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Lack of audit stalls museum takeover

Historical Society won't open books

By Kaye Jensen
THE REPUBLIC | AZCENTRAL.COM

The Chandler Historical Society is refusing to let the city audit its museum's financial records, stalling a planned municipal takeover of museum operations and putting employees at risk.

Historical Society President Jim Patterson, a former Chandler mayor, said the non-profit society welcomes the takeover but will not allow a municipal audit because it would be a public record. "It's a privacy issue," Patterson said. "Our books are audited every year by an independent auditor and we're not interested in anybody else looking at our books."

Museum administrator Judy Crago, a municipal employee, said an audit is critical to the city's understanding of how the museum operates and it would not make donors' names public. A takeover agreement that includes the audit was supposed to have been signed before the start of the fiscal year, which was Tuesday. The Historical Society has submitted an alternative proposal with no audit. Without an agreement signed by both parties, Chandler can't continue financial support of museum operations — an expenditure of about \$100,000 last year. Crago said. The money has been used to pay museum employees' salaries.

City Councilman Jeff Winkler called the society's audit refusal "alarming" and said he is disappointed that reaching a takeover agreement is taking so long.

"I don't understand why they're presenting as much. We're getting ready to build a new \$14 million museum and we want to get a handle on what the costs are."

NEW COURT TACTIC
Group-therapy justice
Chandler's county court is trying group therapy methods instead of just threats to collect overdue traffic fines. The second class of 17 scofflaws "graduated" last week. Page 4

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Haley's story will inspire

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Key downtown project gets 1st tenants

By Luci Scott
THE REPUBLIC | AZCENTRAL.COM

Maris Thomas and her husband, Gary Stuckey, were having dinner the other night when a stranger opened their door and started to walk in.

"They thought (our home) was a model," Thomas said.

"They backed out very quickly."

The unexpected visitor was one aspect of the couple's life as pioneers. They are among the first residents of The Villas at San Marcos Commons, the second infill townhome development to be built in the core of downtown Chandler.

Creating high-density housing downtown is a key to the area's ongoing redevelopment, city planners have said.

Buying the unit was a result of serendipity.

Thomas and Stuckey were living in Oakwood Lakes in south Chandler when they attended a party celebrating the opening of a portion of the Santan Freeway. They walked up to a booth sponsored by Desert Viking, the Villas' builder.

The couple didn't buy right away but eventually signed papers in June 2006 for their three-bedroom, two-story unit of 1,750 square feet with a two-car garage.

The first day they lived there, they walked around downtown.

"One of the things we just love is all the restaurant options, and that's just great. I don't intend to cook a lot," Thomas said.

The couple downsized from a four-bedroom, 2,000-square-foot house.

"The adjustment is in the main living area," Thomas said. In her new home, the living and dining areas and kitchen are in one big room.

"We had a living room in the other house that we rarely used," she said. "This is more compact."

They also like the freedom from taking care of a pool and yard.

"We have no regrets about downsizing, not at all," she said.

Downtown then and now
What it looked like: When Maris Thomas lived in downtown Chandler in the 1940s and '50s, the entire block was residential, with single-family homes," she recalled. "As kids, we went through the alley to our friends' houses; it was a great adventure land." The boundaries of Chandler were Ray Road on the north, Alma School on the west, Pecos Road on the south and McQueen Road on the east. "I had a good friend at Arizona Avenue and Knox Road. She was out in the country. When you went north out of Chandler, it was eight miles of farm land before you got to Mesa," she said.

The resort hotel: The hotel that became the Crowne Plaza San Marcos Golf Resort was open only half the year, and it was very exclusive, she said. There were cabanas on the grounds, a tennis court where the entrance is now, and a huge oleander hedge that hid the resort from the masses.

Other things nearby: The post office was on Buffalo Street, on the corner near where the La Stalla restaurant now stands. Thomas walked to school at Chandler High, where she graduated in 1960. She also worked in the box office of the Parkway Theater, which was on the site that is now the restaurant El Zocalo.

DAVID WALLACE/THE REPUBLIC

At a glance
Names: The Villas at San Marcos Commons.
Address: 121 and 124 N. California St., Chandler.
Units built: 37.
Under contract: 26.
Total to be built: 79.
Prices: From the \$240,000s.
Sizes: 1,343 to 2,037 square feet. All have two-car garages.
Information: www.sanmarcoscommons.com

