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## News Update

### Film depicts rapid growth of Phoenix

By Joe Kullman, Tribune

Kathryn Lincoln sees a silver lining in the cloud hanging over the Valley because of its swift passage from desert outpost to sixth-largest metropolitan area in the country.

"We're viewed as a poster child of urban sprawl," said the Scottsdale resident and president of the Lincoln Foundation. To her, that bad rap affords the Valley a stage on which to emerge as a shining example of a place balancing economic expansion and environmental sensitivity amid the pressures of growth.

She and her colleagues at the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy — supported by the foundation established in the Valley in 1947 by industrialist John C. Lincoln — are embarking on a project to unite disparate factions in framing a practical vision for making that happen.

The first step is an hourlong film documentary, "Making Sense of Place — Phoenix: The Urban Desert," that examines the conflicts arising out of rapid urban growth in a challenging desert climate.

After a recent preview of the film for an invited group, the foundation is seeking wider audiences. It is planning to schedule at least four town hall meetings this spring to screen the documentary throughout the Valley, including one meeting in Scottsdale.

The film will be the focus of a May 19 forum put on by the Arizona State University School of Public Policy. The foundation also is talking to PBS about televising it locally and possibly nationally.

The documentary soon will be offered for showings by community and civic groups.

As much as the film is meant to inspire activism, the producers said they were careful to avoid making it a save-the-desert call to arms.

"We took the approach that this would be a fair characterization of the issues," Lincoln said. "We are not an environmental group. We are not a developers' group. . . . there's no closet agenda."

"This is not an outsiders' critique. . . . We don't have Washington policy experts talking about what they think (the Valley) ought to be doing," said Armando

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Carbonell, a senior fellow of the Lincoln Institute. “We wanted to get the voices of the community that is grappling with these issues.”

Among the voices heard in the film are those leading efforts to preserve open scenic desert in Scottsdale and elsewhere in the East Valley.

One segment spotlights the recent saga of Pinnacle Peak. The mountain — one of the area's most prominent natural landmarks and popular hiking spots — was closed to public use for several years while Scottsdale officials, preservationists, developers and nearby neighborhoods squabbled over conditions for its promised release from private ownership to become a city park.

Other voices include those of local developers and residents explaining why big subdivisions built ever farther into the desert provide the good life people are seeking.

“It was fairly balanced. It didn't try to find someone to blame, or look for bad guys,” said Grady Gammage Jr., a land-use attorney and author of a history of the Valley's development.

“It isn't preachy . . . It raises the level of dialogue about growth. Maybe it can help get us to look at the big picture rather than only our individual causes and crusades,” said Vern Swaback, a Scottsdale architect and longtime voice in the development debate.

Luring developers to a presentation billed as a look at growth issues will be a challenge, said Eric Brown, president of Artisan Homes, the only land developer who attended the film's preview.

“I found it reasonably fair, but most developers are going to think they already know what it's about, the same old pro-environmentalist story,” Brown said.

The foundation's goal is to take the debate beyond the established business, political and preservationist circles and inspire more grass-roots involvement.

“One women came up to me (after the film preview) and said, ‘I've lived here all my life and I care about the desert and the future, but I really haven't done much about it. I feel I've got to do something now,’ ” said Lincoln Institute official Dennis Robinson. “That's exactly the purpose of this film.”

*Contact Joe Kullman by [email](#), or phone (480) 898-2342*