

Paradise Valley mountains preserved through generosity

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LAND TRUST

Paradise Valley mountains preserved through generosity

By MacKenzie Brower
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The Paradise Valley Mountain Preserve Trust is stewards of 260 acres of land, including all of Mummy Mountain, the north side of Camelback Mountain and the east side of Phoenix Mountain Preserve.

“At today’s prices, which is \$1.5—\$2 million an acre, it’s a big testimony to the generosity

• See **Land** on page 24 of people in the township who have given the rights away to their land, either outright or through conservation easements,” said Frederick Pakis, chairman of the trust’s board.

Pakis has served on the board for 18 years and chaired for five. The PVMPT was founded in 1997, celebrating its 25th anniversary last year.

The land trust is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization led by a board of seven volunteers, which works closely with the town but is independent of it.

PVMPT has recently welcomed two new members to the Board of the Trust: George Getz and Scott LeMarr, former PV mayor.

There are also other “extracurricular volunteers,” Pakis said. For instance, long-time Paradise Valley resident Pam Hait and her granddaughter Estelle Cohen from Connecticut wrote a children’s book called “The Real Story of Camelback Mountain” that gives all proceeds to the trust. Other volunteers handle the sales of the book.

The book is illustrated by Sebastien Million, a nationally recognized artist and Paradise Valley resident.

“When our grandchildren visited again from Connecticut, I embellished the original story and added a new ‘chapter’ that the camel was upset about building creeping too high on its back and would stand up to shake off the structures. It just continued to evolve over time,” Hait said.

“The Real Story of Camelback Mountain” is available throughout the Valley at the Desert Botanical Garden, Scottsdale Center for the Arts, Children’s Museum, Camelback Inn, Changing Hands, Omni Montelucia, Sanctuary, The Paper Place, Mountain Shadows, and AJs

on Lincoln Drive.

PVMPT is responsible for the conservation and preservation of all the land donated by Paradise Valley residents living in the designated heritage zone.

They can either donate the land outright through a “fee simple” donation, or they can do a conservation easement, which is more innovative and recent, according to Pakis.

“What they’re donating is the rights of future development to the land,” Pakis explained. “They own the land, but any subsequent owner of the land is not allowed to develop that portion which they’ve designated as a conservation easement. It’s a way to have your cake and eat it too.”

Pakis is most proud of the information sessions PVMPT has held for residents to explain conservation easements which he said are somewhat obscure and uncommon. At the sessions, the State Director of the Nature Conservancy Patrick Graham spoke, as well as tax and legal experts.

As a result of those sessions, PVMPT increased its holdings by upward of 10 acres.

There are significant tax incentives for people to donate because of the high valuation of the land.

“You’re donating something of value, no different than if you were going to give cash to the American Cancer Society,” Pakis said.

There are currently 25 donors, both entities and individuals, and a significant portion of the mountains are in the PVMPT. The trust has proposed a donor wall that is currently under advisement of the town.

About 30 acres are left to preserve everything in the designated heritage zone.

“We’re at a point where there might be an additional 15 families who this would make sense for,” Pakis said. “It’s not really that broad of an audience we’re dealing with, which limits how much we can do in a given year. It’s our mission just to increase (PVMPT) to its optimal size.”

PVMPT’s land is not public and is promised to be kept in its natural state. It will never have cell towers, hiking trails or picnic areas like in

other parts of Camelback and the Phoenix Mountain Preserve.

In the event of drainage or natural disasters, PVMPT is responsible.

Since the trust must maintain the land in perpetuity, it’s affiliated with the town as an institution that will be around forever. However, it’s independent from the town so as not to mix PVMPT’s stewardship with the town’s zoning and building approval process.

Operating costs are negligible, according to Pakis. Advertising and hosting a website are among the only costs of the trust.

Pakis joined the trust after he and his neighbors on Mohave Road protested a subdivision of 15 acres to build houses. The person who was subdividing eventually became a donor.

“For the first time since I moved there, people were active, questioning the benefits of developing that,” he said.

Afterward, he was invited by the town to join the trust, which he wasn’t aware of before, and use that as his vehicle for preservation.

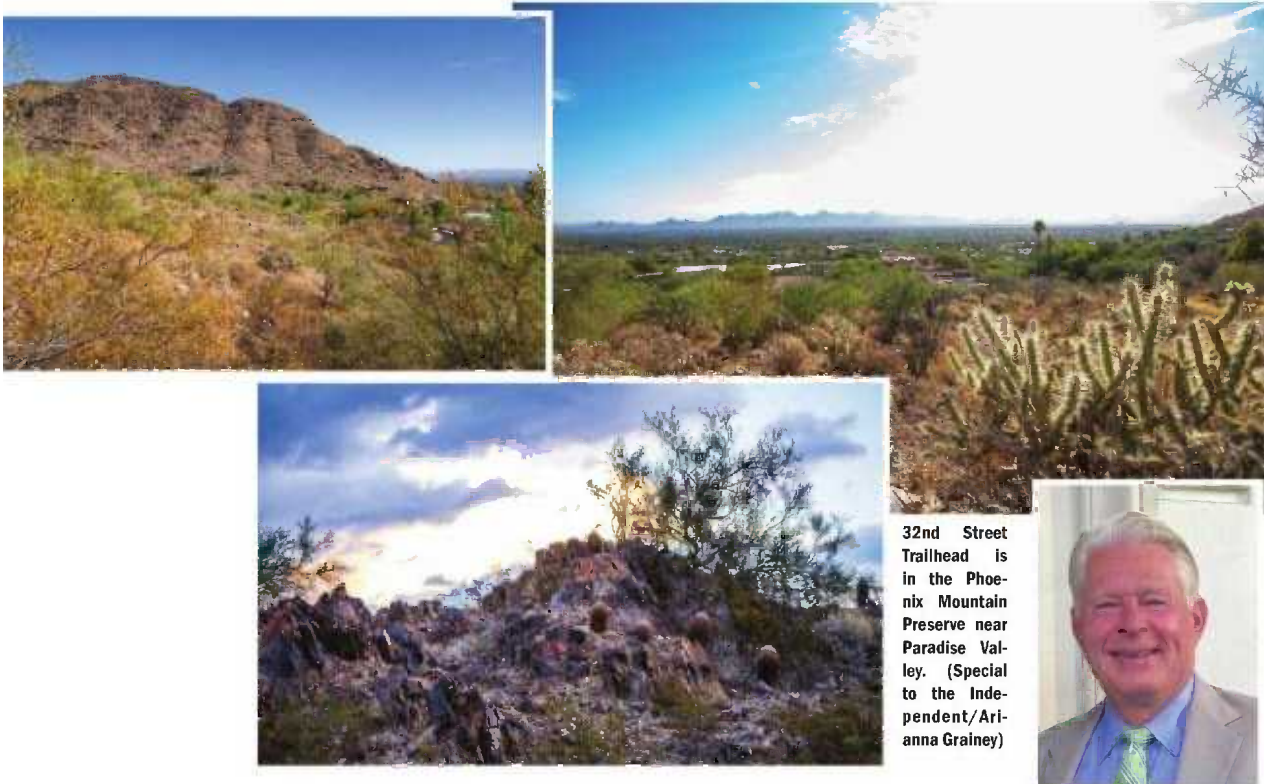
PVMPT is important to the character of the Town of Paradise Valley.

“The town is really defined by being a valley and having these natural, beautiful mountains on both sides,” Pakis said. “It’s such a good feeling to know that there’s never going to be a big house up there looking down. It’s a real asset of the town.”

MacKenzie Brower can be reached at mbrower@iniusa.org. We’d like to invite our readers to submit their civil comments, pro or con, on this issue. Email AZOpinions@iniusa.org.



Mummy Mountain overlooks Paradise Valley. (Special to the Independent/Arianna Grainey)



32nd Street Trailhead is in the Phoenix Mountain Preserve near Paradise Valley. (Special to the Independent/Arianna Graine)



Frederick Pakis is chairman of the Paradise Valley Mountain Preserve Trust board. (Courtesy Frederick Pakis)