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Downtown Walkabout: City of Chandler

Posted By Mike Padgett

(Writer's note: Downtown Phoenix rules the school these days, with the headlines dominated by the new Metro light rail, the expanded Phoenix Convention center, the new 1,000-room Sheraton Phoenix Downtown Hotel, Arizona State University's expanded downtown campus and other new developments. But there is more to the Valley than Phoenix. Over the next few months, I plan to talk with mayors, city redevelopment teams and business owners in the region's other cities. If you have ideas or concerns about the Valley's suburbs or downtown Phoenix, send me a note. Thanks.)

These are exciting days for Diane Martin. She's standing at the gate of her future where the butterflies are history and her courage is at full throttle. She's ready to open her gelato, Italian ice and sandwich shop this week in downtown Chandler.

For the past 10 years, Martin worked in information technology systems in banks. She helped tame the bank computers to keep them user-friendly for employees. But today, after nursing a dream of entrepreneurship for five years, Martin is headed down a new career path. Her homework has included traveling to frozen dessert conferences, studying business courses and collecting advice from business mentors.

Now, she's ready. Martin plans to open her business, Simply Unique Gelatos & Italian Ice, this week in downtown Chandler at 8 S. San Marcos Place, Suite 106.

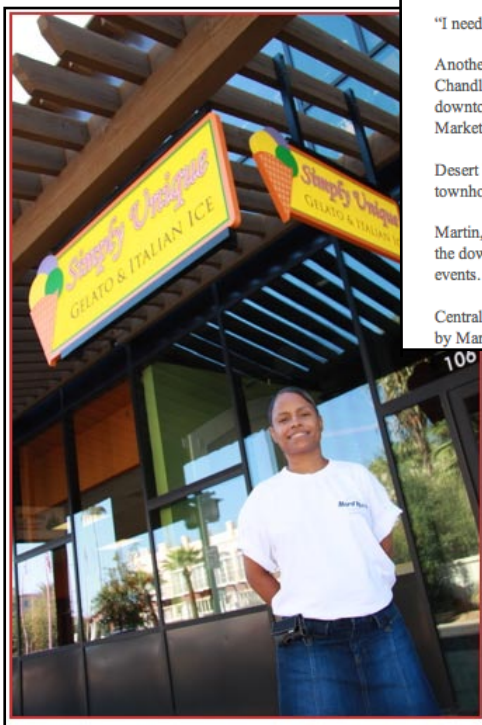
"I needed a change," Martin says. "I felt like I wasn't moving. I felt like I wasn't growing intellectually."

Another downtown Chandler business owner with a powerful inner drive is Niels Kreipke, co-owner of the [Desert Viking Cos.](#), a Chandler-based redevelopment team. Kreipke and his father-in-law partner Michael Hogarty are credited with jumpstarting historic downtown Chandler with new and renovated businesses and new residential condos. They also revived the historic Gold Spot Market at Third Avenue and Roosevelt Street near downtown Phoenix.

Desert Viking's newest project is [San Marcos Commons](#), a mixed-use project under construction in downtown Chandler. It includes townhomes, buildings for offices and retail use, and a parking structure.

Martin, Kreipke and Hogarty are only a few businesspeople betting heavily on the future growth of downtown Chandler. They credit the downtown's strong economic pulse to the business community's team spirit. They help each other, and they organize public events.

Central to the downtown area is the historic [Crown Plaza San Marcos Golf Resort](#), which dates to the early 1900s. It is bookended by Martin's Simply Unique Gelato & Italian Ice on the south and Desert Viking's San Marcos Commons on the north.



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Design elements of the hotel are seen in the architecture of San Marcos Commons townhomes. The first phase, with 37 residences, is nearly sold out. Work is starting on the second phase, which has 42 units. The price range is \$240,000 to the mid-\$300,000s. The size range is 1,350 to 2,050 square feet.

The 15-acre master plan for San Marcos Commons includes an agreement with the city for "150,000 square feet of office, retail and restaurant" space on the north and east sides of the new townhomes, Kreipke says.

Downtown Chandler has a charming small-town feel to it, but with extra energy offered by the proximity of the new freeway, the San Marcos Country Club, the ambiance of the historic Crowne Plaza San Marcos, Desert Viking's new residential construction, and the revitalized businesses bordering the Dr. A.J. Chandler Park, named for the city's founder.

"One of the reasons that downtown Chandler is succeeding is because everybody's working together," Kreipke says. "We're working together from a marketing standpoint, from helping each other build events and festivals."

Interest in downtown Chandler began accelerating in 2005 and 2006 with the opening of segments of the Santan Freeway one mile south of downtown on Arizona Avenue, says Teri Killgore, downtown redevelopment manager.

Other projects in downtown Chandler's future include:

- A \$74 million city hall that will include space for the city historical museum.
- A \$65 million beautification project on Arizona Avenue, from the park south to the freeway.
- A proposal for a 100,000-square-foot convention center and a hotel tower with about 250 rooms next to the golf course and coordinated with the San Marcos resort.
- Renovations to the Chandler Center for the Arts.

Aiding the success of downtown Chandler is its own history, which is anchored by the San Marcos hotel, says Eileen Brill Wagner, executive director of [Downtown Chandler Community Partnership](#).

"I think what's happening here is unique," she says. "If you look at any other city, East Valley or otherwise, you don't have the historic combined with the new business owners coming in, and combined with the historic hotel."

The city also is interested in plans for even more development of offices, retail space, luxury apartments and entertainment venues. Kreipke estimated the value of plans committed and proposed in and around downtown at "almost half a billion dollars."

In early October, one day after two downtown businesses in the historic district closed, Killgore's office received bids from four other companies for the two vacant spaces. "I think that says a lot about how much people want to be downtown," she says.

