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SPEAKERS

NPR promo, Kris Olson-Garewal, Zac Ziegler, Christopher Conover, Nicole Cox, Steve Kozachik



00:00

Following is an azpm original production.



Christopher Conover 00:09

Welcome to The Buzz. I'm Christopher Conover. This week we get some updates from some people we met earlier this year. The holiday season is often a time to catch up with old friends and acquaintances. Maybe it's a party through a card or on a trip. For us, we're taking the opportunity on the radio. We reached out to a few people who appeared on the show this year to get some updates on how they're doing. We start with Dr Kristen Olson garewell. When we spoke with her in May, her non profit the homing project was preparing to build a set of temporary tiny homes on a plot of land in Midtown Tucson. When we asked her where to meet up now, she recommended another plot of land near Sixth Avenue and interstate 10. So we're meeting in a different spot than we did earlier this year. Tell us why we're at this location.



Kris Olson-Garewal 01:11

This is our second location. We have not yet started our first location, but there's a game plan behind that that we just have to keep in mind, and that is that the first location is where we're going to get our bed and breakfast experience, and then our second location is the really big one. The first location will just be 10, maybe 15 people, and this location will be over 100 units, and that is where we had actually hoped to start, but realized that the problems that go with having been houseless will need to be treated, and that we probably aren't ready for that level of experience until we've actually just simply set up shop. And so that's what we're doing at the first location. This one, as you can see, is bare site. It's large. It's 4.3 acres. We can easily fit 100 people onto this, and we'll have much larger kitchen, laundromat, more bathrooms, just a larger facility. And this is sort of where we hope to really get the ball rolling. One of the things that we at this point expected to be pretty close to opening at this point, but have found that,

because we don't fit any of the templates that the city of Tucson planning department has, they have had a they've had difficulty approving our planning. And we don't want to use any shortcuts like a political support. We want to get this so that we have a precedent with this first place in Tucson, so the second, third, fourth. Anyone who wants to do this will find that it's much easier to do.

C Christopher Conover 03:09

So with the hold ups and permitting. And that sounds like the development of almost any housing development, there's always permits and hold ups as you go through what's the time? What's the realistic timeline, do you think?

K Kris Olson-Garewal 03:24

Probably five to six months from now? He is He He said he would try to get for December, but we haven't even taken a bulldozer into the first property.

C Christopher Conover 03:38

But five to six months isn't terrible, because that's the beginning of the heat when people really shouldn't be unhoused just for mere temperature, weather safety reasons. In the monsoon, we'll hopefully be getting going around then. So that's not a bad timing, slower than you wanted, but not a bad timing either.

K Kris Olson-Garewal 04:00

Any time is better than than never. And you know, it will take patience, but yes, it certainly will be good to have get some people in off the streets Then we had hoped already be started on the second site, but that was, I guess, very unrealistic.

C Christopher Conover 04:18

Well, that was my next question. If it's going to be five, six months before you're into the first site, hopefully, what's the timeline then for this site, especially with the learning curve that will come.

K Kris Olson-Garewal 04:33

that's just it, hopefully much quicker. We're probably not going to open with 100 units. We're going to probably open with 20 or 30 units at a time phase it in. And the other thing is that this site will have units that are built here by a local nonprofit that shares our concern for housing. And instead of the 19,000 that the COVID. Possible, very easily portable units are that we were

getting from the state of Washington. The local ones are going to be very solid, built for this weather and much hopefully use much less electricity. So we're looking forward to it, and they'll cost half the price.

C Christopher Conover 05:19

The first project was a collaboration with the southern Arizona Land Trust making use of some donated land that they had. How'd you get hold of this property, which, as you said, is much bigger, over four acres?

K Kris Olson-Garewal 05:32

This is joint free lease donation from the Deconcini family and from the zagona family, who are the owners of Caruso restaurant, and we just Patrick Deconcini, had responded to our initial request for land donation over two years ago with just letting us know that he had lots of land and take a look at and he could find us something. And then when we found that we needed more than the size of their property, which is just part of this, he simply asked the zagona family, who are good friends with theirs, if they would come in on this. And salon said, Certainly they were. People have been very generous.

C Christopher Conover 06:24

To refresh people's memories the houses at the first place, 10 or so units here, hopefully 100 or so units. How long do you expect people to be staying in these houses?

K Kris Olson-Garewal 06:39

Two to four years? And that's based on visiting other villages like this in California, talking to places that are similar in Colorado and Arkansas and the California place, when we the first one we met with, said, if you're not able to keep people for two to four years. Don't bother opening such a village, because their experience was they had expected three to six months for people to take care of their health problems, get a job and get a permanent place to live, and at the end of six months, no one was in permanent housing. And that's when it finally hit them that the problem was housing, and that is certainly the problem here. It's at least 6000 units that were short in Tucson for affordable housing, and 26,000 units in Pima County. I had asked Keith Bentley, who is the person who does the numbers analysis for the city for their point in time count every year in January, and had asked him, How many villages should we count on making of 100 each? And he just laughed and said, don't plan on any end. So he said we were in a definitely, we had job security.

C Christopher Conover 08:07

Well, he jumped on my next question, if we have 100 here, 10 at the we'll call it a pilot site, what's the ultimate goal, and maybe, what's the dream goal and the realistic goal for you all?

K

Kris Olson-Garewal 08:24

Well, our realistic goal is that we will help people get back on their feet with stay at our spa, and we'll give them training, arrange for them, those who are in the workforce eligible, make sure that they have skills that will earn them living wage, so that they aren't going to be leaving for permanent housing and quickly evicted. We want to make sure that they are permanently in permanent housing, and so it's probably our our inaugural project, our pilot project, will be folded into the larger the first larger project and the southern Arizona Land Trust, which had not been able to find a developer, you know, a bid that they could afford to develop an apartment complex. We'll hopefully get a shot in the arm from what the infrastructure that we leave, we have worked with. Our architect has worked with their plans of what they already have approved for their apartment complex, so that when we leave the infrastructure we leave, they can build on that, and that is what we are hoping to do in each of these sites, is that we will leave an instant infrastructure that is a sort of starter yeast for permanent housing. That is why, part of the reason why we are not buying property

C

Christopher Conover 09:56

This property is really in the shadow of the VA, I can see it just down the way here. Will you all be working with them a lot, because there's a large homeless, unhoused veteran population here, and you're right down the way?

K

Kris Olson-Garewal 10:13

The veterans have done beautifully. That's that was, you know, a priority of the Biden administration to house homeless veterans, and they are ahead of their game plan, but yes, we will certainly try to have a veterans sub unit within our housing unit here.

C

Christopher Conover 10:34

Well, thanks for coming and meeting us at the new site.

K

Kris Olson-Garewal 10:37

Well, thank you for having me.

C

Christopher Conover 10:41

That was Dr Kristen Olson-Garewell of the Homing Project. Our next update also took place at an unexpected location. In March, we spoke with longtime Tucson city council member Steve Kozachik, who was about to step down from his elected position to work with Pima County on the Mosaic Quarter. That's a new public private partnership that will bring a variety of new sports facilities to the area. When we caught up with him now, it was at his temporary office at the Pima Animal Care Center where he's interim director.

S

Steve Kozachik 11:18

The Mosaic Quarter leases are finalized, approved by the Board of Supervisors, and so they've broken ground. And so credit to Carmine Debonis to county administrator's office, Frank Knott, owner of Knott Development, for pulling that across the finish line. It's a 34 month project. And so they have begun clearing the land. The Ice Plex will be the first piece that goes up and running probably March, April of 27 and then the field house a few months after that. Now that we've gotten that that moving, the next assignment was to take over the southwest border operations, managing the managing the shelters and the shelter operators, we have issued a request for proposal. We're in the middle of a selection process for new shelter operators. Now, with the new administration, more questions arise about, you know, what's the future of that funding? So all that is playing itself out. And in the meantime, the former director here at PAC resigned, and so knowing that I had been involved in animal advocacy while I was on the city council, Jan Leshner and Francisco Garcia, Deputy county manager put me out here and said, Go, Go run that for a while.

C

Christopher Conover 12:34

When we talked to you in March, you said one of your proudest achievements was closing the Tucson Greyhound park. You called yourself a critter guy. So how's everything going out here at PACCC?

S

Steve Kozachik 12:47

Well, we have about 800 critters on site, about 500 plus dogs, about 100 cats. We have some birds and pigeons and all sorts of animals out here. We also have a great, great group of volunteers and fosters. We have roughly the same number of animal of dogs out in the community being fostered as we do here in the shelter. So when you see a census of 500 at pack, read, that is double that, and that's how many dogs are out in the community being fostered by the by the volunteers and foster people. We have a great staff out here. We have some real challenges. One of the challenges is that people expect animal protection services to be all things to all people, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I'll give you two quick examples. We went out recently and busted a cockfighting ring. Immediately had roughly 300 roosters here in the in the shelter, that's that's a mandatory you go and you address that. And meanwhile, the phone calls we get from people in the community saying there's a stray dog walking through the neighborhood, or there's some people in the park walking their dog off leash, simply not things we can realistically get to in a timely fashion. So we have some messaging issues that we need to do. In addition to that, with the census being above 500 or right around 500 we have capacity issues out here. You can't double bunk kennels with dogs, or you'll have fights, or you'll have spread of illness, and so we really are relying on relationships with rescues to depopulate, even on a temporary basis, some of the kennels, that's another example of some of the unrealistic expectations that the community might have. So messaging the dogs that are on deadline for euthanasia, messaging the fact that we've Zac we've got some great rescue partners, messaging the fact that we have people who come out here every single day and adopt dogs and to become their, you know, their forever family members, lots of different challenges out here. I'm really happy to be here rubbing shoulders with some really great staff, with some really great volunteers, and I'm looking forward to it. As long as I'm here.

How long do you think you're going to be here? It could be two days, two weeks, two months, two years, I don't know. And so my approach is just go into it with the expectation that you're going to be here for the long haul, and not let things sit for if they do. Hire another director whenever that happens, not have a bunch of things piled up. For example, we went over. We began, going over the fiscal year 26 budget with the staff today, we began talking about a partnership that we're forming with friends of PACC and the Humane Society, a grant that's coming that'll help us work collaboratively. We began talking about how PACC can support the prosperity initiative, assistance for low income families around the around the county. So Christopher, my approach is I'm not going to assume a timeline for me being out here. I'm going to assume that Francisco, Garcia and Jan Leshner asked me to come out here to operate as a director unless and until they make another decision, and that's what I'm going to do.

C Christopher Conover 16:00

You mentioned the humane society, people will remember they they got themselves in some trouble. That wasn't you all. Do people make the differentiation? Did any of that splash back on you all, even though it wasn't you all at all?

S Steve Kozachik 16:14

Yeah, I think people have a maybe a negative connotation to shelters generally, because of the olden days when it wasn't Pima Animal Care Center, it was the dog pound. It was where you sent your dog to get euthanized. And that's not what we are anymore. We have an extensive rehoming operation. If somebody comes in here and says, I want to, I want to turn my dog or my cat over to you. We have an entire staff out here who will work with those people to try and keep them in the home or find a foster you know, is it rent assistance you need? Are you just running out of food? How can we help you? You know, through the you know, through the short term, to get your feet back on the ground. Another example is, I had a former colleague on the council call me earlier today and say, we're going to clean out a homeless camp. Later on, one of the women has a dog. Can we get a temporary foster? We have a program called keeping families together out here where we assist that person while he or she is getting their life in order, and we'll get a temporary foster, and then you get your dog back. So we got those programs that the community is simply not familiar with that's a part of the messaging that I'm talking about. We need to make sure that the community knows that this is not the dog pound that we're sitting out here killing dogs. This is a shelter. We operate as a shelter, as a place of last resort for dogs. Our first priority is keep them in their homes or find another home for them.

C Christopher Conover 17:41

Let's go back to what you mentioned at the beginning, the border, some of the other stuff you're working on. And when you were on the council, you were the one who really got the shelter going at the old monastery. When things were getting really rough with the incoming administration, things could radically change. What does that look like for Pima County?

S Steve Kozachik 18:04

Pima County, right now is operating on what are called Shelter and Services Program funds. Earlier in the year, we received roughly \$21 million in SSP dollars. In August, we received another 18 point 7 million. We are using those dollars to process legally processed asylum seekers. Elpas, that is a legal term of art, which means very simply that Border Patrol has received these people at a port of entry through the CBP one process, Biden's imposed process back in the June executive order, and they are now in our shelter, legally here pending the adjudication of their asylum hearing that could take years. They're not staying in our shelter for days or weeks or months. They're here for one two days, Max, when we get what we get them on a plane to their next of kin or a sponsor paid for by the next of kin or the sponsor. So we are using federal dollars to manage these programs. When Biden initiated the the executive order back in June, the numbers dropped drastically, and we are now at a rate of about 150 new arrivals per day, easily manageable if Donald Trump's administration comes in and does two things, sweeps the SSP dollars and eliminates the asylum process. We will then be in a position where the board of supervisors will have to make a policy decision. A, are we going to come out of general fund to keep these shelters open? And B, if we do, are we going to take people who are here, who are not here legally? Those are policy decisions that will have to be made. If those decisions are not made and Trump sweeps the funds on January 20, then we're going to be shutting doors, and we could see for the first time in this community, street releases that we have successfully avoided by managing this. Even back to the Benedictine

C Christopher Conover 20:01

So you still live in Ward six. You still live in the city, since you don't work for the city. Now, what's it like on the outside looking in?

S Steve Kozachik 20:10

I'm really focused on this stuff, on pack, on the border, on working for the county. And I will admit to you, it is pretty easy to disengage and to not pick up the local news anymore and just kind of focus on life just like a regular citizen.

C Christopher Conover 20:24

How tempting has it been to show up at a meeting and just to call to the audience?

S Steve Kozachik 20:28

Zero. Absolutely zero. I do not miss call to the audience, and I wish them all well.

C Christopher Conover 20:33

All right. Well, thanks for spending some time with us. That was Steve Kozachik. You're listening to The Buzz. After the break, we get a quick update on more stories from this year. Stay with us.

N

NPR promo 20:48

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C

Christopher Conover 21:03

Welcome back to The Buzz. I'm Christopher Conover. We're checking in on the people from some of the stories that we did this past year. Back in April, we did an episode that examined how the money Arizona is receiving from opioid lawsuits is being spent. Joining me now is our producer, Zac Ziegler, who looked over data provided by the Arizona Attorney General's office to give us an update. Zac, welcome,

Z

Zac Ziegler 21:31

Hey, good to be here.

C

Christopher Conover 21:32

So when we examined opioid spending in April, there wasn't a lot of spending reported by the state or local governments, or maybe not a lot had been reported. Has that changed?

Z

Zac Ziegler 21:44

Yeah, now we're actually seeing a fair amount popping up, actually starting right around the time of when we publish this story. Now we have 10 of 15 counties reporting some spending. Millions have been spent, mostly in Maricopa County, as far as the dollars go, but more counties have been spending quite a bit, especially when you start looking at the percentages of what they have received.

C

Christopher Conover 22:12

Now in April, the leader for percentage of money spent was Yavapai County, at around 14% of what it had received, is that increased spending due to more money coming in, or those percentages changing also? Those

Z

Zac Ziegler 22:27

percentages have changed a lot since we did our story. The leader now is La Paz County, which has spent all \$200,000 it has received, and actually then a little Gila County has spent more than half of its allocation. Graham County a bit less than half. Yavapai and Coconino counties

have both spent about a quarter now. Most everyone else who has reported is in the 10 to 15% range.

C Christopher Conover 22:57

We also heard about Yavapai County spending on their partners against narcotics, Law Enforcement Task Force. How's that money being spent by law enforcement?

Z Zac Ziegler 23:07

So law enforcement is an area we see quite a bit of spending by the counties or other municipalities. Lots of it are going towards programs that help people in need of help. Get connected to resources, we see organizations mentioned like connections to care, abatement programs and avoidance programs. Are also some other big ones. There's a fair number of mentions, actually, of programs like that geared towards youth. And we also see money being spent by law enforcement geared towards getting recovery homes up and going interesting.

C Christopher Conover 23:43

So has any money come into the pool that the counties have to work with since we did this reporting?

Z Zac Ziegler 23:50

Yes, the grocery chain Kroger, which has pharmacies in its stores we know locally around Arizona as fries, has added about 68 and a half million dollars of money in a settlement it recently had with the state attorney general's office.

C Christopher Conover 24:07

Is any more money going to come into that pool that we know about?

Z Zac Ziegler 24:11

Possibly the Attorney General's site still lists two groups as possible future fund distributions, one of which is endo Health Solutions, that company is currently going through bankruptcy, as well as settling civil and criminal complaints related to this. And then, of course, they also list Purdue. I'm guessing that is Purdue pharma, not the university. Back in October, a settlement with various states, and Purdue pharma was blocked by the Supreme Court of the United States because of the shielding it offered the Sackler family, the owners of Purdue pharma, from personal liability. We'll see where that ends up.

C Christopher Conover 24:54

C Christopher Conover 24:54

All right, as you said, that's a wait and see. So let's wrap the. Us up with another appearance you made on the show back in February. It was an episode about organ and tissue donation, and this was a case of experiential journalism for you, because you're a tissue recipient. You received donated cartilage in your knee more than a year ago. So how's that going?

Z Zac Ziegler 25:20

You know, it's going great. I've, I've started running again. I was geared up to take part in the altur de Tucson, the metric race, 100 kilometers, about 63 miles. But as luck would have it, I got sick right before the race. Was actually in the emergency room the night before, so didn't get to ride this year. Was really hoping to was trained up ready to go. That was a bit of a bummer. But you know, it's it's going great. My My doctor, every time I go in and talk to him, just he seems like he wants to brag about how well this surgery went and how well the results are, and if how I'm doing is any clue he has a right to it's it's been spectacular. The knee that I had the surgery on went from being my bad leg to my good leg,

C Christopher Conover 26:13

all right. Well, let's hope that keeps going the way it's been going.

Z Zac Ziegler 26:18

Yeah, definitely.

C Christopher Conover 26:20

And that's the buzz for this week. You can find all our episodes online at azpm.org and subscribe to our show wherever you get your podcast, just search for the buzz Arizona. We're also on the NPR app. Zac Ziegler and Desarae Tucker are our producers, with production help from Maggie Farmer, Our music is by Enter the Haggis. I'm Christopher Conover, thanks for listening.

N Nicole Cox 27:01

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