

The Ranch Review

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Skylar Scott is all smiles at the Cars and Cues event at Rack Scottsdale.

The News Around Our Neighborhood

Mailed to homes in Gainey and McCormick Ranch areas and in the surrounding communities.

The Balloon People bring artisan ballooning to the Valley

By Jimmy Magahern



Francine Kades has been creating balloon art for more than 13 years.
(Photo by Kimberly Carrillo)

Francine Kades would like to throw Phoenix a parade.

The local balloon artist, founder and owner of North Scottsdale's The Balloon People, was one of 44 balloon professionals invited from around the world to create fanciful, eye-popping balloon floats for the 48th annual Chicago Pride Parade this past June. She'd like to replicate the event at next April's Phoenix Pride Festival — or perhaps sooner. Even the city's Veterans Day parade, she suggests, could use a balloon upgrade.

Passionately describing the Chicago event across a table at the Camelback Colonnade's

Balloon...continued on page 6

McDowell Sonoran Preserve Project could move forward

By Wayne Schutsky



Tickets to Desert EDGE will cost \$17.50, though access to the trailheads and some on-site facilities will remain free. (Courtesy Desert EDGE/Swaback Partners)

The controversial McDowell Sonoran Preserve project — formerly known as Desert Discovery Center — is going before a Scottsdale City Council study session at the end of the month as the long-gestating project creeps closer to becoming reality.

The center has gone through many iterations over the past two-plus decades and has met stiff opposition from multiple community groups opposed to

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Yogi's Grill, after wrapping a giant balloon arch over the entrance to the new "flexible-format" Target store at the 16th Street and Camelback Road mall — a typical grand-opening gig for the busy balloon artisan — Kades muses over how the Valley might receive such a grand display of balloon awesomeness.

"No one here has ever seen anything like what they put on in Chicago," said Kades, a Johannesburg, South African immigrant who lived in L.A. before eventually settling in Scottsdale. She still speaks with the charming cultivated British "acrolect" of the region's upper class, which suits the Scottsdale socialites whose elaborate Sweet Sixteens, bar mitzvahs and weddings provide the bulk of her business ("I'm not the cheapest," she readily submits).

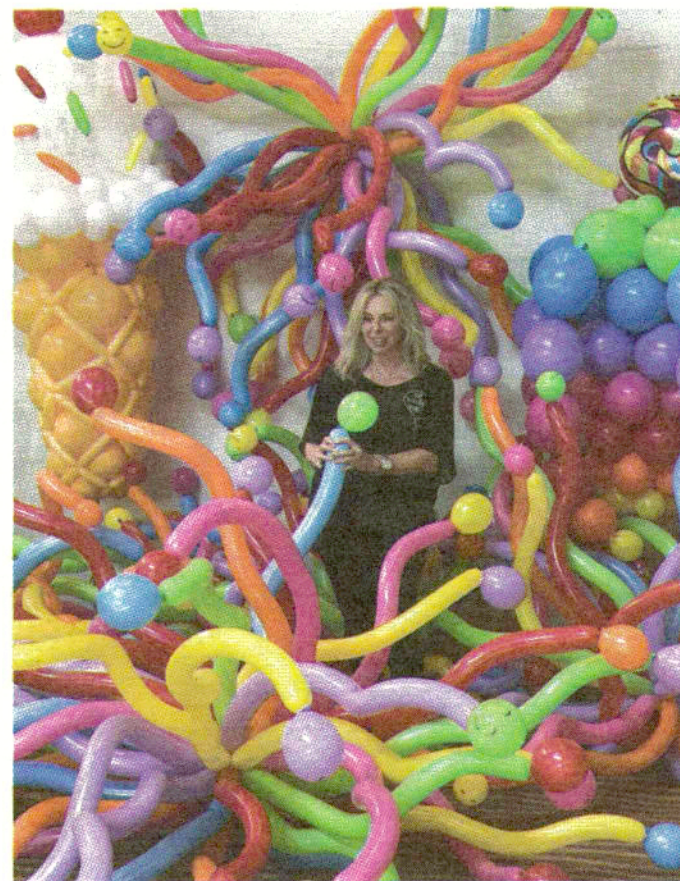
"There were 43,000 balloons," she said. "And there were over 40 of us working around the clock for four days, just creating all this stuff. We wound up with two blocks worth of color — it was mesmerizing. We made up the theme 'Life Is Sweet,' and we had balloon gummy bears as wearable

costumes, we had people carrying giant balloon cupcakes, ice cream cones and gumball machines. It was vibrant and colorful and beautiful.

"People here don't know what is possible," Kades said. "And unless you see it, you can't understand it. So I think I'm going to have to do a parade with us walking and wearing all the inflatables, and then hopefully some corporate event bookers will be interested in having us do the same for them."

"Us," right now, consists of Kades and two assistants: Ranier Mehlaui, an in-demand balloonist ("other companies are always trying to hire him away from me") whom Kades has worked with for 27 years, and Joshua Chavez, a young "superstar" she's only been working with for three months — "but he picked it up immediately," she raved. During peak seasons, like New Year's Eve ("that's the balloon artist's Super Bowl"), Kades, who runs her business out of her home near the southwest corner of the Scottsdale Airport, has about five other assistants she enlists.

Kades is all about elevating the art of balloon "stacking," which the industry



The Balloon People create colorful and festive latex sculptures. (Photo courtesy The Balloon People)

differentiates from balloon "twisting," an advanced art unto itself. "We're called stackers because we basically stack round balloons into décor, as opposed to twisters, who twist long balloons into shapes. The best of them are really gifted — as are we!"

The former paralegal and mother of two got into ballooning after a divorce 13 years ago, when she attended a franchise presentation in Phoenix by a balloon manufacturer. "I didn't buy into the franchise, but I bought an afternoon's worth of training!"

"People don't appreciate all the work that goes into this," she said. "We have to be not only artists but scientists and meteorologists, because of all the weather conditions that affect balloons."

Kades says her biggest thrill is seeing clients' reactions when she brings what's in their wildest imaginations to life. "That's what makes my week," she said, "when they're bowled over by the results. It doesn't happen with every job, but when it does, that's spectacularly rewarding."

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water. Africans alone spend 40 billion hours a year fetching water, according to the United Nations. Areas with insufficient water infrastructure (like Mexico or Native American reservations) or brackish municipal water (like parts of the Middle East) must buy bottled water — increasing household expenses, traffic and pollution from delivery trucks, and waste.

Zero Mass Water's off-the-grid panels, which can be installed in a little over an hour, are one solution to these problems. The company has placed panels at homes and a clinic in Ecuador; villas in Dubai, and offices and schools in Mexico. Recently, they received a grant from the United States

Agency for International Development (USAID) to provide panels for Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan. They're also partnering with the Asian Development Bank to install Source in the Philippines.

The impact has already been positive, Friesen says. Thanks to the panels in Mexican schools, children are no longer suffering from upset stomachs that distract them from learning, and teachers don't have to spend their modest incomes buying bottled water for their students. Stories like that — along with the chance to transform the lives of millions who lack drinking water — are, Friesen said, "probably one of the biggest things that gets me out of bed in the morning."

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