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Column: Something completely new for downtown - throngs of people!

by **John D'Anna** - Jul. 9, 2010 11:35 AM
Mesa Republic editor

Did you catch the Celebration of Freedom last weekend?

Fifty thousand people. We haven't seen those kinds of throngs downtown since, well, ever.

That's like two and a half times the home crowd at a Diamondbacks game - without the bad baseball, of course.

Let's hope the magic can carry over into the city's unfortunately named monthly art walk.

After our suggestion to hold a contest to come up with something less lame than "Second Friday," our friend Rob Price came up with "Fringe Friday," which works on so many levels.

Got a better name? We'll happily relay it to the masses.

Brown: the new green . . . Our friends over at the city's Sustainability Department are hosting a seminar on "how to remove your grass."

Apparently there are other methods besides "quit watering it." Who knew?

Anyway, the seminar will tell you how to get \$500 for your grass without the risk of doing hard time.

The money comes through a city rebate for turning your grass to xeriscape.

For the uninitiated, xeriscape is a Greek word meaning, "It sure wasn't this brown in Wisconsin."

The workshop, part of the city's monthly "living green" series, begins at 1:30 p.m. today at the Dobson Ranch Branch Library, 2425 S. Dobson Road.

Meet and greet . . . The folks at the Arizona Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the East Valley Hispanic Business Alliance are hosting a mixer Thursday at the new AZ Country USA.

Bonus points if you show up wearing sheriff's SWAT team regalia.

OK, that was mean.

In any event the mixer runs from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Thursday at AZ Country USA, 1300 S. Country Club Drive, Mesa.

Appetizers and networking are free. RSVP to Carlos Velasco at 602-294-6083 or e-mail membership@azhcc.com.

-30- You may have seen the obit for our longtime friend and colleague Jeff Dozbaba in the grownup paper on Thursday. You may not know it, but Jeff spent considerable time in the Mesa newsroom after one of the 17 reorganizations we've had in recent years.

In fact, he was one of the architects of our current community news strategy, so in a way you have him to thank for the edition you're holding in your hands.

We first met Jeff one night about 20 years ago at a party in someone's backyard. It was late fall, and he was wearing a leather jacket and sunglasses and had a beer in each hand. He handed one to us while he wiped his hand on his jeans and then shook ours. Then he made us give the beer back.

The second time Jeff handed us something to hold was during our job interview at *The Republic*.

We met over lunch at a Chinese restaurant in the old Mercado in downtown Phoenix. After Jeff grilled us for an hour on our journalistic bona fides, the waiter showed up with the check.

Jeff grabbed it, looked at the total, then handed it across the table.

"Here, you get this," he said with a completely straight face.

Stunned, we reached for our wallet because, well, we really wanted the job. Then he broke out in a big grin, grabbed the check back and said, "Man, you should have seen the look on your face."

The message was clear. If we came to work for Jeff, we could expect not only to work hard, but to play hard.

And play hard he did. Once during a pickup basketball game he fouled us so hard that we wound up with a broken thumb. Of course it was our fault for even thinking of taking a shot while he was defending us.

Hard to believe anything could stop a guy like that. Cancer may have gotten his lungs, but not his heart. Never his heart.

John D'Anna is the Mesa Republic editor. To submit an item, send it with a drought-resistant plant for his yard.

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