

# Happy Golden Anniversary Pinnacle Peak Park Celebrating 20 Years! April 20, 2002 - April 20, 2022

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## Pinnacle Peak Park - The Beginning

By John Loleit

"I wish you no luck!" This was said to me at the Grand Opening of Pinnacle Peak Park on April 20, 2002 by a homeowner that lived adjacent to the Park. There was a lot of worry by the surrounding communities that their tranquility was about to be broken. We held numerous public meetings and small group gatherings to answer questions and attempt to ease the the concerns of the nearby residents. Heartfelt, angry, and terrified statements made during these meetings claimed that crime would increase, property values would decrease, and even gangs would come to this area of North Scottsdale. These meetings became so contentious that Scott Hamilton and I joked half-heartedly that we would need to watch our backs!

This Park was going to bring a change to this quiet community, and they felt threatened by it. The Management and Operations Plan for Pinnacle Peak originally called for a simple trailhead with no staff on site. The local communities demanded staff because they felt someone needed to keep an eye on all the hikers and equestrians. The City responded by making me the first employee of Pinnacle Peak Park. I was warned early on about the challenges I would face, and the early years were a lesson in honest communication with the public. In one of the meetings it was suggested a sign to be placed on the trail letting hikers know that sound travels far and to keep their voices down. I agreed to the sign but stated that sound travels in both directions and sometimes golfers get a little frustrated and may use some non-family friendly language that could be overheard on the trail. This slightly humorous exchange helped ease the tension.

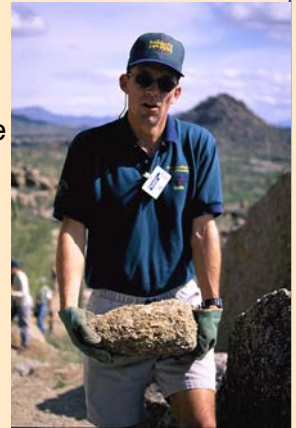
For months leading to the opening there was an enormous amount of planning and coordinating with police and fire for search and rescue operations. This planning paid off when only four days after

opening a climber fell and broke his back! Numerous people responded for this very technical rescue and the closest place to land the air evac helicopter was a cul-de-sac in the gated community. The efficiency of planning paid off, but the neighbors were not happy at all: this is exactly what they knew was going to happen. For days afterwards I spoke with many locals, explaining what happened and assuring them this would be a rare occurrence.

Another major concern for the operations of the Park was the limited number of staff. Volunteers were desperately needed to supplement the long hours of operations. Who better to reach out to assist in the operation of the Park than the communities that opposed it. I went to many of the Homeowner Meetings pitching the volunteer program. The ranks began to fill, and there are still a few of those original volunteers at the Park!

There was so much controversy with Pinnacle Peak that the Parks and Recreation Commission said they wanted an update 6 months after opening. I had been in weekly conversations since the beginning with security from the gated communities, and I called them to ask if they or their residents had any concerns. The Property Manager of Estancia said Pinnacle Peak Park has become an asset to the community!

Twenty years later, Pinnacle Peak is an integral part of the surrounding communities. Sometime later during that first year the person that wished me no luck came up to me and said they were pleasantly surprised at the success of the Park and the effort to understand and meet community needs. Then, turning away, they proceeded to hike the trail.



John at Pinnacle Peak Park in 2000



# Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park

By Paul Diefenderfer

In 1975 I learned to rock climb through the Arizona Mountaineering Club. One of my first climbs was the Pinnacle Peak, and it was glorious!

Pinnacle Peak was located on State Trust Land. When a developer wanted to buy the land, a group of climbers and I lobbied to have the Pinnacle preserved. After negotiations a deal was reached where the developer agreed to donate the 180 acres around the peak to the City of Scottsdale. In 1995 the peak was closed for a year to put in roads and infrastructure. However, the developer dug their feet

(they didn't want to give up the land), so a group of climbers and I established the Friends of Pinnacle Peak. Seven years later Pinnacle Peak was finally turned over to Scottsdale. The Friends had succeeded, so we scattered and went on with our lives.

One day I received a call from Morrie Chernis, who wanted to know if he could use the name "Friends of Pinnacle Peak" for a group

he was starting to support Pinnacle Peak Park. I told him he was welcome to it. Case closed – NOT!

A few years later Morrie called me up and asked if I would be interested in serving on the board of the non-profit he created – Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park – and I agreed. A few more years passed, then one day I was chatting with Morrie when he lamented that he was getting older and needed a break. He had worked hard for FOPPP: raising tons of money, implementing many park improvements and events, and logging well over 1,485 volunteer hours. I told him he needed to be more of a slacker, like me. He somehow twisted that around and the next thing I knew I was the President of FOPPP.

I'm still on the board, and though Morrie passed in 2017, we continue to keep his dream alive – supporting Pinnacle Peak Park, one of the wonderful open spaces in Arizona. The FOPPP support public education programs; volunteer and staff training, and recognition; the purchase of hydration supplies; and improvements to park facilities including benches, wildlife signs, and kiosks. We also sponsor popular events such as the Jingle hike to Santa and Astronomy nights. The FOPPP is a volunteer organization, 100% funded through activities such as calendar sales and generous public donations.



Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park founder Morrie Chernis at the park.

# Pinnacle Peak Park - The Future

By Tom Eye

Have you ever arrived at Pinnacle Peak Park and found the parking lot completely full, and cars parked along the street all the way down to Alma School Road? Or waited in line to use the small and outdated restrooms? With over 250,000 annual visitors, including both residents and visitors from around the world, Pinnacle Peak Park needs some significant upgrades, and help is on the way.

In 2019, City of Scottsdale voters approved a Capital Improvement Bond for a wide variety of projects. One of those projects, Capital Improvement Project 61, earmarked funds for the much-needed upgrades at the park. Plans include expansion of the parking lot from the current 85 to 300 spaces, adding new restrooms, increasing trailhead office and storage space, improvement of existing hiking trails, and construction of a new interpretive trail.

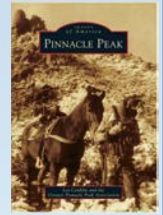
Two new residential developments – the Summit and Acoya Troon, were recently completed on North

102<sup>nd</sup> Way, directly outside the park. When the parking lot is full, which happens frequently, cars park on the street directly adjacent to these developments, causing noise, traffic, and safety issues for these residents. Since the planned 300 car parking lot represents full capacity of visitors for the park and hiking trails, once the new parking lot is completed, the City of Scottsdale could remove the on-street parking which would eliminate these issues for our neighbors.

Pinnacle Peak Park is one of the jewels in the Scottsdale outdoor recreational portfolio. We're thrilled that the voters and city leadership recognize the importance of the park and are investing in this important asset. The timing of these improvements is contingent on acquiring 5-acres of land adjacent to our current parking lot from the State Land Trust. Please monitor our FOPPP website (FOPPP.com) for updated information.

# Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park

To learn more about Pinnacle Peak Park you can pick up Les Conklin's book *Pinnacle Peak, Arizona*. It can be found online and at local retailers.



Below are some fun photos from FOPPP activities!



## Friends of Pinnacle Peak Park

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