

Regional Profile: Buckeye Mayor Jackie Meck

Roots Go Deep for Buckeye Mayor



Mayor Jackie Meck
Town of Buckeye



His mayoral office looks out on the building where he was born, and he's never lived more than seven miles from that spot. His grandparents came to Arizona in the early 1900s from Tennessee, and settled in Liberty, just west of Town of Buckeye. His father served for 30 years as the town's judge, coroner and city magistrate. His wife, Verlyne has been tapped to write two books documenting Buckeye's history, and Meck, his wife, and his father have all been separately awarded Buckeye Valley Citizen of the Year (2004, 1988, and 1969, respectively). The couple's three children also grew up in Buckeye.

You might be hard-pressed to find another elected official in the country whose roots go as deep into the community as that of Buckeye Mayor Jackie Meck.

"I have a passion for my community, and it has been very much a part of my entire life. I was born here, I've never left. I love my community, and I'd just like to have other people love it as much as I do," says Mayor Meck.



Mayor Meck jokes with officials at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the grand opening of the new joint National Guard/Army Reserve training facility in Buckeye in July.

Meck, who was elected to a four-year term as Buckeye mayor in 2008, previously served as Buckeye mayor from 1973 to 1975. He also served as a member of the town council from 1968 to 1975 and from 2002 to 2006. Mayor Meck says a lot has changed since his first stint as mayor more than 30 years ago.

"When I was mayor in the 1970s, our population was about 1,200, and we are at about 48,000 now. No one here in this community, including me, has ever seen the kind of growth we have experienced since we annexed lands in the 1990s. We are 650 square miles today, and Phoenix is 600 square miles," notes Meck.

While Meck says Buckeye has spent the past few years in "hurry up" mode to accommodate its rapid growth, he adds that the recent downturn in the economy has resulted in the opportunity for Buckeye to refocus its priorities. For example, three years ago Buckeye was issuing about 1,200 building permits a month. Today, the number is about 15 per month. For Meck, it's critical and prudent to use the slowdown to lay the foundation for the future.

"Unlike Buckeye, most cities grow their infrastructure from the center by putting pipe on the end of a pipe and growing outward. Instead, we have several large master-planned communities like Douglas Ranch—which is 35,000 acres just by itself—that are 20 to 38 miles from historic downtown Buckeye. Those developments are communities being built from desert or agricultural lands," says Meck. "We are a large ship and we need to turn the ship around and point it in a focused direction. The slowdown gives



Mayor Meck poses with a look-alike of the late Ohio State University Buckeyes football coach Woody Hayes during the fourth "Buckeyes in Buckeye Day" celebration in January.

us time to catch our breath, to back up and look at a big picture."

A longtime farming and business entrepreneur who has seen both success and failure in taking risks, Meck understands that things don't always turn out as you planned. "The economy dictates that we trim down where we can, and that may be the template for the future. Perhaps we do not need to get as large our projected plans. We may find out we can do more with less," he states.

In the meantime, Meck says his priorities remain education, solar industry, and healthcare. Without a stand-alone hospital, Meck has been working with as many as three healthcare corporations to develop a full-service medical center in Buckeye. So far, he says it has all been about rooftops.

"I've talked to them about starting construction, the sooner the better. In fact, I've even offered to take a shovel and start digging the foundation for them to get something going, even if it is an emergency center. Each of them come back and just keep saying, 'you know, it takes rooftops,'" says Meck.

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Mayor Meck throws out the first pitch at the dedication of a new little league baseball field at the Earl Edgar Recreational Facility in Buckeye.

Mayor Meck (continued)

Meck has also spent considerable time wooing solar energy companies. The city of Phoenix has committed to 1,200 acres of solar in a Phoenix landfill facility located within the town of Buckeye. APS is also looking at a solar facility 40 miles south of Buckeye, near Gila Bend, while another company, Sempra Energy, is looking at a 1,200 to 1,500 acre facility near the Palo Verde nuclear power plant. Another company is also looking at building a solar facility south of Buckeye, east of State Route 85.

“Each facility would require 1,000 to 1,500 employees to construct. After the construction, which is estimated to take five or six years, the solar companies estimate anywhere from 25 employees to as many as 120 regular employees, depending on the technology? Obviously, we’d like to get those jobs and supplies within the community,” says Meck.

When asked, “If you could give one gift to the Valley, what would it be?” Meck, who is the retired general manager of the Buckeye Water Conservation and Drainage District and a member of the El Rio Restoration Project Executive Committee, says he would clean up the Gila River.

“I was born in 1941, at that time, there was occasionally water running in the Gila River. We did not have the mass of salt cedar trees that are currently growing in the river. I would hope that someday we can take the Gila River resource and clean it up for trails and lakes,” says Meck. “The groundwater is very salty, and is a resource we need to preserve. If I could wave a magic wand, I would say clean water, clean air and lots of open space are what I would want for future generations in this valley.”

Committee to End Homelessness Celebrates 10th Anniversary

After a decade of raising awareness, community support and millions of dollars for homeless programs in the region, the MAG Continuum of Care Regional Committee on Homelessness is marking its 10th anniversary.



Continuum of Care
Regional Committee
on Homelessness

The committee celebrates the anniversary as it begins implementation of the 2009 Regional Plan to End Homelessness, providing a fresh look at regional homeless issues and introducing updated action steps focused on ending homelessness in the region.

The MAG Continuum of Care Regional Committee on Homelessness was formed in December 1999, when the MAG Regional Council approved the process to coordinate federal funding applications at a regional level and tasked the committee with developing a coordinated, regionwide application process to address homelessness. The committee coordinates regional efforts to apply for annual McKinney-Vento homeless assistance funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). To date, the committee has helped secure more than \$172 million in funding, which has provided assistance to more than 50 homeless service providers.

“Individual providers used to apply on their own for the HUD funding,” said City of Tempe Vice Mayor Shana Ellis, who chairs the regional committee. “By coordinating the application process and prioritizing programs based on our regional needs, we have had significantly greater success in securing funding, to the benefit of all providers,” she said.

In March 2009, the MAG Continuum of Care Regional Committee on Homelessness officially announced its 2009 plan, which includes 30 new action steps in the areas of leadership and community support; community awareness and collaboration; prevention; housing and services; and education, training and employment. The committee’s first regional plan, developed in 2002, received national acclaim and is regarded as a best practice by similar committees nationwide. In 2005, MAG updated the regional plan; since that time, more than 88 percent of the identified goals have been completed or engaged.

In addition to its planning function, efforts by the committee include providing heat relief to homeless people during the intense Arizona summers by coordinating and publicizing water donation and refuge sites. This year those efforts resulted in donations of thousands of bottles of water.

The region receives valuable data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). The HMIS database collects information about the men, women and children living in emergency shelter, transitional housing programs and permanent housing programs through the region. At a 2007 national conference, the Maricopa County HMIS was recognized as one of the top three systems in the nation for tracking homeless data.