

Rising from the Ashes

Let's Resurrect Scenic Drive in Phoenix

By Les Conklin

In Greek mythology, a phoenix is a long-lived bird that obtains new life by arising from the ashes of its predecessor. Phoenix was founded on land that was once home to another culture, the Hohokam. Now, we ask that the City of Phoenix and its residents help create a regional landmark and tourist amenity by giving new life to the Cave Creek Road section of the historic Desert Foothills Scenic Drive. This call to action comes from Friends of the Scenic Drive and Utah resident Tracy Armstrong, who knows all about "life arising from the ashes," scenic roads, and the Scenic Drive



Midnight Message

In mid-September, late at night, I was at my computer writing. An email arrived from a stranger. Tracy Armstrong wrote, "I ran across your website, scenicdrive.org, quite by accident. I have some history that I could share with you. I hope you will understand that the history is from almost 40 years ago, when I was a boy living on the corner of 27th Street and Campo Bello Drive ... I'm writing to you on the spur of the moment and at 1:00 a.m."

Tracy's message described his memories of the Scenic Drive and how, at age 14, he earned his Eagle Scout Badge restoring the Cave Creek Road section of the drive in 1975. Tracy ended his message, "If you think that I can help your cause, please let me know. If not, then I will thank my lucky stars that I found your group and had the chance to reminisce for one very late night and early morning almost 39 years to the day from when I received my Eagle Scout Badge!"

I was struck by the timing of Armstrong's message because a month earlier, GPPA-Friends of the Scenic Drive's board had decided to launch a campaign to restore the Cave Creek Road section of the drive. Here was an email from someone who had helped that part of the drive arise from the ashes almost 40 years ago.

Cave Creek Museum

A Tragic Story Unfolds

Using information in Armstrong's message, I did a Google search and found these and other stories.

August 9, 2007. Deseret Morning News, "Father of 9 shot 4 times but survives. He is paralyzed; Las Vegas man arrested, charged in incident" by Sarah Israelsen. "Provo - Tracy Armstrong had just finished asking his guest how many towels he wanted for a Panguitch cabin he was renting to him when another man walked in and shot Armstrong four times at point-blank range. The



The Tracy Armstrong family before shooting, clockwise from lower left, Ryen, 6; Ethen, 8; Craig, 16; Austen, 22; Justen, 20; Trichelle, 14; Lynn; Nathen, 3; and Kendra, 6. Tracy is holding 3-year-old Dillen. Courtesy of Deseret Morning News

45-year-old father of nine sat bleeding on the floor with bullets in his shoulder, vertebrae and lungs, waiting for paramedics to arrive and while police chased the shooter. Five hours later, he was in Utah Valley Regional Medical Center in Provo, where doctors told him he'd be paralyzed. But he's glad to be alive."

October 6, 2007. Desert Morning News, "Panguitch welcomes home its 'winner' by Sara Israelsen." Provo - Tracy Armstrong left Panguitch two months ago in a helicopter, bleeding from four gunshot wounds and fighting for his life. He came home Thursday to a hero's welcome, paralyzed but alive. What I received yesterday, somebody told me, 'You're a winner, that's why they did this for you,' Armstrong said, choking up on the phone. 'I get emotional real easy. Having the whole community stop what they were doing yesterday and come out and basically honor me, it's overwhelming.'

Return to Midnight Message

Now that I knew more about Tracy, I re-read his email with more care.

"My family, consisting of my parents, DeVon and Carol Armstrong, my younger brother Quinn, and I, moved into our new (to us) home early in 1968. At that time, there was very little in the



Tracy Armstrong Restoring Plant Exhibit, 1975. Courtesy of Tracy Armstrong

way of homes to the north of Campo Bello Elementary School, where I finished first grade. Both Cave Creek Road and Scottsdale Road were fun to drive back then, because both narrow two-lane roads went up and down where the washes ran, giving a young child that feeling in your stomach that you never

forget. I remember so vividly the signs at each plant, which were my teachers, so that at a very young age, I learned the name of the desert plants.

"As I grew older, we went as Cub Scouts in Pack 108 to the Scenic Drive for one of our meetings and had a picnic.

"By the time I turned 11 years old and became a Boy Scout, we had occasion to go down the Cave Creek Road part frequently, to go to the county dump located off of the Carefree Highway, where Cave Creek went over the highway during heavy rainstorms. Our Boy Scout Troop 108 was the best. We had many a campout up to Seven Springs. By now, we drove Scottsdale Road more than Cave Creek Road. I remember I wanted to see Dick Van Dyke, so badly, in fact, that I would scan every person we drove past and ask my

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parents or leaders to go slow where the road turned off to the new movie studio.

"As those early years passed and I entered my teens, a wise Scoutmaster (and father) asked me if I was thinking ahead to my Eagle Scout Service Project. The list of suggested projects didn't excite me. One day, my dad reminded me how the Scenic Drive had fallen into disrepair and how I had always looked forward to the drive as a youngster. I became excited immediately and set out to find out whose permission we needed to rehab the Scenic Drive on Cave Creek Road. We thought about doing both sides, but the Scottsdale Road portion was in decent shape, and, with what we had planned, we had plenty of work ahead.

"I fear that I will not do justice in describing what I believe to be the first effort to rehab the Scenic Drive. Someone may want to correct me about it being the first rehab on the Cave Creek Road section, but I do remember seeing years later that someone had rehabbed my rehab. At the time, it bothered me enough that it comes to mind now."

Tracy's Project Report

To be considered for his Eagle badge, Tracy had to submit a project report. Here are excerpts from the report.

In the cover letter, dated September 15, 1975, Robert Ingram, Park Ranger II, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department wrote, "Tracy has done a very good job. People viewing the Desert Foothills Scenic Drive (going north on Cave Creek Road), can now read the signs and identify the plants. Tracy has benefited by becoming more aware of the time, cost, and labor involved in maintaining public parks."

Tracy's report begins, "The Foothills Scenic Drive was the place I selected to do my Eagle Service Project. The Drive is along the Cave Creek Road going toward Cave Creek and Carefree. The area which I selected was from the beginning up to Carefree Highway. This consists of 18 plants and lots of work ... The Drive was

hit by vandals lately and was in need of repair.

"The materials I used are as follows: rakes, shovels, white paint, redwood stain, 6 paintbrushes, 2 wire brushes, hand broom, bolts and nuts, wrenches, wagon, and an Igloo water jug. A prickly pear was donated by Claudia Weathersbee. I had the help of Ronald William Davis, David Allen Vann, Joseph Kelley, Quinn Armstrong, and my father and mother. We wire-brushed the signs



Eagle Scout Service Project Cover Letter, July 16, 1975. Courtesy of Tracy Armstrong

to take the paint off and clean them of the dirt. We raked around the plants and then put the rocks around them in a circle. We also wire-brushed the rocks to get rid of the dirt, and then we painted them white."

Tracy's project report included a log his activities. Entries were made for ten work days. Below are three entries.

"7-30-75 Dad took me to get rocks from the Cave Creek riverbed to put around the plants. Time: 30 minutes.

"8-21-75 Ronny, Quinn, David, and I went out with Mom. Quinn and Ronny went to work on the catclaw, trimming it, raking it up, and making a big pile with the cut limbs and the stuff that they had raked up. David and I worked on painting the signs and the posts, and I painted the names of the plants. We started at the Creosote Bush and worked up to the blue palo verde. Mom helped David with his job so we could move faster. We then went to pick up Ronny and Quinn at the catclaw. While we were waiting for them, I decided to wire brush the catclaw sign. (Some guy who was



Plant Exhibit Before Restoration. Note Cave Creek Road in background. Courtesy of Tracy Armstrong

riding by in a car thought that I was trying to destroy the sign and he pulled over.) Time: 4 hours.

"9-4-75 Dad and I went out to finish the posts, which I did. We also took before and after pictures, Time: 1 hour.

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"If you ask me, I think it looks beautiful out there now!"

Tracy spent a total of 25 hours on the project. Project costs were: gas for his father's truck - \$15, paint brushes - \$4.39, two gallons of redwood paint - \$4 at K Mart, two gallons of white paint - donated by K Mart, paint thinner - \$.50, screw bolts - \$.50. "All other items were borrowed from my father and then returned to him at no expense."

Tracy Today

Tracy owns Blue Springs Lodge in Panguitch, Utah, which is located on a scenic byway. He also operates a real estate business. He is a paralyzed from the chest down and struggles with pain.

He lives in one of the world's most scenic areas, with Bryce and Zion National Parks and Cedar Breaks National Monument nearby. He is the longest serving member of the Garfield County Travel Council. The All-American National Scenic Byway 12, Mormon Heritage Highway US 89, and Utah's National Scenic Byway 143 all pass through his county. Tracy writes "The Desert Foothills



Blue Spring Lodge, Panguitch Lake. Courtesy of Blue Springs Lodge

Scenic Drive is something very special, and what you've created is actually a tourist site." He suggests that the entire loop drive could become a scenic and historic landmark that would benefit businesses in Phoenix, Scottsdale, Cave Creek, and Carefree. "I believe the Desert Foothills Scenic Drive ought to be recognized and celebrated as a truly historic achievement in the once beautifully lush Sonoran Desert north of Phoenix."

No argument here, except that the Scenic Drive represents more than desert beauty and history. It's a testament to community service; the actions of people like Tracy and his family, who over the years, despite on-coming development, have created the drive and have helped it rise again and again from the ashes. Now we need Phoenix and its residents to do their part.

Want to Help?

If you want to help restore the Scenic Drive in Phoenix, please call Friends of the Scenic Drive at (480) 361-6498 or email info@scenicdrive.org. We posted more information about Tracy on www.scenicdrive.org and www.gppaaz.org (*The Peak*). For information about Blue Springs Lodge, visit bluespringslodge.com or call (800) 987-5634.

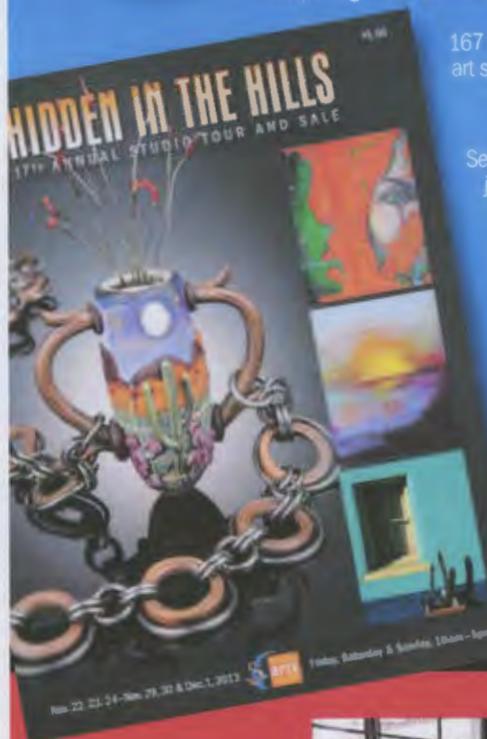


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Cynthia Carlstens (oil painter)
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