

# JIMMY MAGAHERN Bio

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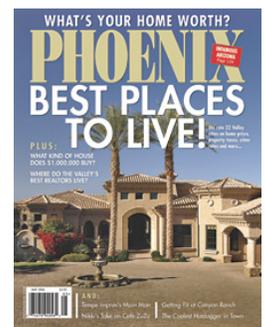
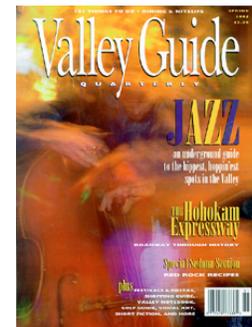
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Jimmy Magahern (left) with Dave Pratt in 1984; Magahern today



I started my writing career as a freelance music journalist in 1982, writing the first of what would become over 275 published articles for the Phoenix-based *New Times* before the end of the 80's.

In the 90's, I began writing lifestyle and entertainment stories for *Valley Guide*, a Madden publication targeted to resorts and Arizona visitors, in addition to some corporate publications.

In 2001, I returned to writing music stories for *New Times* and, two years later, became a staff writer, creating another roughly 90 articles for the nationally-recognized weekly (now part of Village Voice Media) before returning to freelancing in January of 2006.

Since then, I've had stories published in *Phoenix Magazine*, the *Arizona Republic* and *Republic Magazines* (including *AZ*, *Arrowhead Life* and *AZ Society*), the community newspapers of Strickbine Publishing (including *Scottsdale Times*, *Northeast Phoenix Times*, *Chandler Times* and *Gilbert Times*), *944*, *TechConnect* and others.

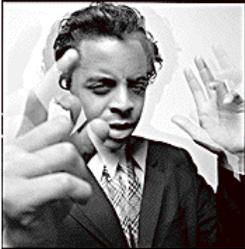
Over the years, I've also had my work syndicated for publication in many newspapers across the U.S., including *Albany Times-Union*, *Dallas Times Herald*, *Denver Post*, *Detroit News*, *Houston Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Louisville Courier-Journal*, *New York Daily News*, *Orlando Sentinel*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Santa Ana Register* and *Washington Weekly*. Reprints of my Phoenix *New Times* stories have also appeared in the chain's other weekly papers, including *Cleveland Scene*, *Dallas Observer*, *East Bay Express*, *New Times Broward-Palm Beach*, *Houston Press*, *Miami New Times* and *SF Weekly Riverfront Times*.

In addition to my writing work, I've also worked as a graphic artist for America West Airlines (now US Airways), U-Haul International and other firms in the Phoenix area. I have a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Arizona State University, am a graduate of Brophy Prep, and a Phoenix resident since 1967.

FULL TEXT OF ALL STORIES AVAILABLE AT: [jimmymagahern.com](http://jimmymagahern.com)

Prior to returning to freelancing in 2006, most of my published writing appeared in the Phoenix *New Times*. On the following pages you'll see a sample of that work. Complete text of all articles, including work published since 2006, is available at [jimmymagahern.com](http://jimmymagahern.com).

## Different Voices



We live in a diverse world, so I strive to bring a diversity of voices and viewpoints into my stories. If there's one thing we can all relate to, it's the ring of truth in what others say.

### Kid Sharpton

Jarret Maupin is the reverend Al's handpicked protégé. Is Phoenix City Hall ready?

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, February 3, 2005

### Postcards From the Edge

Hi, Mom! I'm crossing the border!

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, October 20, 2005

### Storm Troopers

Black people calling Phoenix the promised land? The Katrina evacuees in the Valley haven't been getting out enough

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, September 22, 2005

### Quiet Riot

Rockin' the house but shying from the spotlight, DJ Element is the Valley's no-flash grandmaster

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, November 17, 2005

## Excerpt from *Storm Troopers*

Published: Phoenix *New Times*, Thursday, February 3, 2005

Jannah Scott, the freshly appointed policy adviser to Governor Janet Napolitano on faith and community initiatives and the woman in charge of a team of spiritual care providers at the Coliseum, told a gathering of local religious leaders at a nearby church six days after their arrival:

"Our people from the Gulf Coast of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama are some of the most resilient people that we will ever meet." She marveled, "Some of them had to push bodies aside to get through the water. And yet they can still find joy. They're smiling. Telling us, 'Thank you.'"

Like most of the evacuees, Elton Bush doesn't blame God, even though His name is listed on his insurance forms, after a checked box and the words "act of."

"Most of them don't blame God for what happened," says Warren Robertson, a minister and volunteer on Scott's team who's been working in the spiritual care chapel, set up in a small room inside the Coliseum between the makeshift pharmacy and the Post-it-filled message board.

"As a matter of fact, most of them feel God brought them here," says Robertson, who was born and raised in New Orleans and now lives in the Valley. "A lot of them say that: 'I was in a situation that I'd have never left. And it's just washed me out to a promised land.'"

A promised land? Phoenix?

It's a brand-new curiosity: black people who don't think Phoenix sucks.

Forget Ev Mecham and the pickaninnies. Forget that Public Enemy song.

Bishop Alexis Thomas, the youthful, charismatic leader of the Pilgrim Rest church at 14th Street and Jefferson, a center for much of the black community here, was so excited after seeing all the positive energy at the Coliseum, he told the hundreds attending his Sunday service, "All that bad stuff people ever said about Phoenix? It's all turning around now! All that Martin Luther King holiday stuff? It's gone!"

But the Katrina evacuees still at the Coliseum haven't been getting around much yet. When the black volunteers, like Homer Washington, who's lived here all his life, hear the new people talking about how wonderful all the people of Arizona are, he has to bite his tongue.

"You almost don't want to tell them," he says, smiling.

**MORE**

## Comic Relief



Taking our frivolity seriously is the only way to get through life. Blow up balloons, but get really into it, and it may even get you through a tragedy or two.

## Pop Culture

Super-talented "twisters" are blowing up all over the Valley

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, January 12 , 2006

## Jokers Wild

Making it big in the valley's comedy scene is no laughing matter

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, September 8, 2005

## Big Cheese

Valley export Mark Davis plots to kill his lounge-pimp alter ego, Richard Cheese

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, May 19, 2005

## Excerpt from **Big Cheese**

Published: Phoenix *New Times*, Thursday, May 19, 2005

Mark Davis is a pro at staying in character. Sometimes he wonders if anyone in his audience even knows his real name, and considers whether he should do a curtain call, like the stage performers do on Broadway. Mark Davis as Richard Cheese, ladies and gentlemen!

"I would like to think that people want to see the show because it's a good show," Davis says a few weeks before the Vegas concert, over lunch at Carlos O'Brien's Mexican restaurant on Northern Avenue in Phoenix, where the Los Angeles resident grew up and still visits frequently to see his aging parents.

"But I'd also like to know, are they there because they think Richard Cheese is a real person? Or are they in on the fact that it's a portrayal?"

Davis, who today is appearing in his natural form -- floppy, un-gelled hair, simple black tee shirt and baggy khakis -- chooses to keep his real name buried in the CD credits and on his suitably cheesy Web site, [iloverichardcheese.com](http://iloverichardcheese.com), mainly to keep it simple for the fans.

"Whatever I'm doing with this, I want to keep it really clear," he says. "Like NASA, when they launch the space shuttle, they're not also selling ice cream. We're basically launching a space shuttle."

Still, each night after the Dick shuttle comes back down to Earth and the dizzied fans stagger off to their respective lives, the actor behind the comical cad every luscious lady loves to tease is often left to wonder, where is the love?

"I don't think the groupie knowledge I have is accurate," says Davis, still single at 39 -- a fact that, lately, seems to be weighing on his mind.

"We're a joke band, so we don't get what you'd call fully operating groupies. I get girls who say they are big fans, but then once they realize that the tuxedo is gonna be removed, well . . . they don't necessarily want to see what's really behind the tuxedo." **MORE**

## Generation Next



I write about teens like I write about adults - and sometimes the teens don't like it. "You never chalk anything up to their age, which is, by the way, young," wrote a reader. But they're also very real - just hang out with them for a while.

### Dance Dance Fever

Valley arcade rats find fame on the DDR Dance Pad

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, September 9, 2004

### I'll take care of your kids!

For troubled 'tweens, forget the parents: Nothing beats the hip techie uncle with the PC room

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, May 8, 2003

### Brainiacs

International Baccalaureate students learn that the best revenge for a nerd is a great education -- in elitism

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, January 15, 2004

### Small World

Radio Disney feeds the new pop underground with music for tweens

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, December 13, 2001

## Excerpt from **Dance Dance Fever**

Published: Phoenix *New Times*, Thursday, September 9, 2004

"JSB is here! Jason just saw him in the parking lot!"

In the toy-castle-styled arcade building just east of the water park at Mesa's sprawling Golfland-Sunsplash amusement center, the news is passed above the din of blaring video games and hollering teens as if the words themselves were a stage-diving rock star.

"JSB? You sure?"

Suddenly, the throng of sweaty teenaged boys that has been gathering all morning around the DDR Extreme machine snaps to attention. Vaulting up the six steps that separate the sunken lower pit of the arcade from the surrounding upper deck, they cut left at the snack bar and walk quickly -- but coolly -- past the lunch tables and Initial D Version 3 machines and fling open the thick wooden doors at the entrance to the arcade. Silhouetted by the blazing mid-July sun, the boys look left, then right, anxiously surveying the ramps leading up from the two parking lots encircling the coin-op kingdom.

Pinball wizards and joystick Jedis have always carried a certain celebrity cachet among the arcade-rat crowd. But expert players of Dance Dance Revolution, or DDR -- a game where players battle each other through dancing, "Beat It" style, on twin mini dance pads -- have become the arcade world's American Idols.

Pumped up by flashing klieg lights, the stage-like platform and constant whoops of encouragement from the recorded announcer ("Everybody's watching you!"), DDR is a game that makes performers of its players -- and true arcade stars of its champs.

While the game is deceptively easy to learn -- stomp on the correct arrow as its corresponding symbol scrolls to the top of the screen, and you're "Perfect!!!", "Great!", "Good"; or, if you come too close to missing the beat entirely, "Boo!" -- it takes months of obsessive arcade residence to perfect the lightning-fast footwork required on some of the hardest songs. That is why, four years after the Japanese arcade game's introduction, we're just now beginning to see all these amazing young sneaker percussionists through the arcade windows by the mall food courts.

"More people are starting to play now, because the players they see are getting better," says 13-year-old David Benavidez, a.k.a. Zero, one of the youngest players in the Valley DDR community -- and also one of its best. "Back when I started playing, like, three summers ago, there weren't many good players to inspire you. Now we're starting to see what people can do with this game."

**MORE**

## Action, Jackson!



Being a confirmed guy myself, I tend to do a lot of "guy stories" - action-packed yarns about street racing, cage wrestlers and high-flying, swinging bachelors. Got a problem with that, buddy?

## The Mile High Guys

With unlimited free flying and online access to singles worldwide, working for the Valley's hometown airline is the next best thing to being James Bond

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, July 10, 2003

## The Fast and the Frustrated

All revved up with no place to go, Valley teens -- and hemi-ed up husbands -- go wild on the streets

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, March 4, 2004

## Caged Heat

Rage in the Cage promoter Roland Sarria lets loose the Valley's modern-day gladiators

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, August 4, 2005

## Turning Japanese

Desert drifters import "car surfing" to Arizona's hot streets

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, July 8, 2004

## Excerpt from **The Mile High Guys**

Published: Phoenix *New Times*, Thursday, July 10, 2003

Rob, a newly divorced, 41-year-old SWM known to the online dating community by his Match.com screen name "phxbuddy," is 24,000 feet over Pocatello when it suddenly dawns on him: The only piece of identifying information he has on the woman he's traveling 726 miles to see tonight is her e-mail address.

He knows her first name is Sabrina -- there can't be too many of those in the Boise white pages. But without a last name to look under, he's sunk.

Unless there's an Internet kiosk at the airport, Rob thinks. He could log on, check his e-mail and see if "sabrInah" pops up on his AOL Instant Messenger buddy list.

But upon landing, Rob, who toils by day in the advertising department at the Tempe corporate headquarters of America West Airlines, quickly discovers that Boise Airport is no LAX. He's more likely to find an antique shoeshine stand than a broadband-wired computer station in this unintentionally retro transportation hub.

Rob steps quickly through the terminal, checking his PDA, then his watch, then his cell phone like a sex-obsessed Inspector Gadget. Finally, Rob steps outside the concourse onto the curb and hails a cab. Somewhere in this city, he figures, there's got to be a Kinko's.

It only takes about three miles in the cab before one of the 24-hour copy centers with all the glowing computer monitors catches Rob's eye. He hollers at the cabby to drop him off here, at the Kinko's on Capitol Boulevard, where Rob immediately logs on to an open PC and fires off a short e-mail notifying his latest Match.com find that he's in town for the night. Sabrina IMs back instantly, saying that she and a friend -- whom Rob, ironically, has also been carrying on an Instant Message romance with -- were just heading out to Bogie's, a local blues club. "What's the address of the Kinko's?" Sabrina asks. "We'll pick you up on the way."

Within minutes, Rob is tearing up the dance floor at Bogie's with two women that, until tonight, he's only known by their JPEGs. Sabrina is astonished that their playful online conversation this very morning about "getting together for some skiing" is actually happening. "I can't believe you're here!" she says, a difficult-to-read expression covering her face.

Rob, an average-looking cubicle drone who's managed to turn his discovery of the online personals world into a lifestyle rivaling James Bond's -- with a little help from the unlimited flight benefits he receives from his job at America West -- just smiles as he delivers his standard line to his new lady friends. "I'm like a pizza," he boasts. "Delivered hot to your door in 30 minutes or less!"

**MORE**

## Geek Squad



From wardrivers to podcasters to gamers who maybe take Battlefield Vietnam just a little too seriously, there's always something new that really r0x0rs in Nerd Nation.

### Geeks Gone Wild!

Wardriving hackers take the revenge of the nerds to the street

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, August 14, 2003

### War Games

For the Valley's extreme gamers, the action is often too big for a computer screen

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, May 6, 2004

### The ME Show

See me, hear me, feel me, fund me! Are vlogging and podcasting the ultimate slacker careers?

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, March 24, 2005

### Game Boys

The Minibosses show us why dorks rock

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, September 30, 2004

## Excerpt from *War Games*

Published: Phoenix *New Times*, Thursday, May 6, 2004

They line up by the warehouse door at Contractor Wire and Cable in south Phoenix like an army of IT guys delivering refurbished computers: 140 mostly white males, most in their mid-20s, clutching big CRT monitors in front of their guts and toting hefty cabinets and bags full of wires, keyboards and mice under their arms.

To the couple of Spanish-speaking kids angling their bikes in the quiet industrial park street to view the action on this early Saturday morning in March, the only excitement in watching the slow parade of overburdened Dilberts lies in waiting to see if anyone drops his box -- which none of them does.

But inside, as each man picks a spot to set his computer down along the long rows of picnic tables lining the cavernous warehouse, the environment quickly transforms into the Bizarro version of Office Space, with every character playing a post-hypnotic Peter Gibbons knocking down imaginary cubicle walls and personalizing his two-square-foot space with geeky gusto.

One by one, as the boxes are plugged in, cabinets with angular-cut Plexiglas windows light up in neon hues from the banks of ultraviolet cold cathode lights encased among the multicolored wires and illuminated LED fans. Guys in tee shirts imprinted with Windows error messages and mother-board manufacturers' logos decorate their monitors with nerdy good-luck mascots -- a dragon here, a cartoon Ren Chihuahua there -- and personal photos. One beefy guy props a 3x5 of what appears to be himself in a superhero costume against the bottom of his screen.

Loud music, ranging from the latest skater-punk anthems to vintage Average White Band, blares from the MP3 player of a centralized computer specially set up as a music server. And every computer in the building is loading games. In fact, for the next 14 to 20 hours, nonstop except for the occasional snack bar or bathroom break, it's all about the games.

This is boot-up time at Desert Bash 2.0, the second annual super-size LAN party hosted by LanCamp, Arizona's biggest computer gaming "clan," with some 58 official members and another 340 game enthusiasts from all over the world registered on its Web forums. **MORE**

## Words and Music



I started out as a journalist writing music stories for the *New Times* in the early 80's. I still do it, although probably from a different perspective today.

### Ghost Radio

Who's behind Arizona's nonstop oddball rock time capsule?

Published by *Phoenix New Times*, September 18, 2003

### Mad Max

Metal dad Max Cavalera rocks the thrash scene – and his Phoenix neighborhood

Published by *Phoenix New Times*, May 22, 2003

### Mouf Wash

Conservatives and hip-hop fans weigh the pros and ho's of Ludacris

Published by *Phoenix New Times*, March 6, 2003

### Ooh Child

MTV's blockbuster TRL Tour proves black is beautiful and profitable

Published by *Phoenix New Times*, August 30, 2001

### Droll Call

Veteran Valley music oddballs plot to top the Sponge Monkeys

Published by *Phoenix New Times*, May 6, 2004

## Excerpt from *Ghost Radio*

Published: *Phoenix New Times*, Thursday, September 18, 2003

Adam Marsland, an indie rock singer-songwriter who, by his own accounts, spends most of his life on the road, discovered KCDX purely by accident one day while riding in his tour bus across the Arizona desert.

"I usually don't listen to the radio because it seems like it's always the same old crap, no matter what city you're in," says the 30-ish guitarist from L.A., currently on tour with John Mayer and the Counting Crows. "But one day I was flipping around the dial, and I heard a song that I never heard before that was kind of odd. Then I heard another song I didn't know, then another one, then a song I kinda knew, then a couple of songs by some bands I recognized, but they weren't the songs you usually heard by those artists. And it was really weird. I was calling up my friends in L.A., saying, Who does that song called "Creature From the Black Lagoon"? Was that Dave Edmunds? Well, they're playing that on the radio here! And they're like, No way!"

Weirdest of all, Marsland heard absolutely no commercials on the station, all the way from Globe until nearly New Mexico, where the signal finally faded out. "It was like Internet radio, but on the airwaves," he says. Marsland figured the station was a bizarre fluke, sure to be gone by the time his tour circled back to California.

But sure enough, when Marsland passed through Arizona again weeks later, there it was, "still commercial-free and still playing one classic rock obscurity after another," he recalls. The only interruption Marsland heard was a recorded station ID that flew by once on the hour, announcing "103.1, KCDX, Florence." Finally, the rocker was so intrigued he decided to make a long detour to Florence to find the secret control booth where all the magic was purportedly coming from. It was a pilgrimage that echoed the young Richard Dreyfuss' search for the Wolfman in *American Graffiti*.

"I just got as far as the guy at the Chamber of Commerce, who photocopied an article from the local newspaper that only deepened the mystery," Marsland says. "It said the station owner was a pharmacist who had the opportunity to acquire a radio license in Florence. And I'm thinking, How does a pharmacist get into buying radio stations? Was he dealing drugs out of Osco?"

Marsland laments he never actually got to meet the wizard. "I had to get back on the road to go do another show, so I never got to pursue it any further," he says. "But I don't think anybody really knows where this guy's operating from. It truly is a mystery." **MORE**

## Next, the Phone Book!



I love the challenge of crafting a good, entertaining read about subjects most writers would consider too mundane. 5,000 words about the mall? Hey, you'd be surprised how much life goes on there if you hang out long enough.

### Big Time Mallin'

Living, loving and loathing in the mini-cities of the Valley's malls

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, December 9, 2004

### Might As Well Jump!

A hot new sport -- from France -- gives teens an excuse to act like kindergartners

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, May 20, 2004

## Excerpt from **Big Time Mallin'**

Published: Phoenix *New Times*, Thursday, December 9, 2004

There's light pop music piped in through the ceiling speakers at Paradise Valley Mall, but Donny Lang never really hears it.

"This particular mall has no music -- or it's so quiet and the ceiling's so high that I can never hear it," says Lang, 25, a part-time musician and full-time retail clerk.

"All I ever hear is the weird sound of the mall itself. All the strange little clicks, clacks and industrial sounds, mixed in with echoed voices. It's like the soundtrack to a David Lynch movie. The background music in Eraserhead sounds kind of like what we hear every day in the mall."

Lang, who works behind the sales counter at Ritz Camera on the far east end of the sprawling, W-shaped shopping mecca, actually kind of likes the peculiar ambient music of the mall. A second-generation Brian Wilson fan who leads his own psychedelic surf-rock band and counts the Beach Boys' druggy Smiley Smile album as one of his favorites, Lang has a keen ear for odd sounds.

"I don't hear it so much inside the store," he says in a slow, sleepy drawl. "From the back of the store, behind the counter, it's just this distant, vague, reverberated noise."

Nevertheless, it gets to him. As do the lack of windows, the sky-mocking high ceilings and the general hermetically sealed-in feeling that typifies the average mall.

"I always look outside, down the end of the mall by Luby's, where I can see the doors from inside my store," he says wistfully. "And sometimes I can tell if it's overcast, and I'll think, 'What's it like outside? Is it cold? Is it going to rain?'"

More than a hundred million people pass through the Valley's biggest malls each year, according to Westcor, which now owns seven of them (including PV Mall). A lot of those visitors actually spend money: According to the International Council of Shopping Centers, Phoenix-area malls raked in an average of \$27 per square foot in September alone. That's more than a million dollars a day for a mall the size of Chandler Fashion Center.

For Lang, it's a mystery why anybody comes to the mall.

"It's all these pseudo-specialty stores that really don't sell anything you can't get somewhere else," he says. "I think to some people it's kind of like a street fair, like towns had in the old days. But it's a pseudo-version of that, too." **MORE**

## Mixing It Up



What's famed mime Robert Shields doing checking out a B-Boy battle? Why is 70's rocker Jerry Riopelle playing in a video arcade? I brought 'em there, to add twists to their stories. I love a good sport.

## Robot Wars

A thriving Arizona break-dancing culture redis-covers the state's grandmasters of boogaloo

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, January 9, 2003

## So Young

Thanks to a bright invention, Valley favorite Jerry Riopelle is finally on the verge of becoming cool

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, December 29, 2005

## Excerpt from **Robot Wars**

Published: Phoenix *New Times*, Thursday, January 9, 2003

It's Saturday night at the Arthur Murray Dance Studio, midway through the b-boy summit, and a curious Robert Shields has just arrived to check out the competition with his friend Flash X, an early member of the legendary L.A. Lockers who now lives in Arizona.

As teens in Survivor-style bandannas, Puma track pants and Lugs sneakers jostle by the old cats without offering so much as a glance, Shields, clearly used to being recognized, is already beginning to feel sadly out of place.

"These kids don't know who I am," he shrugs. Worse, the rapid-fire acrobatics of the dancers, in which Shields had hoped to spot some of his influence, have so far left him largely unimpressed.

"Where's the theatrics?" he complains. "Most of these kids are so concerned with looking tough, they don't let any of their personality show on their faces."

Finally, Shields gets what he came for in the person of Flattop, a Venice Beach street performer, who bounces out on the floor wearing an oversize striped suit and a Larry Blackmon-circa-'85 hairstyle perfectly befitting his nickname. Rocking to Roger Troutman & Zapp's 1983 funk hit "Doo Wa Ditty," Flattop engages the supportive crowd with a short dance most notable for its pauses. Dropping down to a split, the nattily dressed dancer takes a full four measures to rise again, as if depending on some invisible helium balloons to lift his muscular frame.

Suddenly inspired, Shields darts behind the sound system to meet the dancer and, sure enough, Flattop turns out to be a fan of the mime master. Between comparing moves and offering mutual admiration, the two new friends begin plotting the future of break-dancing.

"This is the kind of stuff that needs to go on the next time around – put a little humor back into it," Flattop says.

"I'd like to get these kids going, and maybe even do some classes," Shields exclaims. "Get their heads thinking. Get them to see it's not just here," he says, pointing to his feet, then to his head, "but here, too."

Sitting on the floor, meanwhile, a group of younger dancers is being interviewed for a video being produced for the event. As if overhearing the old hooper, one thuggish-looking white teen pokes his thumb to his chest and tells the cameraman, "It's in here. This kind of dancing ain't something you can just learn in a dance studio. It's gotta be inside you."

**MORE**

## Shorties



No job too small! From time to time, I'm called on to write something that doesn't ramble on for nine pages. Here's a quick look at some of my quick reads.

### Beyond Biff

Back to the present

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, December 8, 2005

### Drummerpalooza

Feel the benefit

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, September 8, 2005

### Too Sexy for His Skits

If you don't have anything nice to say about Tracy Morgan, buy him a drink

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, August 11, 2005

### Party System

A recent grad dishes dirt on ASU's party daze

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, September 2, 2004

### High on the Hawg

Adrenaline junkies gather for the love of bikes

Published by Phoenix *New Times*, March 25, 2004

## Beyond Biff

Published: Phoenix *New Times*, Thursday, December 8, 2005

When you're an actor best known for playing one of the biggest buffoon bullies in screen history -- a dimwitted tyrant with a penchant for messing up popular sayings and landing headfirst in manure -- you basically have two choices: one, succumb to the typecasting and spend the rest of your career in B-movie Palookaville, or, two, make like a tree . . . and get out of there.

For comedian Tom Wilson, who played Marty McFly's eternal nemesis in the Back to the Future trilogy, the choice was the latter (that means the second one, butthead!). "I'm definitely not the bitter old guy who's always ranting, 'You know, I've done a lot more than play Biff Tannen in Back to the Future!'" says Wilson. "But Biff, to me, is an infinitesimally small part of who I am."

As if to prove it, Wilson -- an ASU political-science grad who lived in Phoenix during the mid-'70s -- has become a bit of a Renaissance man since the Back to the Future trilogy. Besides continuing to act -- most notably as the tormented Coach Fredericks in the short-lived NBC series *Freaks & Geeks*, which, like BTTF, has since amassed its own cult following -- Wilson has gone on to voice cartoon characters on *SpongeBob SquarePants*, record an album of original Christian music, and even become a respected painter of pop art (displayed at [www.tomwilsonusa.com](http://www.tomwilsonusa.com)).

That's not to say Wilson shuns his Biff past. His act often opens with him singing a song meant to answer every BTTF freak's FAQ ("Was that real manure? No!"). "I have fun with it," Wilson says. "Biff is a big part of how people look at me. But it's a tiny part of how I look at myself."