

JEANNE TOVREA: NEW INFORMATION IN
THE MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF A VALLEY HEIRESS

PHOENIX

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JILTED LOVERS
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KEEPING TIME ONLINE

As Baby-Boom bloggers get hip to the new "Web 2.0" tools, some are creating media-rich time capsules of Phoenix history – and new concerns for a web-leery generation. The question is, are we ready for an interactive Legend City, KRIZ-KRUX mash-ups and virtual Ladmo?

BY JIMMY MAGAHERN

kcacives.blogspot.com



From top: The staff of KDKB radio in Phoenix in the 1970s; DJ William Compton's license to practice; and June Johnson, an avid KDKB listener, in 1974.

When Ken Beals posted a comment on *KCAC Lives*, a web blog dedicated to early progressive rock radio in Phoenix, he thought he was offering just another piece to the blog's growing archive of photo, audio and video media.

Instead, Beals' proposed contribution to the site – a video tribute to Dwight Tindle, the good-hearted founder of KDKB radio who died of cancer last November – was quickly reeled in by the nonprofit organization that had assigned him to make the video in the first place. The video was intended to be part of an induction ceremony that the Arizona Music & Entertainment Hall of Fame (AMEHOF) had planned for Tindle sometime in April.

"Ken's generosity and kindness are legendary, but here's a thought," read one quickly-posted comment from a Hall of Fame board member. "Giving the tape to AMEHOF for distribution seems a great idea that's more far-reaching. AMEHOF can sell the video through the store that's already set up on the website. We could do some video clips on AMEHOF's home page to generate more interest. Plus, we can link it to other sites...."

Terri Sussman, president of the Hall of Fame, later explained that the organization was mainly concerned with finding a way to raise donations for Tindle's family, and protecting the privacy of the individuals interviewed on the tape. Some of those captured on video – including several major players in the Valley music and radio scenes – let down their hair

with bawdy recollections of the psychedelic haze that surrounded KDKB at the dawn of the '70s.

"Guys like [renowned Valley concert promoter] Danny Zelsko really said some personal things," Sussman points out. "We are mainly concerned about getting the proper releases signed before distributing it."

Beals, like many of us today, was clearly just caught up in the share-all spirit of the new "Web 2.0" – a buzzword coined by O'Reilly Media in 2004 that refers to the new generation of internet-based services, like social networking sites and web pages, where anything from photos to videos can be shared among viewers.

Flushed with the excitement of having quickly assembled – through blog posts and e-mail – an all-star lineup of Phoenix radio veterans to pay their respects to their former boss on camera, and having enlisted fellow AMEHOF member Keith Ritchie to edit the footage overnight so it could be shown at Tindle's memorial, Beals was looking to share his 17-minute masterpiece the fastest way possible.

Today, that means uploading the thing on the web and watching as the "views" stack up. It's a practice that's finally catching on with the parents of the YouTube and MySpace generation, who've been doing this sort of thing for... oh, eons already.

But as the country's 82 million Baby Boomers begin scanning faded photos and digitizing dusty home movies for upload – not to mention live video from their present lives – a whole new kind of historical museum is quietly taking form. It is one that challenges the future of the traditional brick-and-mortar museum – and it's the kind of space AMEHOF has been seeking to house its growing collection of artifacts, photos and videos of Arizona entertainers for the past two years.

Many longtime Valley radio fans (including this writer) contribute to KCAC Lives (kcalives.blogspot.com) – an open forum set up on a free Blogger account. The website's exhibits change on a daily basis, and anyone can add to the collection. On the day of Dwight Tindle's memorial, one of his old friends, now living in Colorado and too ill himself to attend, posted a picture of the album cover to Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks* – a Tindle favorite – and listed the lyrics to the title song. A couple hours later, another contributor searched the blog's archives to find an MP3 submitted by yet another member of the community, and posted a collage of songs from that album as played by disk jockey William Edward Compton (a Tindle discovery) in 1970.

By the time of the 3 p.m. memorial that Sunday, Tindle's friends and fans had assembled a real-time tribute glowing for him on their computer screens, filled with music, photos and writings posted as the spirit moved them.

That's the kind of thing a traditional museum could never do, and Beals says that the immediacy of the web particularly suits the subjects that he, as AMEHOF's principal videographer, is entrusted to capture.

"I feel such an urgency to get some of these people on video," he says. "These storytellers aren't going to be around forever. And to have this opportunity now to get them on video, and share it with



Chris-Town Mall, now called Spectrum Mall, holds many fond memories for Valley natives, including gathering with friends at the mall's indoor fountain court, bird court and flower court.



The entrance gate (above) at Legend City was a familiar sight for kids who grew up in Phoenix in the 1970s.

legend-city.com



the world... I mean, I know there are so many great stories that need to be shared."

Sussman, like many of her generation, is a little more cautious. "I'm not sure a lot of these people think about what it means to be filmed today," she says a few days after the video's debut at the Tindle memorial, noting her surprise at some of the subjects' candor. "They think they're just sharing things with a few close friends. They're not thinking that they could wind up on YouTube the next day."

John Bueker sits wistfully on a bench in the atrium of Spectrum Mall, staring at a giant, blank wall just to the west of Costco, one of the mall's main anchors.

To most of the shoppers lunching on hot dogs and pizza near the Costco entrance, the wall represents little more than an enclosure of drywall and white paint. But to Bueker, an Arizona native who still vividly recalls when his grandparents first took him to this mall back in 1963, two years after its grand opening as Chris-Town Mall, the wall seems like an amputation of his fondest childhood memories.

"Remember the old Woolworth's and Miracle Mile and the bird court?" Bueker asks, remembering the long west wing of the mall, now leveled to make way for yet another big-box retailer. "It's kind of sad, really."

Fortunately for Bueker, he has photos of the amputated wing – including the famous "Court of Birds," where noisy parakeets and cockatoos once competed with the bustle of busy shoppers – on his website, Chris-Town.com. Online, Bueker has recreated as much as he's been able to of the beloved shopping place, including dozens of photos sent in by family, friends and website visitors that show the once-vital mall in all its '60s and '70s splendor.

"It's hard to believe now," Bueker says, "but Chris-Town was once the place to be. People would come here just to see each other, eat and hang out."

Bueker, an instructor for the online Anthem College, actually runs several websites off his own server, all dedicated to preserving a personal slice of Phoenix history. Apart from his Chris-Town homage, Bueker maintains small sites dedicated to WestTown Mall, and the steamship-shaped Copper Belle restaurant residents used to sail by on west Camelback Road, and even the Alpine Village miniature golf course.

"Part of why I'm doing this is to keep alive the little parts of the city, back when it was much smaller, more charming and much more innocent," says Bueker, 48. "It was a totally different place. A smaller, more intimate place."

Most of Bueker's tribute sites are small, too – his Alpine Village page, for example, includes only pictures of a scorecard from the miniature golf course, and a personal essay of reminiscences.

"There's gotta be people out there with photos and things," he

PHOTOS COURTESY JOHN BUEKER

says. "I know people had birthday parties at Alpine Village, and they've got to have photos. But how do you reach them?"

On each of his sites, Bueker invites anyone with material to share to send him an e-mail. But, so far, the only page that's drawn a lot of submissions is his Legend City site – Bueker's tribute to the Valley's once-bustling amusement park, which operated from 1963 to 1983.

On legend-city.com, visitors are treated to photos, maps, postcards and even scanned memorabilia – everything from buttons and bumper stickers to bowie knives – that strive to bring the amusement park, now buried beneath the Salt River Project headquarters and surrounding office parks, back to life.

The site's best feature is an audio page that includes full audio recordings made along the park's rides, captured by some plucky kid who managed to sneak a cassette recorder into the Lost Dutchman Mine and the Cochise's Stronghold River Ride. Listening to the streams while viewing the photos is the next best thing to being sprayed by the park's long-extinct river elephants.

Bueker is certain that more multimedia exists out there for each of his sites, but unlike today's phonecam-toting youngsters, he is appealing to a generation slow on the upload, and more hesitant to share sound bites from their personal lives.

"Right now I'm talking with a guy who had his 8th birthday party at Legend City in the summer of '81," Bueker says excitedly. "And he tells me he's got two-and-a-half hours of old home movies, showing pretty much the whole park."

But before the stranger turns it over to Bueker in digitized form, he first has to find it in his grandfather's attic. Then he has to enlist a kid with some iMovie skills to do the transfer. And finally, Bueker says, "he wants to go through it all and delete the scenes with him and his family. He doesn't want that distributed on the internet at all."

Bueker sighs. "Eventually, I'm going to put some of that on the website," he says. "But I'm afraid it's going to take a while."

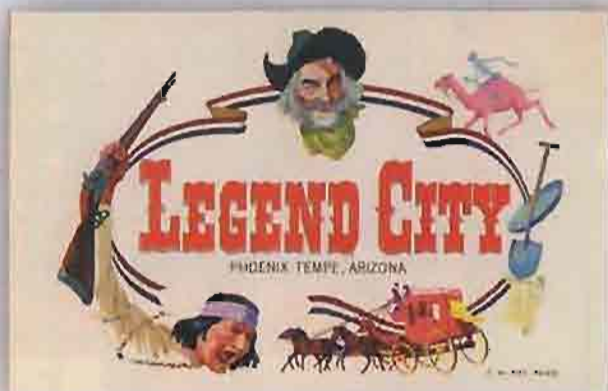
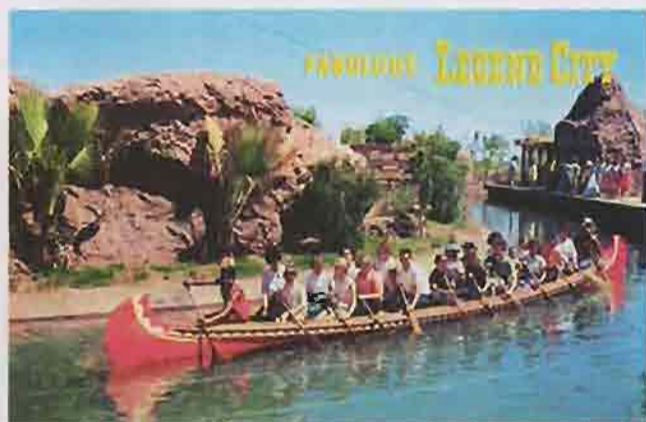
Rob Cook remembers the first two words he ever typed into a search engine, after his daughter had finally coaxed him to conquer his fears of the internet and propped him in front of the family computer.

"The very first thing I typed was, Wallace, Ladmo," says the 51-year-old former Scottsdale resident, who, by then, had moved to Oregon but still remembered fondly the phenomenally long-running children's show, which aired in Phoenix on KPHO-TV from 1955 until 1989.

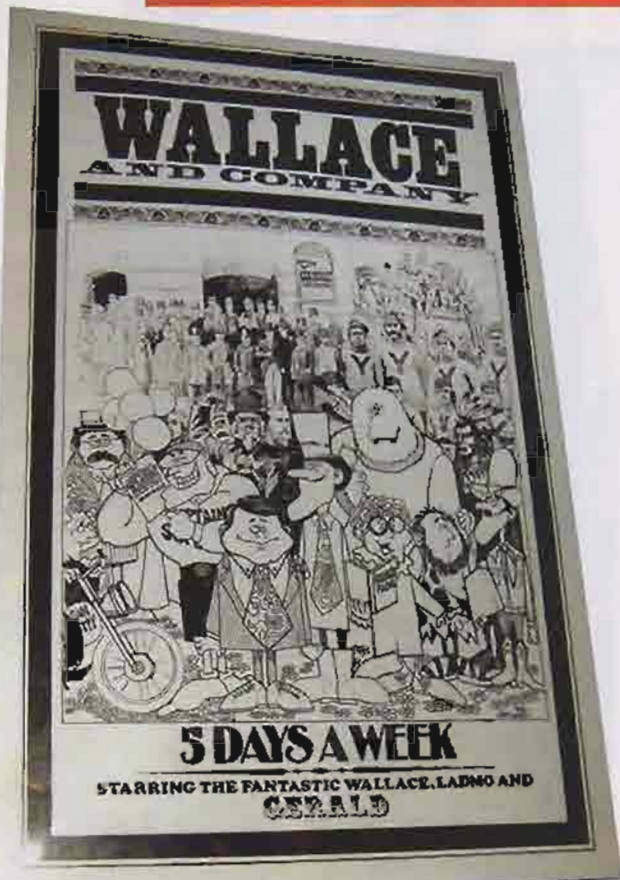
At that time, Cook's search returned only a simple page run by a *Wallace and Ladmo* fan named Brent Nebeker.

"He had a few pictures," Cook recalls, "but then he had a guestbook. And there were just dozens and dozens of people expressing similar sentiments and longings about the show."

Most of those in the guestbook were reeling from the death of Ladimir "Ladmo" Kwiatkowski, who died of cancer in 1994. Cook says he was looking for a way to let Bill "Wallace" Thompson know how much he was loved by all of Arizona, and he wanted to do it before it was too late.



The *Wallace and Ladmo Show* ran from 1956 to 1989. The website that honors the show features nearly 50,000 photos.



wallaceladmogerald.com

"I looked at the computer and thought, 'Maybe this is the way.'" With the help of a friend, Cook set up a page on the then-dominant social networking service Yahoo! Groups, which offers electronic mailing lists and forums to everyone who signs up. Quickly, membership in what was dubbed the "Wallace & Ladmo Fan Club" group began doubling every week, with new members uploading personal recollections, photos and videos (most transferred from old VHS tapes of the show) onto their own sub-sections within the group.

While still clunky to use (Cook has launched a newer website, wallaceladmogerald.com, that's easier to browse and upload to), the Wallace & Ladmo Yahoo! Group now boasts more than 850 members, and its catalog of multimedia files, spread out over 75 different personal pages, is staggering: 45,500 photos, more than 800 music and audio files, and dozens of video files – the category that's growing the fastest as users upload clips to YouTube and link them on the group pages.

"Wallace" himself, Bill Thompson, is a frequent visitor on many of the sites (the ever-hip 75-year-old even has his own MySpace page), and has no problem with videos of his beloved show being all over the 'net.

"Frankly, I feel like the whole *Wallace and Ladmo* thing is public domain," he says. "I feel it belongs to the fans."

Thompson, in fact, takes comfort in seeing that the wholly original sense of humor he, Kwiatkowski and show regular Pat McMahon embedded in Valley viewers is still alive and well on the websites of so many undying fans.

"They understood the type of humor we were doing," he says. "And I can't think of one single thing that I've seen on any of the websites that I didn't like or disagreed with. Nobody has stepped over the line or done anything in bad taste. They all keep doing the stuff in the spirit of the original show."

While Thompson loves the sprawling physical exhibit dedicated to the show at the Arizona Historical Society Museum and appreciates the books, plays and music CDs fans have produced to honor the show, he likes the online time capsules most for the links they provide to real, living fans.

"I know so many people now who were just viewers, but I know them by their first names – thousands and thousands of them," he says, rattling off a list of names to prove it. "It makes me feel great to know that I have a lot of friends."

For Cook – who now gets personal phone calls from Wallace – just knowing he's captured the spirit of his hero in a way he can share with the world is the greatest reward.

"Bill's way of seeing the world influenced a lot of us," he says. "It's in our humor, in our tastes for TV and music, in the way we raise our kids. And he can see that now."

When New York-based website designer Jonathan Harris was contacted by Yahoo! to develop an online "time capsule," where visitors to the site could easily upload words, pictures, audio and video files they felt somehow defined their lives in 2006, he

was immediately intrigued.

"I live a fast, busy life, like most people," Harris says. "But few of us take the time to pause and reflect on what we're doing each day. This was a chance to create a place on the internet for people to stop, pause and think about themselves — their identity, their past — and project out into the future what type of museum they want to leave behind."

Harris' simple and playful interface attracted nearly 200,000 people to upload their own digital artifacts before the time capsule closed. It will open again in the year 2020.

But it was the second stage of the experiment — a live projection of all the images on the red rock canyon walls surrounding an ancient pueblo in New Mexico — that really blew Harris away.

"It was the first culture project of mine that had a physical transmission," he says. "We went out in the middle of the desert, and they had these crests 100 feet tall being illuminated by these huge images from humans all over the world. It was just natural, beautiful and awe-inspiring."

While the three-night event drew few actual visitors to the remote spot, Harris believes the experiment, which used four state-of-the-art projectors to run individual slide shows on each of the canyon walls, demonstrated a whole new model for future museums.

"It's a wonderful idea, making a museum that's not constrained by its physical space, but using light to change exhibits dynamically," he says. "The technology certainly exists."

Indeed, with a few such projectors and a computer, groups like the KRIZ and KRUX fan clubs or the Kiva Tika cultural preservationists — a few of the other Phoenix collectives struggling to collect memorabilia online — could have a fully interactive museum, where the comments, images and movies posted on a website could be projected onto the walls of a gallery. The content could change in real time, with each new post contributed to the page, and the community would be the curator.

It's an idea that already has the old hippies on the *AGAC Lives* blog talking.

"I envision a random multimedia forum where one could attend it like an ongoing movie," wrote one contributor recently. "With music and popcorn and tape for old people and one or two Rocky Horror Picture Show-type heads doing their very own interpretation of real life."

Another boomer-blogger suggests the images be shown in a giant, 2007-like outdoor amphitheater that would emit a continuous soundtrack from the late '60s to the mid-'70s.

"Solar powered. Indestructible," he writes. "A very friendly place to sit down, listen to music, make love, drink wine, maybe smoke a little weed and wonder what it might have been like to live in those days."

Well, perhaps Phoenix isn't ready for that museum just yet.



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