

# Arizona Daily Star®

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## Marana at 30: Time flies

By Aaron Mackey

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

*Editor's note: Spotlight is a new feature in the Northwest Star for readers who want to be tuned in to what's happening in the community. Every week we'll select one story we think you shouldn't miss, and feature it here, on Page 2.*

When Marana celebrates its 30th birthday on Saturday, it will have come too soon for many of the town's founders.

"Time really flies for all of us," said Herb Kai, the town's vice mayor and member of one of Marana's founding families.

Much like the maturation of a child, Marana's growth has been rapid and seemingly limitless, town leaders said. The community also has had its fair share of growing pains.

The early years of incorporation were rough, Kai said: "Finding the money to operate the town of Marana was always a challenge."

And while the town has found a fix to its early financial woes by annexing nearby business corridors to bring in sales-tax revenue and charging some of the region's highest construction and impact fees, other challenges have appeared, leaders said.

Those include maintaining a water supply and building roads that will sustain growth in a town that could eventually have more than 100,000 residents.

"That's the challenge to our council — providing services for our new residents who move in," Kai said.

### In the beginning ...

Kai can still remember meeting in farmhouses in 1977 to begin the incorporation process.

The town, formed to protect area irrigation waters from encroachment by the city of Tucson, started small — its original town limits included only 10 square miles of farm and ranch land with a population of 1,500.

The town now encompasses nearly 120 square miles and close to 30,000 residents.

"It was all farmland and (the farmers) didn't want any additional taxes," Kai said.

Because the town had no money, patching potholes and putting up road signs took a true community effort, said Brad DeSpain, the town's utilities director.

DeSpain said residents would bring tools and food, and donated patch mix to fix the potholes. They'd then spend hours working to fix their own roads.

Residents no longer have to patch their own roads, thanks to a \$130 million yearly budget that comes in large part from area sales-tax revenue.

The workdays made the community more close-knit than it is today, DeSpain said.

## **Enshrining the past**

DeSpain moved to Marana in 1962, buying a ranch near North Sanders and West Moore roads from Bob Honea, the mayor's uncle.

At that time, residents driving on Marana roads would stop one another and talk. That doesn't happen too often anymore, he said. Those times might be gone, but current residents work hard to enshrine the town's past, DeSpain said.

Examples of this can be seen in developments such as Gladden Farms, named for the farming family who originally owned the land.

Holding onto parts of the past is important so that new residents can know the town's history, Mayor Ed Honea said.

Officials hope to break ground this spring on the Marana Heritage River Park, which will hold a museum, amphitheater and learning farm. It will be near Gladden Farms.

"We've done a lot of things to try to maintain that small-town atmosphere," he said.

The town will also try to create that atmosphere through the construction of Marana Main Street, an area near Town Hall where officials hope to build houses, apartments and retail shops.

Hopefully, Main Street will be completed before the town turns 60, giving another generation of Maranans a place to call home, Honea said.

"It's going to come to fruition," he said. "It'll create a walking community and will work quite well."

Did you know ...

- Marana was founded in 1977. At the time, the town was about 10 square miles and had 1,500 residents. The town has grown to 118 square miles and roughly 30,000 residents today.

- Before the town was incorporated, the area was settled by cotton and dairy farmers in the 1920s. Other farms followed.
- The Santa Cruz River Valley, which runs through Marana, has long served as farmland. Archaeologists estimate that people farmed in the area as far back as 8000 B.C.

Sources: Town of Marana and Old Pueblo Archaeology Center

Founders' Day lowdown

When: 9 a.m Saturday.

Where: Ora Mae Harn Park, 13250 N. Lon Adams Road.

The celebration begins with a parade around Town Hall, 11555 W. Civic Center Drive, and lasts all day.

The scheduled events include:

- A junior rodeo at the Western Heritage Arena, on North Postvale Road at the frontage road west of Interstate 10.
- Show car display.
- Little league tournament.
- Cultural and genealogical demonstrations.
- Student art exhibition.
- Chili cook-off.
- Arts, crafts and food vendors.

For more information call 382-1900 or visit the Web site [www.marana.com](http://www.marana.com).

The decline of farming

In 1984, Marana had 23.6 square miles of farmland within town limits. Today, that number has dropped to 18.6 square miles.

As the prices of cotton and other crops grown in the region continue to fluctuate, more farm owners may look to sell their land to developers, said Brad DeSpain, the town's utilities director and area rancher. That's not necessarily a bad thing, he said. "It's a choice. You've got to have a willing buyer and a willing seller."

Even with the lure of development, the western edge of Marana and areas extending into Avra Valley and Picture Rocks should still have thriving farms and ranches for years to come, DeSpain said.

"You'll still see some of the urban ranches and rodeos," he said. "Those kinds of things will remain."

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