

South Phoenix continues to fight for opportunity, perseverance of small businesses

Voice of the Voter: Highlighting voter perspectives from communities across Arizona

A community defined by struggle and perseverance, South Phoenix has a rich history shaped by the pursuit of opportunity and equality.



By: Cameron Polom

Posted 8:15 AM, Oct 03, 2024

and last updated 10:28 PM, Oct 03, 2024

PHOENIX — A community defined by struggle and perseverance, South Phoenix has a rich history shaped by the pursuit of opportunity and equality. Today, it stands as a testament to the powerful identity forged by those who call it home.

Baseline Flowers, a family business, is rooted in something simple yet profound.

“I think the values are really about family, community, and a sense of place,” said owner Kathy Nakagawa.

The business dates back 75 years, founded by one of seven Japanese-American families who settled in the area after World War II. In the shadow of South Mountain, they found prosperity by growing flowers and produce.



KNXV

“It’s what the United States was built on, right? Immigrants, strength of family, small businesses,” said Nakagawa.

AD



But it wasn't easy. Her parents were among the 120,000 people, mostly of Japanese descent, placed in internment camps after Pearl Harbor. When they were released, they had to rebuild their lives from the ground up.

"There's a saying in Japanese: Shikata-ga-nai, which means "There's nothing you can do, so you just keep going," she said.

Their perseverance paid off, as they shipped flowers across the country and the fields became a source of pride for South Phoenix.

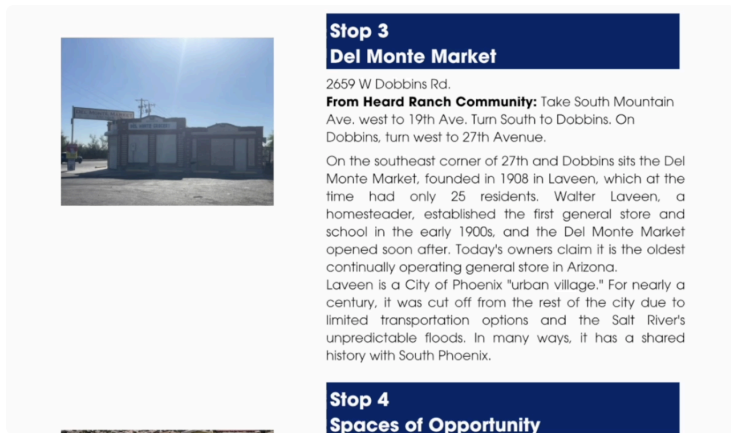
"This is a great story, and I'm glad we're able to be a small representation of that."

This story is part of ABC15's Voice of the Voter series, where we're highlighting voter perspectives from communities all across Arizona. To see more Voice of the Voter coverage, [click here](#).

While the shop remains, the flower fields have been replaced by housing and urban development. That transformation has inspired a group of students at South Mountain Community College to ensure the history of South Phoenix is preserved.

“I think people living in South Phoenix now recognize that with new development comes a new challenge to their history,” said Dr. Summer Cherland, who is leading the effort.

Cherland and her students are collecting stories from families through interviews and photographs, creating a 30-mile driving tour highlighting some of the area's most influential landmarks.



[South Phoenix Oral History](#)

“I think every community wants to preserve its legacy,” Cherland said.

That legacy includes overcoming segregation and racism, with powerful figures like Travis Williams who helped develop neighborhoods specifically for Black families.

“This was a development bought and built by the first Black-owned construction company in Arizona, and it was built for Black buyers,” Cherland said.

Another stop on the driving tour is Precision Auto Parts, founded in 1953 by Juan and Mary de la Torre and now run by their sons.



Precision Auto Parts

“One thing that was instilled in us was to be proud of who you are,” said John de la Torre.

The family, made up of veterans, takes pride in what they’ve built, offering healthcare, good wages, and a 401(k) to employees. But they worry about the rising cost of housing and the lack of recreational development in the area near their shop that’s grown increasingly industrial, fearing it may force workers to live elsewhere.

“They’re hard-working people. They need a break in terms of getting homes that are suitable,” he said. “When we were growing up, we had a lot more in terms of recreation around here, homes available. We need more of that.”

While the future of South Phoenix is uncertain, one thing is clear: its residents

have never given up the fight for a better
life—and they don't plan to start now.

*WATCH: South Phoenix political
demographic breakdown*