening!

One of our first acts was to establish a downtown task force. We began by bringing diverse individuals and groups together. We wanted all of their creative energy in one setting. This group will be making some recommendations to the City Council this year. We applaud them for their hard work, their ability to deal with their differences, and their willingness to tackle the complexities of our multifaceted downtown.

It will be protected, enhanced, and revitalized!

One issue which has been controversial for a decade is the bend in Scottsdale Road which exists just south of Camelback.

It restricts the normal flow of traffic on Scottsdale Road and it has discouraged access to shops on the west side of Scottsdale Road.

Your Mayor and City Council voted unanimously to straighten Scottsdale Road! The city will realign the road this summer, when the construction affects the fewest drivers and businesses.

The Galleria, the vacant “White elephant” in our downtown, has been the source of much frustration and controversy. Today, the faded structure is transforming into Scottsdale’s first technology center, bringing skilled workers downtown, more jobs, and new business opportunities.

We have reached an agreement to convert 327 parking spaces to public use to help alleviate our nagging problems in downtown.

The area north of the Canal is coming back to life as well, and it is doing so without putting our historic areas south of the canal at risk. Work is scheduled to begin soon on this development. It will be less intense than previously proposed, more in keeping with the Southwest, and hopefully will bring several live theaters to Scottsdale with the help of our Scottsdale Cultural Council.

A theater district would be a wonderful visitor destination and gathering place for people in our downtown! I am very encouraged about the prospects for our north Canal bank.

The redevelopment of the Scottsdale Healthcare Hospital and campus in the downtown area continues to move forward. We support their efforts to bring a “first class” medical campus to our downtown to serve residents and we look forward to its successful completion.

Let NO ONE underestimate the level of commitment by your Mayor and Council to revitalize the mature areas of our city! We know how important it is to those who live in those areas and how important it is to our entire community.

We will make it happen!

I believe the status of the former Smitty's at McDowell and Granite Reef further demonstrates our commitment to revitalization - and the strong new direction we are taking to better control the process. With the consolidation in the retail grocery business which is taking place nationwide, the old Smitty's became a victim. It was closed and has remained abandoned for a couple of years.

In the past, it served not only as a place to shop, but as a gathering place for neighbors. We have tried to encourage private redevelopment, but the proposals were either inappropriate for the area, or did not meet any of the neighborhood's needs. We decided to take control!

Just last month, the city successfully negotiated the purchase of the Smitty's property and will be moving forward to develop it. This is new ground for Scottsdale. This time, we stepped in and purchased the property, rather than relying on the private sector to begin the redevelopment process.

Why? We were unwilling to let the site continue to sit abandoned. We wanted to make absolutely sure that the citizens have a voice in choosing the best plan for revitalizing the heart of their neighborhood. We will bring community members together to plan the entire parcel to see that it meets the needs of our residents and becomes a community asset.

Just down the road is another revitalization project. It is an understatement to say that Los Arcos remains a challenge.

Let me say this, no matter what happens - whether the redevelopment contains a hockey arena or whether it offers something very different -- Los Arcos will be revitalized and will become a vibrant area of our city!

Our city has been negotiating in good faith with the Ellman Companies. We are cautious, and rightfully so. This is an incredibly complex proposal. We will be fair, forthright and professional. We are determined to ensure a good outcome for the city and its residents.

This you can count on!

We face other challenges.

Protecting life and property from flooding in a community like ours has always been a concern. The average annual rainfall is minimal, but extreme flooding is always a potential. Within months after moving here in 1972, our family was cut off from returning to our home because of the flooding which was taking place in the Indian Bend Wash. The Greenbelt has dealt very successfully with these flooding issues and has been a very important amenity to our community.

The issue before us is how to deal with the threat of flooding in the fragile desert in the northern areas of our city. Years ago, it was proposed to build what was called a Desert Greenbelt to address this possible threat.

Last night, the City Council held another public meeting about the proposed Desert Greenbelt plan. We made a unanimous decision to end the Desert Greenbelt Project and begin anew.

With this new direction I can assure you that any future drainage improvements will be designed and implemented with extensive community input.

Traffic certainly is one of our most visible symptoms of growth. As the number of Scottsdale residents has grown, as the city of Phoenix has built extensive developments on the west side of Scottsdale Road, as all our neighboring communities have also grown, our traffic has continued to intensify.

We must address this problem.

A most important step is that in the future we intend to grow at a more deliberate pace. You will see this time and time again as we study proposals for development. Land use and transportation must always be considered together.

On Saturday of this week, the northbound lanes of the Pima Freeway will open all the way to Princess Drive. By the middle of next month - weather permitting - the entire section of the freeway -- to Princess -- will be open to its full capacity.

As you know, Scottsdale Road is our signature road and we intend to keep it that way. The passage of our recent bond issue will provide funds to beautify the road, create greater setbacks and to keep that distinctive Scottsdale look. But we are also doing more. To alleviate crowding and facilitate north-south movement, we have approved the addition of a third lane on the west side of Scottsdale Road south of Gold Dust.

Last year, a series of community meetings took place as part of our "Let's Get Moving" transportation study process. Out of those grassroots dialogues came a new direction.

It is clear to everyone that just laying more and more pavement is not the ultimate answer to reducing congestion and pollution. A greater use of sophisticated technology will allow us to time intersection better and to make adjustments as necessary.

We are working on a multi-modal solution that involves real choices: van pools, telecommuting, greatly improved bus service, carpooling, elimination of traffic bottlenecks, strong encouragement for flexible work schedules, along with freeway completion.

Preservation, revitalization, transportation - if there is a common thread that runs through these challenges it is maintaining the good life in Scottsdale. And at the heart of that good life are neighborhoods.

As noted in the goals I outlined earlier, neighborhoods will be the top priority of this mayor and City Council. You can be assured that our budget and work plan will reflect this priority. Everything that takes place in this city government - whether it's land planning or economic development - will reflect that philosophy.

Neighborhoods are the backbone of our community and must remain strong.

Certainly one ingredient to a strong neighborhood is a quality school.

Your mayor and council understand that link. We will work hard this year to foster stronger relations with all schools and districts serving Scottsdale.

Growth poses challenges for those organizations, too. Together, we can find solutions that will keep our quality of life - and our local education system - among the finest anywhere.

The final topic I would like to discuss tonight is the successful passage of our bond program. Your affirmation -- your commitment -- to our community was shown in your support for these necessary investments to keep Scottsdale special.

I want to thank you for voting for the bonds and for your confidence in our community. We now will proceed with our new Senior Center, new libraries, new parks and upgrades to existing parks, improved police and fire protection, scenic corridors and improved transportation throughout our community. These are important to our quality of life and our future.

On the invitation to this State of the City Address I stated
"The Scottsdale future we envision is not a series of promises, but a set of challenges."

I'm encouraging citizens to reflect on what makes our city unique and I'm challenging you to take an active role in keeping Scottsdale that way. History will not make itself ... it has to be made, and remade by us.

Tonight I have discussed lessons learned over our 50 years history. I have also dealt with our challenges, our successes and our strategies and values as we move forward.

I started out this evening talking about the amenities which brought my family to Scottsdale almost 30 years ago - the pleasing neighborhoods, comfortable downtown, our respect and balance with the natural environment.

Our insistence on maintaining a safe, secure community has always been based on the principals of respect and civility for all.

That success has always been based on principles. And the bedrock of those principles is respect for open government and civility for all. These are not empty words, but values we must live by.

Just this month in the *North Scottsdale Times* - one of several newspapers serving our community - there's a letter from Lauralee Green, who left the cold of New England to begin a new life in Arizona.

Lauralee wrote that she arrived in the Valley not knowing where she was going to live.

"Some locals suggested that I stay at a hotel in Scottsdale," she wrote. "When I drove down Camelback and then up Scottsdale Road I had an uncanny feeling that Scottsdale was right for me - that I had finally arrived home."

That's the same feeling I had back in 1972. Most of you have experienced it, too ... some decades ago, and some, like Lauralee Green, very recently.

Future generations should experience that same sense of "home" when they come to Scottsdale. They should feel this is a city where things work ... a special place where our Southwest heritage fits as easily as a favorite pair of blue jeans, where our vision extends beyond the far-off mountains and our future is as bright as the noonday sun.

On behalf of our City Council, our city manager, all our city employees and myself, I sincerely make the following invitation:

Come join with us.....as we "Begin anew".