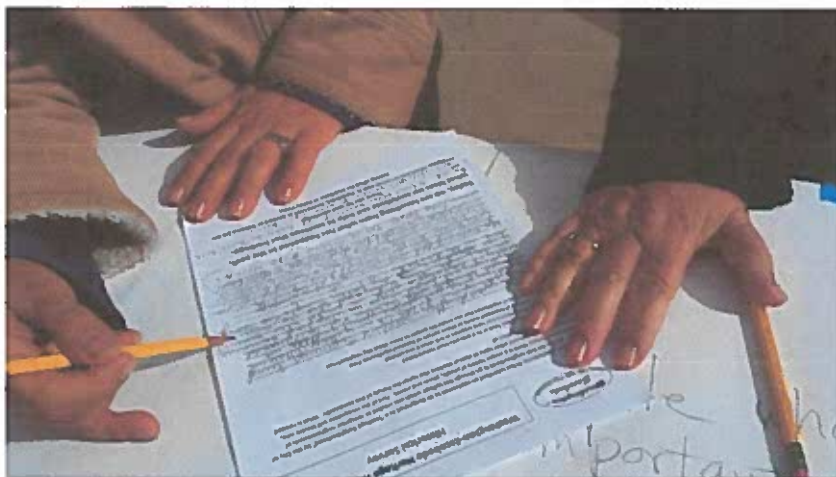


## **Washington-Escobedo Heritage Neighborhood Application**

### **Historical Information**

The Washington-Escobedo (W-E) Community has been participating in a resident driven planning process since 2010. They have created a document referred to as the "Quality of Life Plan" (QLP) which contains many goals and strategies created and to be implemented by the residents of this community. One goal, "Attain Historic Designation," was selected in keeping with their vision statement: "Celebrating history and diversity with a sense of community pride." This application fulfils this goal. In keeping with the philosophy of the QLP, the residents have come together to gather and produce the information in this document. They have distributed surveys, visited with current and former residents, and held meetings and events to provide opportunities for residents to participate in creating this part of the Heritage Neighborhood application. The following information is submitted by those who have participated in achieving this goal.



### **Washington Park History**

African Americans arrived in Mesa starting in the early 1900's, but discrimination kept them from owning homes in the original town site. The first housing subdivision to welcome them as buyers, homesteaders and residents was the Mitchell addition created on the land North of University Street and East of Center Street. Together with another subdlvision, Tuskegee Place, it soon became known as the Washington Neighborhood, which was named after the neighbor school Booker T. Washington.

The first Black Family arrived in Mesa in the late summer of 1905. Alexander McPherson, a retired veteran of the Spanish American War and a retiree of the United States 10<sup>th</sup> Calvary, he was a Buffalo Solder; he brought his wife; Clara and four children. They lived north of Everybody's Drugs Store; which was located on Main

Street. The McPherson family is credited for starting the first African American Church in Mesa.

Before 1910 Dr. James Livingston, Veterinarian and retired Spanish American War veteran, began homesteading on the 400 block of North Pima Street. This unclaimed territorial land was outside the town square.

Between 1910 and 1920----; Black Americans moved into Mesa a little more freely. They included Cora Kemp, registered nurse; the Frank Moore Sr. family; the Marveletta Halls; the McKelvys; and Leon Fergusons. The Jacob C. Harrington's and the Reverend James M. Robinson family came between 1915 and 1917.

John Lee, a banjo player, guitar player and dancer arrived in 1919 with a Minstrel Show. After several unsuccessful performances the show disbanded but Lee stayed on in Mesa.

### **Alston House History**

Dr. Lucis Charles Alston was the first African American Doctor to practice in Mesa. Alston was born in 1892 in Morgantown, West Virginia, graduated from the University of Tennessee, did his postgraduate work at Columbia University and served overseas during the First World War.

Alston and his wife Velma had one son, Lucius Jr, who died many years ago. Alston moved his family into the house that was built in 1922. He expanded it over time, adding elaborate chandeliers that caused some people to begin calling it the Light House. He practiced out of this house as well as his own office on Pima and University with his wife Velma, a trained nurse.

### **The Churches of Washington Escobedo Neighborhood**

From the early time of slavery to today the African American community has embraced the church as a symbol and site for inspiration; guidance and hope. The celebration of movement in the black churches has deep roots dating back to the first Africans Slaves in America. The Washington Park neighborhood had five churches.

### **Mt. Calvary Church**

Mt Calvary Baptist Church

Organized in 1918 By Re. J. Herrll

Pastor Rev. W.M. Hardison

Deacons: A.R. Charles, G. Venearable, J.D. Freeman, N. Frelix, H. Mason, T. Twigg, and J. Jones. Dedicated 1955

### **Bethel A.M. E. Church**

The church was founded by Isabelle Ferguson and seven others in the year 1919. Their spiritual leader was a missionary known as Mother Maxwell, who served the church for approximately six years under the direction of the Presiding Elder Reverend Hamilton;

and others later assisted the members of Bethel in remodeling the house on North Morris Street for use as a church. Current residents remember Margaret Anderson-Hicks, a Sunday school teacher and Girl Scouts Leader from the Bethel A.M.E. Church Choir. She sold tacos and ice cream along with Lola Mae Bonner, Wilola Willis, and Lillie Mae King every Saturday night at the Church (known at the "best tacos ever!").

### **Church Of God and Christ Church/Holy Temple of God in Christ**

Corner Stone: Church Of God In Christ

Organized in 1932 by Bishop J.W. Taylor

Pastor Elder B.E. Dansby Trustees & Deacons E. Tuner, Roberta Ford and Theodore Daniel. Pearly Branch Layed in 1955

### **Pentecost Church of Jesus Christ**

Pentecost Church of Jesus Christ

Organized: 1940

Pastor: Bishop Ezra Loring Sr.

### **North Center Baptist Church/Trinity Evangelical Baptist Church**

Reverend W.T. organized North Center Street Missionary Baptist Church November 22, 1948. West and Reverend Walter Jeffery Cook, at Bethel AME Church located at 508 N. Pima Street Mesa, AZ. Reverend L. J. Dunbar served as Moderator; others attending the meeting included Reverend R.J. Jones Senior, Deacons Ruffer, Deacon Canton, and Sister Humdy. The Ground breaking ceremonies at 537 North Center Street began April 20, 1949. Remolded Under The Administration of: E.B. Burks Staff: Brother R.C. Hester, Brother C. Thompson, Brother M. C. Coker, and Brother J. Strong. Clerk: Sister F. Wilkins 1966.

### **The Washington Activity Center History**

The Washington Activity Center (WAC) was opened in the mid 1940's; it was originally used as a Hospitality House for the Colored Soldiers living in the Escobedo Projects. Later it became known as the Colored Center to be used by the Colored people of Mesa. It remained a segregated facility until it closed around 1975. A new structure was built in 1977 on the site of the former segregated school, Booker T. Washington. Currently the WAC has become part of the award winning; high achieving EduPrize Charter School System. Children from the W-E community have an easy walk to their school. They offer food programs, after-school and summer programs in addition to the educational curriculum. The WAC was a place where the children in the community came for after-school and summer activities. Kelli Hawkins was the first choreographer for the WAC. The children performed at local parades and the State Fair. There are many fond memories of the Managers at the WAC: Ms. Jackson, Mrs. Odessa Williams, Mr. Leon McClellan, and Mrs. DiAnn Hunter.

### **The Community Garden**

The original Washington Activity Center location on North Sirrine was demolished in 1977. The land on which it stood became home to a community garden until 1981. On any given day you could find young and older residents laughing, talking, and catching up with each other while they planted and harvested what would become much-needed fresh vegetable for many of the residents in this close-knit community as well as some from neighboring areas. During this time, any member of the Washington-Escobedo that chose to plant and tend the garden was free to do so; the same held true for anyone in the neighborhood in need of the produce could harvest it. The garden moved to the north end of the new Center in 1982 when new housing was planned and constructed on its original site.

### **Booker T. Washington School History**

Booker T. Washington School was built in the early 1920's on land that was donated by William Mitchell to the city of Mesa. William Mitchell is the grandfather of former Congressman Harry Mitchell and great-grandfather of current Tempe Mayor, Mark Mitchell. William Mitchell was born in Johnson County, Illinois in 1880. He grew up in the area and later became a schoolteacher in the county. Looking for adventure, he moved to Mesa, Arizona where he oversaw the publication of a local newspaper. Booker T. Washington School opened in 1920 as a segregated school for African American children, it was a two-room brick structure located at 509 N. Pima Street, and the first African American teacher was Helen Vance.

### **Veora E. Johnson**

In 1927 Veora E. Johnson came to Mesa and began her teaching career at Booker T. Washington School. She became the first African American Principal in Arizona and the first African American woman to earn Arizona administrative credentials. In 1953 she was included in The Who's Who of Women in America. Her concern for youth led to the Veora Erma Johnson scholarship at Mesa Community College in 1968. She retired on July 1, 1974. During her career she challenged African American youth to take the highway: "Life was not meant to be fretted away on non-essentials... A burning philosophy is needed as you journey down life's pathway... So, strive and you shall win."

### **Verde Vista /Escobedo Park Neighborhood History**

Verde Vista surveyed and recorded in Sept 1916, but sales and construction started in 1920. Hispanic title, street names and lower cost lots show intent to be sold to Hispanics. Almost all buyers of lots were Hispanic. Commercial places such as grocery stores and barbershops were in the neighborhood. Houses were veranda style.

Origin of name of Escobedo—Pedro Guerrero of original Housing Authority Board named Escobedo for his friend, Pablo. Escobedo was born in Mexico and orphaned in youth. He entered AZ Territory in 1910 with his bride Otila on little burros. Escobedo worked in the mining industry. He tried to enlist in WWI, but was told the work in

mines was more valuable. When his health prevented him from continuing in mining, Pablo and his growing family settled in Mesa. Pablo purchased his home in 1926, which remained in family until 1997. Pablo used his Insurance and money raised by friends for a stay lasting more than a year in San Antonio hospital. He returned to Mesa around 1934 and died soon after. Escobedo is buried in the Mesa cemetery.

### **About Washington-Escobedo**

Washington – Escobedo (W-E) is a neighborhood with rich history in which its residents live in a community of faith, where the values of being close knit, family oriented and accepting of all people is practiced every day. Although W-E neighborhood started as a predominately African-American community, today Hispanics feel embraced and welcomed by the African-American community. Today, the sense of community among all ethnicities –African-Americans, Latinos, Whites, Asian, Middle Eastern, etc - is felt and reciprocated by all who live in Washington-Escobedo neighborhood. It is a community in the truest sense of the word, where neighbors care and support one another, where multi-generational families feel safe raising their children and grandchildren, and where diversity is respected and encouraged.

The first African-American families to come to the Washington-Escobedo neighborhood were true pioneers. Many came in covered wagons, others came by train. The first school in the neighborhood was the Booker T. Washington Elementary School, located on N Pima Street. Ms. Maggie Lee, who came in 1925, was the first teacher and principal of this school. The second teacher, who also became principal was Ms. Veora Johnson, who came in 1927. The 2 room schoolhouse was first built in 1925, teaching grades one through eight. At this time, many African-American children from other communities were bussed to Booker T. Washington from Gilbert, Chandler, Queen Creek and other small cities which had no schools. Since the community was small, there were only two churches and three grocery stores during this period.

As the community grew, the Escobedo Apartments were also built in 1941 in order to house the African-American soldiers who were stationed at Williams Air Force Base. At the conclusion of the Second World War, the City of Mesa assumed ownership and leased the apartments to low-income families.

Soon after, the Escobedo Park and pool was built in 1955. This was a wonderful addition because now the children had a place to swim on those hot summer days. Before the pool, kids would refresh themselves by jumping into the canal directly behind 6th street.

During the mid 1950's, the Mesa Schools became integrated, after which the Booker T. Washington School closed. The school was torn down and a community center was built on a new site for community socials, parties, meetings, etc.; a children's playground was built also. This was a very special feature for the Washington-Escobedo neighborhood. This is the place where the community came together as a family.

Most contemporaneous, there is the mural painted on 5<sup>th</sup> Street between Sirrine and Lewis sometime in the early nineties by Vera Lynn Glass and Martin Marino, which captures the symbols of the past, present, and future of W-E neighborhood. Together, they signify the unity and strength of the African-Americans living in the neighborhood during the days of Dr. King; our Lady of Guadalupe representing the “mother” in the hearts of Latinos; and on the eastern-most part, one is faced with Christ, reassuring that the pain is sometimes temporary and necessary.

The pool, old school, activity center and the mural, all nourished and brought vibrancy and a sense of togetherness to the children and families of the community. We have had our struggles like other neighborhoods faced with negative exterior elements, but we have remained steadfast in caring for each other. Community members have a deep faith in hope that is evident by the presence of the churches surrounding us. Members have always felt proud to be part of Washington-Escobedo and they look forward to the rejuvenation of the neighborhood while preserving its history and lifestyle.

### **The Roots of the Community:**

Many of the parents and grandparents who lived in the neighborhood are considered the “roots” of the community that exists today. They were credited with creating the “village” to look after the children that followed. There is a desire to acknowledge and respect them and others of their time and the legacy they left. Some specific family and individual names that are remembered are: Stewart family, Oso family, Young family, Mandley family, Miss Corene, Miss Sedalia, Miss Hagel, Mason family, Miss Florence, Mama Price, Miss Nona, Wong family, Austin family, Davenport family, Briscoe family, Hamlin family, Sims family, Anderson family, Moore family, Robertson family, Miss Tomlin, Bonner family, and Mr Bobo.

### **Personal remembrances from residents:**

Dwaun Stewart—outstanding athlete. Native born and raised. Set records in track and field 100 yard dash for Mesa Public Schools (Kino Jr High 1970, Westwood High School 1973 and ASU 1975) that have never been broken. He is in a nursing home now due to a stroke in 2004 that left him paralyzed. I want him to be remembered for being an outstanding athlete that he once was. (submitted by Peggy Stewart)

My Grandmother, Josephine Espinoza, lives here for about 50 year. It is a place where we could go play, not worry about anything. We played baseball with the other kids until night. We never got bored because we also had swimming pools at Escobedo Park and we could also swim all day with other kids, met my father here in Escobedo.

My Mom, Lupe Gardena, and Dad met each other at Escobedo Housing and they got married here. They had 5 children. I remember the swimming pools. We used to call them the “big” the “middle” and the “little.” There were pools for all ages. We used to play baseball, tag, especially at night. My family moved from the housing apartments

to Mesa. I used to live in Mesa Royale, but now I am lucky to live in Escobedo at Verde Vista—the area where I was born. (submitted by Lucy Torres)

I grew up on Hibbert in Apt. 58. My Mom is Oralia Garcia Galvan. My siblings are Nellie Galvan Rameriz and my brother is Victor Galvan. We lived here in 1980. I can't remember what year the city paid my Mother to move out, but a little about my childhood. I use to play at the park and I enjoyed this park. But most of all, I enjoyed the Washington Activity Center. We went there everyday. We played basketball and we played pool and the center always had baseball games and took us on field trips. I am so glad I grew up in Escobedo because we were a big happy family and we are still. We are 15+ family's going strong, so I am proud of our Escobedo. Oh, I even remember the swimming pool! (submitted by Margie Galvan)

Washington Center is built in the same spot where Booker T. Washington School once stood. Miss Johnson was a great teacher to a lot of people in the neighborhood and was a good role model. At the Washington Activity Center, two people stood out that made a difference in many children's lives by giving them a safe place to learn and grow. That was Mr. Leon Macklin and Odessa Williams. They ran the Washington Center from the beginning. As Arianna's grandfather, I attended this historical place as a child and Arianna's great grandmother Flora Henderson attended as well. (submitted by Mark Morgan)

My remembrance of Washington Escobedo is all of the matriarchs and true soldiers that have passed on. Fannie and Joe Newton (21), Mrs. Hester (13), Mrs. Mae Pearl (14), Mr. Hunt (17), Mr. and Mrs. Anderson (18), Nina Myers (19), Mr. and Mrs. Andrews (22), Margie Frost (24), Mrs. Marie Bokins (27), Mrs. Williams (10), Mrs. Oneal (4), Reverend and Mrs. Cooper (12), and Mrs. Livingston (28), Mr. Strong (1), and Mrs. Gowdy (23), who is still with us. These are the people that touched my heart as a kid and they are the ones who made Washington Escobedo a village. They will be forever missed. (submitted by Peaches Woods, Martha and Paul)

I moved to W-E in 1980 with my ten children (6 years old to 25 years old) at 515 N. Lewis Street. I moved to Mesa to help my older son who was working at that time to help my family. I moved here to help him with his job. All my children grew up in W-E and they went to school at Eisenhower, Kino and Westwood. I remember back in the 80's there was a community garden (Pima Street and Lewis Street). Washington Activity Center used to be the place of gathering for my children after school. They used to sell snacks. Washington Center used to be the safe haven for my children until I got home from work (7am – 5pm). I was a single mom and never depended on public assistance. There used to be street fights, drinking in public and drug dealings. I remember breaking up many of those fights, mainly between the black community. They used to fight anyone not living in the neighborhood. Now the neighborhood is safer, but still drug dealings. I became a homeowner in 1983 (I paid a down payment with my savings). Later, 4 of my children moved out of W-E and 4 more purchased a

home in W-E and their children are growing up in the neighborhood. Currently I have 36 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren. Out of my 10 children, only 1 purchased a home in Phoenix. Thank you for bringing 1)the light rail to Mesa, 2)bringing a school to the neighborhood, 3) building new housing at Escobedo Housing, 4)the traffic light on Sirrine and University, and 5) adopting my ideas for structures and art pieces for the light rail. My wish list: 1) please bring a grocery store to the area where Lucky's, ABCO, or Southwest Supermarket were located (NWC Mesa Dr and University); 2) give us back a community center for our community meetings. We have not had a place for meetings. We started at Escobedo Community Building. Then we moved to the Heritage Room, and lately we have our meetings at Escobedo VV Property management Office. (submitted by Petra Ambriz)

Pedro Rodriguez (my maternal grandfather), moved to Mesa back in the 50's with the Bracero workforce. He used to live at 523 N. Pasadena (submitted by Maria Mancinas).

A part of the school was a place called "Opportunity Hall." This was a special place for helping children to be successful in school, at home, and in the community. (submitted by Christine Sandoval)

### **Sports Notables from W-E:**

W-E has produced some very successful professional athletes: Eugene Lewis started a boxing club in Mesa in the late 50's. The club is now located in the Broadway Recreation Center. He had many Golden Glove Contenders.

William Pete Mandley (Detroit Lions, Kansas City Chiefs), Warren Livingston (Dallas Cowboys), and Willie Peete (Coach University of Arizona) brought fame to their community with their football skills. Currently, Mr. Bruce Cooper is a Sports Anchor for Channel 12.

### **A Community of Many Skills and Public Service:**

Ellen Sims-Oso was born and raised in Washington-Escobedo. Ellen had a wide circle of friends drawn by her charismatic personality. Through her networks, she would often organize parties, fundraisers and events to help people connect with one another. Her award winning career with Maricopa Head Start spanned nearly 30 years. She started as a parent volunteer and progressed to Administrative Coordinator. Ellen is a proud resident and believes in leading and serving in her community. She provided free tax preparation assistance, organized community Block Watch, planned neighborhood clean-up and graffiti removal and served on local community committees.



Helping Hands Club—Lillie Mae King, Odessa Williams, and Mariah Corder in addition to selling tacos at the church, helped the needy in the community by sewing clothes and providing food and money. They also helped single parents.

Lorene Fuller-Anderson—Executive for a non-profit organization—Prison Ministry Resource to the Source. She has also been a Maricopa County Bookkeeper, Teacher Aide, Parent Mentor, Elected Representative to Washington, DC for Maricopa Head Start, Washington Park Neighborhood-Escobedo Housing Board, appointed Community Volunteer for Mesa City Council Board, Human Resources Board. Kairos Prison Ministry in 2008, representing Word Bible Church. Worked at Mesa Newberry on Main Street.

Ms. and Mrs. Stron—Entrepreneurs at the Soul Food Restaurant for the community.

Willie D. Willis Sr.—Community Activist, helped to provide people with legal resources, employment, and counseling. He served as a Chaplin for hospitals in the Mesa area.

Glridene Quick (DeeDee)—a stay at home Mom who helped in the neighborhood.

Timothy Anderson—played the piano at Milano Music Store on Main Street.

Elquonor Anderson—helped in the neighborhood.

Wayne Jones—a member of the Neighborhood Advisory Committee.

James Daniels—owned two group homes for boys, a professional soccer player, and owner of two dry cleaning businesses.

Les Portee—Mesa Police Assistant Chief.

Donna Hemphill McCormick—First African-American female Mesa PD Officer.

Charlene McClellan

Leon McClellan Jr.—Fire Fighter

Lyn Smith—Highway Patrol Officer

**The vision** of Washington-Escobedo Community is a neighborhood that celebrates history and diversity with a sense of community pride

**The mission** of the Washington-Escobedo Community is to create a safe and engaged community with respect to our diverse population—celebrating the rich history with our homes, churches, businesses and national landmarks. Residents will develop relationships with our community while connecting to opportunities and resources to strengthen the Washington-Escobedo Community.

