



Consumers are online, shouldn't you be?

Commentary

Search ABQTrib.com

[Home](#) » [Opinions](#) » [Commentary](#)

Commentary: Astronomy-themed Arizona Sky Village is a stargazer's delight

Marty Durlin
Thursday, January 10, 2008

MORE COMMENTARY

Commentary: Ecological genius played huge role in shaping New Mexico's landscape, environment

Commentary: To prepare for changes in the environment, we must rethink the ways we live

Commentary: Devine guidance and others' kindness, make my homelessness a memory - and a nudge

MOST RECENT TRIB STORIES

Giuliani awaits McCain in Florida showdown

10:14 a.m., January 21, 2008

There was more to King than his 'dream' speech

10:12 a.m., January 21, 2008

Ex-NFL lineman charged in BALCO case

10:10 a.m., January 21, 2008

Ex-MVP Howard wants more money

10:10 a.m., January 21, 2008

Pope, Passos back on court for Aggies

10:08 a.m., January 21, 2008

TRIB IN THE BLOGOSPHERE*

Forgotten **Albuquerque**: The Book

Albuquerque to Antigua - Antigua Guatemala, Guatemala Rio Rancho Planning & Zoning Agenda - 1/22/2008

ABQjournal West_News: CNM Aims To Open In Two Years an inane headline from HuffPost

*Note: The Tribune does not create and is not responsible for the

"I pledge devotion to the stars of the majestic Milky Way Galaxy and to a dark night sky in which they shine; one cosmos, overhead, clearly visible, with liberty from light, and dark skies for all." — Jack Troeger, Dark Sky Initiative.

In 2001, Florida developer and amateur astronomer Gene Turner came to southeastern Arizona in search of "the new frontier." He found it in a sky darker than any he had ever seen.

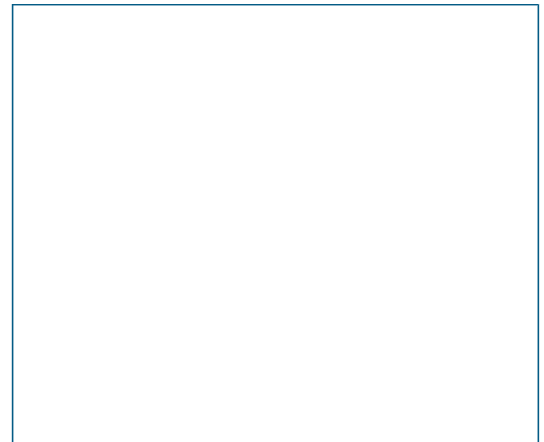
Inspired, he promptly bought up 50 acres near the town of Portal to create an "astronomy community."

Six years later, all 85 parcels in the Arizona Sky Village have been purchased, and many now boast custom homes with observatories. Construction is under way on 11 "interval ownership haciendas," or time-share homes, complete with 14-inch computerized telescopes located in private open-air observation courtyards.

All exclusive communities have covenants, but the rules of the Arizona Sky Village reflect its unusual purpose: Curtains must be light-blocking, so that no light leaks out at night, and only low wattage-bulbs "with full cutoff" — meaning that no light goes up — can be used outside at night.

According to Turner, the success of his venture stems from the first thing he did after seeing the property: He got on the phone with his friend Jack Newton, astrophotographer extraordinaire, whose images of the night sky have appeared in such prestigious publications as Astronomy Magazine, the German magazine Sterne und Weltraum, as well as National Geographic.

Newton and his wife, Alice, had already started an



MOST EMAILED

MOST COMMENTED

The most e-mailed stories

'Extreme Makeover: Home Edition' rebuilds homes in Albuquerque's Trumbull Village
Mesa del Sol developers say growth is exceeding expectations

Fidelity Investments to bring jobs to Albuquerque's Mesa del Sol

Flu hits New Mexico hard; strains caregivers
Search for Crypto-Jews gave photographer insight into identity

Albuquerque residents encounter hurdles in seeking assistance for rent

Commentary: Ecological genius played huge role in shaping New Mexico's landscape, environment

QUICKLINKS

- Today's Headlines
- Richardson's Quest
- LoboZone
- TribVid
- Events Calendar
- Restaurant Guide
- Podcasts
- Alerts
- Comics

TRIBBLOGS

- ABQ AV Club
- Be All You Can Be
- Bill Richardson Log
- Food City
- High School Sports
- No Harm, No Fowler
- Q-T3CH Gamer Blog
- Roundhouse Report
- Split Personality
- The Flip Side
- Trib Sports Extra
- Wolf Tracks

blogosphere's headlines and stories. These links to blogs talking about ABQTrib.com are automatically generated. Use them at your own risk.

STORY TOOLS

- E-mail story
- Comments
- iPod friendly
- Printer friendly

SHARE THIS STORY [?]



astronomy community in Chiefland, Fla. — a village of stargazers that just "happened" because the Newtons were there with their telescopes. In fact, that's how Turner met them in the first place; he was the second person to come to their door at Chiefland, eager to join the community.

From Arizona, Turner called Newton and said, "Jack, you're in the wrong place."

His rave about Portal convinced Newton to buy in.

"It's an extraordinary place. The location is second to none," Turner rhapsodizes. "You've got 10,000-foot

mountains coming down to desert, five of seven life zones, ponderosa to cactus. You've got the mountains blocking Tucson and Sierra Vista; you've got an extremely dry climate with no light domes." Water vapor reflects and disperses light.

With Newton on board, Turner sold the rest of the parcels quickly.

"It's kinda like a golf course," Turner says. "You get the right pro, in this case an astronomy pro, and people come to rub shoulders with him."

The people who have bought property are "mostly biologists, retired writers and poets" between 50 and 70 years of age, according to Turner — many with an interest in horseback riding and bird-watching and all with an enthusiasm for astronomy.

Turner's own love for the night sky stems from the 1960s — the moon race and Carl Sagan's books: "He presented space passionately, more emotionally, a little spiritual, less scientific. It touches something inside, looking at other galaxies up close and personal."

At Arizona Sky Village, the stars do seem closer. The less the magnitude, the brighter the star, and at the village the less-bright stars — those of the 7th magnitude — are visible to the naked eye.

With telescopes ranging from 14 to 30 inches, you can get spectacular glimpses of such faraway beauties as the Orion Nebula. Some part-time residents — like the Newtons, who live six months of the year in Canada at their astronomy-themed bed-and-breakfast — keep an eye on Portal's skies via computer-controlled cameras.

Just a few issues worry Turner, who insists he's never leaving southeastern Arizona. There's the lack of medical facilities, for one — with all its older residents, Portal could use a clinic with good cardiac care. Another issue — the relationship of the village with the neighboring community — seems to be resolving itself.

"At first, there was quite a bit of anxiety over this `quote, development, unquote,' " says Turner. "I took quite a bit of heat. But I think now the community loves the people we have here. We sign up as EMTs, for example. Well, they probably still don't like me, because land values went up about 1,000 percent.

"We got lucky — we got here first to preserve this dark sky."

Durlin is online editor at High Country News (www.hcn.org). High Country News covers the West's communities and natural resource issues.

[Albuquerque Jobs - Jobing](#)

Local Albuquerque jobs & employers Post your resume & search for free
[Jobing.com](#)

[Night Sky](#)

Looking for Night Sky? Find exactly what you want today.
[Yahoo.com](#)

[Local Roofing Contractor](#)

Albuquerque area gutters & roofs Call us today for more details!
[www.kennecoroof.com](#)

[Albuquerque Area Homes](#)

View Homes For Sale in Albuquerque Detailed Property Info And Photos.
[House-Real-Estate.com/Albuquerque](#)

Ads by Google



TRIB TALK: WHAT ARE YOUR COMMENTS ON THIS STORY?

This site does not necessarily agree with posted comments, they are the sole responsibility of the person posting them. Readers will be banned for posting defamatory, obscene, abusive, threatening or an invasion of privacy comments. [Read our privacy agreement.](#)