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SOFTBALL UMPIRE PROFILE: JOE BYRNE
-Larry Wolfe

It takes more than just players to have a softball game; there's the grounds crew, the scorers, the scoreboard operator, the team managers and last, but not least, the umpires. In senior softball, the umpire is a "one-man crew," calling the balls and strikes and all the action on the field. Joe Byrne is one of the best at the Field of Dreams.

A "kinda rare" Arizona native, Joe was born in Tempe and graduated from Tempe High in 1979. He went right into the workforce after high school, starting out as a Machinist Trainee at Honeywell Aerospace. When I asked him how he got that kind of job right out of high school, he said, "My neighbor was the HR Manager at Honeywell, and I used him as a reference." Pretty smart! He spent eight years with Honeywell, working his way up before deciding to join Boeing in Portland, Oregon as a Gear Machinist. This was a "second shift" job, which wasn't ideal with young kids at home, so he transitioned to a Machine Parts Planner before settling in as a CNC Programmer, developing machine part programs using CAM systems. Over what would become a 32-year career with Boeing, he moved up the ladder becoming Lead

Programmer and eventually CNC Programming Manager, responsible for nearly 50 programming employees. He took early retirement in 2020 when, due to COVID, Boeing offered buyouts to many employees.

Joe met his wife-to-be, Donna, at a Rec Center in Tempe, and they married in 1983. They have three daughters and six grands. Two of the girls live in Washington State and the other is in Alabama. Joe and Donna bought a home in Cottonwood in 2018, anticipating early retirement. They rented that place before moving to Sun Lakes in 2020.

Joe began umpiring softball in 1998. He was criticizing the umpire at one of his daughter's softball games, when the ump said, "See if you can do any better!" And he did! He's been umpiring ever since. Besides umpiring in our Sun Lakes League, he umpires girls' high school fast-pitch softball.

A Harley enthusiast, Joe currently owns a 2018 Ultra Limited 15th Anniversary Edition. With Donna as his copilot on the back, they've taken some "super trips," including a 21-day cross-country tour from Portland, OR to Boston and a 30-day round-trip journey from Phoenix to Key West and back, over 6,400 miles! They do off-freeway journeys and stay at non-chain hotels or B&Bs and eat at Mom & Pop diners and restaurants. Joe plans the entire itinerary in advance, including stops to "see the sights of Americana."

Another passion is golf. Joe golfs at the Cottonwood and Palo Verde courses four times per week, including in the PV couples' league with Donna on Fridays. Add in the twice per week umpiring assignments and you can see that Joe has had no problem keeping busy in his early retirement years!