Thriving Folklife:

Tucson’s 85705 Past, Present & Future
What is Thrive in the '05?

The City of Tucson’s Thrive in the '05 Transformation Plan is the culmination of a three-year effort to engage a 2.3 square mile subregion of the 85705 zip code in a place-based, community-centered collaboration including city staff, organizations, and residents. The region is loosely bounded by Interstate 10, Miracle Mile, Stone Avenue, and Speedway Boulevard, but the Transformation Plan intentionally seeks permeable boundaries welcoming adjacent areas. The main neighborhoods include Balboa Heights, Barrio Blue Moon, Bronx Park, Coronado Heights, Miracle Manor, Old Pascua, as well as a southern portion of Flowing Wells. Nearby “arterial” neighborhoods include Barrio Anita, Dunbar Springs, Feldman’s, Keeling, Sugar Hill, and West University.

The Transformation Plan lays out goals divided into four categories: Neighborhood, Housing, People and Education, and Workforce & Economic Development. Broadly speaking, the goals include:

1. A deeper sense of connection that encourages Commercial Corridor Catalysts (e.g., branding and sign restoration), Placemaking & Neighborhood identity (e.g., tree planting, storytelling, public art), and Green Space Renewal (centered on parks and community gardens).

2. Economic Development. Broadly speaking, the goals include:

   a.厘通al strategies that provide diverse and suitable housing types, support homeowners (existing and new), increase and retain affordable and mixed housing options, and make Tucson House a model for aging in place.
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   c. Neighborhood strategies that invest in multimodal transportation, build resilience, improve safety, beautification, and strengthen identity.
   d. Workforce and economic development strategies that support inclusive growth & equitable economic mobility and economic health equity with underserved residents, provide high quality education options, and offer services and programming at Tucson House.

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SFA’s Role in Thrive in the ‘05

On March 9, 2022, the City of Tucson’s Mayor and City Council adopted the Thrive in the ‘05 Transformation Plan. The Southwest Folklife Alliance (SFA) was brought in as one of many partners charged with implementing the plan through Action Activities. These activities mobilized the community, bringing together partners to accomplish tasks like planting trees, painting the streets, and hosting events in the Thrive area. As a partner in these efforts, SFA engaged communities through pop-up events and a six-week Community Folklorist Field School.

The goal of SFA’s contribution and this report is to support both short- and long-term impacts of Neighborhood Goal, Strategy #4: “Strengthen the identity of the area through creative place making and artistic, historic, and cultural preservation,” Action A: “Use storytelling, cultural asset mapping, and events to preserve the cultural heritage of the neighborhood.” (Transformation Plan 2022, pages 9 and 83).

When planning for and investing in a community-driven vision for Tucson, it is critical to understand and strengthen what matters most to current residents. Community members must be the ones to direct and benefit from new investments and resources in the area. The Thrive in the ‘05 effort offers an opportunity to define how investments in infrastructure can be directed to benefit current residents and businesses, and to attract new growth that meets the needs of the community while honoring the area’s unique identity. This goal seeks to strengthen and define that identity through participatory action research methodology that centers folklife. SFA defines folklife as “the things we make, say, and do in shared groups.” Folklife can involve both long-time traditions and newer ones; it can arise from distinct cultural traditions or from shared values, geography, worklife, or choice. By acknowledging historical and cultural contexts and celebrating folklife, we hope to ensure that resident voices and stories remain central to the area’s “revitalization.”

Field School Participants at the City of Tucson Ward 3 Office

SFA’s Community Folklorist Field School

Bringing a folklife and cultural heritage component to the Thrive in the ‘05 “Choice Neighborhoods” initiative aims to ensure that resident voices and stories are centered in the revitalization plans and that neighbor-to-neighbor care networks are nurtured. In this perspective also highlights and values the historic and cultural resources and relationships within the Thrive in the ‘05 neighborhoods—from longtime traditional in Old Pascua to iconic, mid-century neon signs adorning old motor courts. These assets strengthen the community’s unique, collective identity and sense of place.

From August 13 to September 17, 2022, SFA hosted a six-week Community Folklorist Field School at the City of Tucson’s Ward 3 Office. Through a series of lectures and workshops led by instructors, guest presenters, and community organizers, the field school focused on identifying field school goals and needs of the community while honoring the area’s unique identity. This effort has been described as an innovative approach to safeguard the cultural assets in their communities. As a whole, the field school centered the expertise and leadership of community residents, encouraged creativity and expression, and facilitated a celebration of culture as expressed by current residents.

Ten residents of the ‘05 attended the field school: eight adults and two teenagers who participated with their mothers. Dr. Magda Mankel along with Dr. Elizabeth Eklund, Rachel Frank, and guest lecturers Dr. Maribel Alvarez, a folklorist from the University of Arizona, and Felipe S. Molina, an instructor of Yaqui language and culture, instructed the field school.

The cohort of community folklorists included: Julian Argote, Nicholas Bruno, Maria Cruz, Yasmine Cruz, Alexis Redondo, Julia Quiroga, Rebeka Quiroga, Aaliyah Urias, Alisha Vasquez, Victoria Vasquez.

Field School Participants at the City of Tucson Ward 3 Office
Our Connections to the '05: Folklife from Community Folklorists

Community folklorists were encouraged to submit documentation of folklife in their communities, interviews with family or neighbors, and reflections on their connection to the '05. Their "findings" are below.

Part I. Moving into 85705

Vickie Vasquez:
My parents bought a house that was in the 85705 in 1956. We watched it being built on Otilia Drive. It was farmland. There was an irrigation ditch behind our house. There was a disabled tractor at the end of the street. It was a cul-de-sac. I went to kindergarten at Iola Frans, on Prince Road. Walked to school. Went to Catholic School at Sacred Heart Church. Then to Flowing Wells High School. It was nice because it was a small school. There were Mormons. There were some Hispanics, but it was mostly white. There were some Asians. I remain friends with quite a few people that I went to high school with, even if we don't keep in touch all the time. Some of the people are still in the neighborhood. I don't think there's anybody on our block that we live on now who is original except for my mom.

Part II: Leaving the Barrio & Moving North

Vickie:
We used to go to my father's parents' house on South Herbert Street quite a bit. They had an outhouse and didn't have any indoor plumbing. We were always so careful going into the outhouse to make sure there were no bugs or anything like that. We always used to run around the yard there. My dad would be out there watering. My aunts and uncles would come too. We knew the neighbors on the block. But I remember being there, seeing my cousins, playing with my cousins, it was the closeness of family, the neighborhood. We knew all the neighbors, all the kids, you know. The same kind of family closeness in '01, like we had here in '05. Just a different area.

Victoria "Vickie" Vasquez and Alisha Vasquez, Flowing Wells Neighborhood
Six Generations, Tracking the Shifts

Below are excerpts from a conversation between Field School participants Vickie Vasquez, 70, and her niece Alisha Vasquez, 38, which took place Nov. 14, 2022 at Theodora Vasquez's house on Otilia Drive near Prince and Flowing Wells.

Alisha:
It is interesting that Papu (my grandfather, your dad), was able to use his GI Bill to come north, because we know there was redlining. The south and the west of Tucson were more reserved for brown people or other people of color. I think the Vasquez family coming up in the '05 in the Flowing Wells neighborhood shows that kind of first wave of Tucsonsenses moving north.

Vickie:
Like my mom says, they thought that they were really out there because there was just farmland. So they thought, "Where's Papu taking me?" It wasn't that far. But like you said, the lines, crossing the lines. The Valenzuelas too. Their family is from the same area downtown where dad was from in the '01. So yeah, that was quite a move. Even though it wasn't that far, it was still far.

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—Vickie Vasquez

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Vickie's father's family, Tucson 1940s

The Vasquez's House, Herbert St., 85701 zip code

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Part III. Small-town Tucson of Yore

Alisha: Your generation, my mom’s generation, was the last to experience that kind of small-town Tucson. In the 1970s, we saw this kind of boom, like we’re experiencing now, of outsiders moving to Tucson, particularly white folks. I’m curious if you can talk about that because this happened in your lifetime.

Vickie: I noticed there were a lot of people coming from all different places, but we always had what we called snowbirds: people coming from cold places to our area because the weather was so nice. We were used to that but then all of a sudden, I started to notice people moving to Tucson, especially from California where it was getting more expensive to live, and they knew that they could get a nicer place for less money. There were still a lot of people born and raised here, but you could tell there were a lot of “foreigners” [laughing]. I don’t know how else to explain it, but people from the outside, coming in, and trying to change things. We were used to how we were raised and how we were brought up. And people coming from the outside wanted to change this or that. And I think every generation goes through something like, “Oh, I remember when it was like this,” or “It used to be like this,” but you know, there’s changes all the time. And you either deal with it, or you try and change it or bring it back to how it used to be. And even if it’s not going to be the same, at least something similar to what you’re used to.

Part IV. Learning from the Past & Hopes for the Future

Vickie: This project for the ’05 is to make positive changes. There are a lot of homeless people and I know a lot of people with drug problems, and different situations where people lost their jobs. There were certain areas in ’05 that people were struggling and trying to just live, trying to just make ends meet. There’s been a lot of good and bad changes. On Oracle Road there were quite a few restaurants that are no longer there. Ye Old Lantern, we used to go to lunch there. The Elks Club, I think, is what it is now. The owner was named Dean Short and he had quite a few restaurants in town. A club called Funky’s where my friend was part owner. They had bands and food. That’s where my friend Debbie worked. Club 21 had been there forever. We really miss that place. That was family owned also by the Jacobs that had a couple other restaurants. Now it’s Chinito Gordo.

Alisha: Can I go back to talking about the strip off Oracle between Grant and Speedway? Where the Elks Club is. Today in this area I see a huge, unhoused population, a lot of prostitution and a lot of drug use. That area, in my adult lifetime, has pretty much been in decline. In the last 20 years we’ve seen a lot of homeless pushed to the outskirts, like right to the Santa Cruz River, but also to Grant and Oracle. I’m just curious if you could talk about that shift?

Vickie: I think it probably was in the late ’70s, maybe early ’80s. The housing got more difficult for people. I think that was during the recession, too, so a lot of people lost their jobs. People got pushed out of the area with no place to go. They did have some shelters and stuff like that, but there was never enough. I think it’s hard to really pinpoint.

Alisha: The city has purchased some of those motels to help some of the folks that have been displaced. Do you think that this is a step in the right direction?

Vickie: I think it’s a step in the right direction, they just need a lot more. There was an article on the Wildcat House Inn, which takes in the homeless and gives them a safe place. They need a lot more places like that.
Part V. Six Generations, Tracking the Shifts

Vickie: Being at Jacobs Park yesterday brought back a lot of memories. My siblings and I were talking about walking from Flowing Wells High School to use the pool. A lot of the Hispanics now are living in the mobile homes across the street from the school and in the apartments. You can now see a lot of Hispanics at places like Food City. Stores are catering to Hispanics, but it's not just Hispanics that you see in the store. White people, Black people, Asians, they all come into these stores. In the Flowing Wells Plaza, I don't think there's an empty store in that whole plaza. A lot of people don't have vehicles, they walk. They walk to get their groceries and they walk to get different things. There's just a lot more things happening.

Alisha: A friend I went to high school with, who grew up in the '04 and '05, made a comment a couple years ago, “Wow, I went to Flowing Wells and Prince, and it’s just like being at 12th and Ajo.” Meaning, it’s a lot like the south side of Tucson. This made me think there is a more vibrant business culture of smaller businesses, too. Because, like you said, people walk here, maybe there are slightly specialized stores, maybe the shopkeepers speak Spanish. I've seen a huge influx of brown faces around here, and heard more Spanish being spoken. And I went to Amphi High School, which is down the street. Amphi has totally changed in the almost 20 years since I graduated. I consider Prince and Flowing Wells my home base because of Yaya and Papu’s (my grandparents). To see all these changes, and to reckon with that, knowing my family's history—it’s interesting to think of how the city and the feds are getting involved to pump money into a portion of this giant zip code. But I’m not sure that it’s going to be enough. It has been so underserved for so long, so long. I wanted to say since the ‘70s, like you said. So we’re going on 50 years of not putting infrastructure, not putting care, not funding social programs that prevent houselessness, prevent drug abuse, prevent violence. I think it’s going to be in my daughter Athena’s lifetime where we see, probably my life too, but where we see rich people coming back to the Tucson House, in that area, coming back to Miracle Mile.
Part VI. Interventions for Tomorrow

Alisha: I’m seeing a lot of similarities between the late ’60s and early ’70s with this current moment. I’m already seeing the signs of gentrification displacement, which was called “urban renewal” in the 1960s and 1970s, coming into the ’05, which really bums me out because it’s just a continuation of the displacement of poor people. I feel like a lot of folks have been pushed into the ’05. I’m seeing that push again. You mentioned what happened in the 1970s, what did that feel like when Tucson became the “it” city for young folks to move to?

Vickie: How are you going to stop it? You’re hoping that it’s going to be a good thing, but a lot of times it’s not. People come in from other places and want to change things. Multiple Hispanic families are living in one house; that’s how they were able to afford to buy a house. You see it around our neighborhood here. And most of the new families moving in are Hispanic.

Alisha: It’s interesting that you bring that up because that’s how you grew up. And that’s how your parents grew up: having multiple family members—including those not part of the nuclear family—live with you. You all have been doing this for generations, which is normal. You’ve pinpointed something—multiple families living in the same domicile—versus this kind of “American Dream” fantasy. That imaginary is very Anglo, Western, where the nuclear family only lives in one house. That’s just not the reality for the majority of the world. Something that’s been pretty natural for us is seen as something different.

Vickie: I hope that Thrive in ’05 continues and doesn’t let up. I hope they keep getting money and ideas. I hope they don’t think of it as just a one-time thing. The 85705 is a mixture of so much, which is good.

Alisha: So was it a disinvestment by the city? Was it poorer people moving in? Was it people having less money to give to the house and their community?

Vickie: I hope that Thrive in ’05 continues and doesn’t let up. I hope they keep getting money and ideas. I hope they don’t think of it as just a one-time thing. The 85705 is a mixture of so much, which is good.

Alisha: Do you think it would be advantageous for the city to implement something where developers have to invest so much into the area they’re buying into?

Vickie: Absolutely, absolutely. You just can’t come in and build and then not invest anything else into it. It’s a sad situation. That’s why the rents are so high today. They’ve got you afraid that you don’t know how anybody could afford it. I don’t like a lot of the people coming in and buying these places. They want to make changes in the area. It’s like, “You’re not from here; it’s not your area. You’re supposed to be part of the area.” I don’t know what the answer is. I really don’t.

Julia Quiroga, Old Pascua Neighborhood

Growing up in the ’05: Five generations in Old Pascua

My grandparents, parents, daughter; granddaughters, siblings and I have a long history with a neighborhood in the 85705 zip code. My mother, Cruzita Flores, was born in the mid ’50s and was raised in the Old Pascua neighborhood. She can vividly describe how the adobe homes in the neighborhood were laid out on each block and names the families that lived in each home. She’s told me how citrus trees used to grow in the yards across the street. And to our disbelief, she said that the mobile home community on the other side of Grant Road, called Sleepy Hollow, was lush with fruit trees and was considered beautiful, luxury living when it first opened in the 1960s.

She described the homes in the neighborhood at that time as being made of adobe, plywood, corrugated tin, and sometimes patched up with cardboard. She said there were no streetlights, it was very dark, and there was a lot of desert vegetation.

Until her late teens, most of my mother’s extended family lived close by. She said that no one in the neighborhood had much, but they shared whatever they had and therefore had a strong sense of community. She said they walked everywhere in groups because they had to. At that time most folks in the neighborhood did not have the means to afford a vehicle. They walked to school at John Spring Junior High or Tucson High School and to the stores as far as downtown.

When my sisters and I were children, in the mid to late 1980s, I recall walking around the neighborhood too. We did so not because we had to, but because we wanted to play with cousins on the baseball fields at Richey, or we wanted to climb and slide down the metal playground equipment at the tiny park on Calle Central across the street from Santa Rosa church.
Until the early ‘90s, we were fortunate to have two family-run stores within walking distance from Nana Bell’s (my maternal grandmother, Isabel Flores) home. At the closest neighborhood store, “Sue’s,” we could buy chips and soda for fifty cents or candy for a penny. If you walked a block further south, there was a house where you could buy the most delicious snow cones—leche was my favorite. If you went further down 15th Avenue, you could buy Anita’s tortillas at J & B Market, but we never passed that store, because it was considered past the boundaries of the neighborhood.

For the benefit of current and future generations, we would like to have sidewalks installed to make neighborhood streets a little safer. And to keep the youth and community active. We would also love to see a recreation center for youth programs and tennis courts for the community in neighborhoods that lack these amenities.

In closing, my family and I thank the City of Tucson not only for the work they are doing now, by creating programs and initiatives aimed at investing in the neighborhoods in the 85705 zip code. But, as descendants of Marcelino and Isabel Flores, we thank the City of Tucson for their help in establishing the family home 41 years ago. Since then, three more generations have resided in the same house that has been considered the epicenter of the Flores family and is still known as Nana Bell’s House.

“[My mother] said no one in the neighborhood had much, but they shared whatever they had and therefore had a strong sense of community.”

—Julia Quiroga

There was a house where you could buy the most delicious snow cones—leche was my favorite.

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I interviewed families who have been here for many generations. Manuel Cocio showed me photos of his grandma, when this area had dirt roads, adobe homes, and was still part of Mexico. Now, only a few adobe homes remain. Talking to all these families, they all remember a time when they would wake up each morning to the smell of coffee and fresh tortillas. This smell came not just from their own homes, but from the other homes and the market as well. Manuel also mentioned that everyone gathered in the park for the Fourth of July to watch the fireworks at A Mountain. Family and friends throwing down on the grill, cooking out, having a good time.

Grace Soto continues what her grandparents started and hosts Christmas in Anita every year by having Santa Claus handout Christmas gifts. Manuel Cocio and Johnny Urias talked about playing football and hosting the “The Turkey Bowl” on Thanksgiving morning with friends and family.

Everyone I interviewed also mentioned remembering when the barrio all helped each other out. If you needed something, someone would always help. When everyone had respect for each other, had morals, and loved one another. Everyone looked out and took care of each other.

What I got out of interviewing families and people working in Barrio Anita is their pridefulness in their Barrio. Their connection to the area. Their connection to family roots, their culture and their heritage.
I came to the Thrive in the '05 Community Folklorist Field School as a person who is not in control of his housing. My understanding of people not in control of housing includes unhoused people, tenant-renters, and people whose houses are owned by banks. This puts my interests squarely with the working class, rather than the owning class. I have shared my home with people not in control of their housing. My understanding of people not in control of his housing. My understanding of people not in control of their housing includes unhoused people, tenant-renters, and people whose houses are owned by banks. This puts my interests squarely with the working class, rather than the owning class. I have shared my home with people not in control of their housing. My understanding of people not in control of their housing includes unhoused people, tenant-renters, and people whose houses are owned by banks. This puts my interests squarely with the working class, rather than the owning class.
The ideas handed down from above are for the benefit of the people living there. —Nick Bruno

Adri looks forward to re-engaging with people when she can afford to take part in “community” activities. Adri, based on my informal interviews, is newly in the crowd of folks on the path to owning their own homes. There is a place for everyone in this struggle. Renters can unite with the current interlocking systems of power—corporate landlords, tenants, government, and media. More than this, they’ve re-emphasized the value of having community control of their own and their neighbors in the building. There is great potential for growing this empowerment towards accountability based on the standards that must be met as part of the Section 8 program. In response, we’ve seen some property managers change media offers or pressure not to come around to avoid being held accountable for building and safety code violations. And when police do come, enforcement of laws is inconsistent.

People at those apartments have done some more creative in their practices and ideas. One project the people living in apartments by Mansfield are hopeful for is a mural, a chance to come together and share their creative ideas in a beautiful and fun way. The landlord and managers denied this request and seem to favor the gray cinder block walls topped with spoils of cardboard wire that partially surround their building. Adri, this didn’t feel like family seeking to justify more police funding and violent apprehension.

The City’s image is at stake and along with it, the trust of the people of Tucson. This is because so often we are sold a narrative that individualism and corruption—we are all familiar with the negative stereotypes that these stories provide is an additional gift that simultaneously promotes decadence and corruption—we are all familiar with the negative stereotypes that media not only keeps the City narrative in check, it also creates a path towards accountability based on the standards that must be met as part of the Section 8 program. In response, we’ve seen some property managers change media offers or pressure not to come around to avoid being held accountable for building and safety code violations. And when police do come, enforcement of laws is inconsistent.

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Adri looks forward to re-engaging with people when she can afford to take part in “community” activities. Adri, based on my informal interviews, is newly in the crowd of folks on the path to owning their own homes. There is a place for everyone in this struggle. Renters can unite with the current interlocking systems of power—corporate landlords, tenants, government, and media. More than this, they’ve re-emphasized the value of having community control of their own and their neighbors in the building. There is great potential for growing this empowerment towards accountability based on the standards that must be met as part of the Section 8 program. In response, we’ve seen some property managers change media offers or pressure not to come around to avoid being held accountable for building and safety code violations. And when police do come, enforcement of laws is inconsistent.

One project the people living in apartments by Mansfield are hopeful for is a mural, a chance to come together and share their creative ideas in a beautiful and fun way. The landlord and managers denied this request and seem to favor the gray cinder block walls topped with spoils of cardboard wire that partially surround their building. Adri, this didn’t feel like family seeking to justify more police funding and violent apprehension.

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Neighborhood Perspectives

In the following section, field folklorists Elizabeth and Magda provide an ethnographic synthesis of the informal conversations and semi-structured interviews they had with residents, business owners, organizers, and other stakeholders in the '05. These perspectives were gathered by Elizabeth, Magda, and Rachel between April and December of 2022. The summaries reflect hours of documentation based on participant observation, field-based descriptions, photographs, field notes, and audio recordings. While the SFA team was unable to meet with representatives from every neighborhood present in the '05, what’s offered here illustrates a variety of insights rooted in the experiences of local residents.

Anissa Alvarado-Stewart
Interview and summary by Elizabeth Eklund

Anissa Alvarado-Stewart grew up in Old Pascua and still has family there. “It’s always been very community oriented. Everybody knows everybody. It’s very close knit. You can walk down the street, especially during Lent and neighbors will wave hello and ask how your family is doing. Your great grandma might have been best friends with my great grandma, or my aunt, and...your mom [and] my mom were best friends... all going to the same schools.”

One of the challenges in the area has been rising rents, Anissa says, but places are changing. For example, the Slaughterhouse now hosts seasonal events. Anissa also talked about community services, including those offered by the Pascua Yaqui tribe, which help connect people there, as well as other essential services in the area like the food bank and SunTran. While there are a lot of stereotypes about the area, Anissa says she really wants people to see what a diverse and welcoming community the ‘05 is.

Armando Sotelo, Barrio Blue Moon
Interview by Rachel Frank and Magda Mankel
Summary by Magda Mankel

Armando Sotelo is an artist, father to triplets, treasurer of the neighborhood association, and resident of Blue Moon. Although he, his mother, and his siblings moved into the barrio in the early 2000s, his family on his mother’s side has historical ties to the area. Currently, he lives next door to the house built and owned by his great grandparents on his mother’s patrilineal side. Later on, his aunt lived there.

Today Barrio Blue Moon is a mix of residences, businesses, and warehouses, which makes its streets feel less residential than it once did, he says. Armando recently got involved in efforts to make the streets safer for pedestrians. In collaboration with Living Street Alliance (LSA), residents and other volunteers coordinated a neighborhood Block Painting Party and installed several traffic circles as a traffic calming measure. Armando led the installation and created the artwork for one of the roundabouts in Barrio Blue Moon. LSA expedited the process by bringing in labor, supplies, and city approval.

Armando believes safe streets are key to safe neighborhoods, where kids play and neighbors catch-up with each other on the streets, their porches, or along the fences surrounding their property. These informal exchanges are important to maintaining neighborly relationships and care. “I’m riding my bike and I’ll see someone that’s outside when I’m riding, so we’ll stop and see what’s up,” Armando said.

Despite recent positive developments, Armando says more can be done not only to improve walkability and transportation, but also to form connections between annual events and the neighborhood. The Gem and Mineral Show, for example, sets up a portion of its tents at the edge of the neighborhood every year—along Main Avenue south of Drachman. The Show is seen as both a disruption and an income generator for a few. “It comes and goes, bringing in tourists and money and stuff like that. But then also crowding our streets, just the traffic it brings in, we’re either used to it or try to put up with it. So the relationship is not built and therefore not a lot of people are willing to open up and try to extend a hand out to people who are only here once a year.”
Arnold Martinez, Barrio Blue Moon
Interview by Rachel Frank and Magda Mankel
Summary by Magda Mankel

Arnold Martinez has lived in Barrio Blue Moon for all 68 years of his life and has “seen this place grow from nothing to everything.” As a child he saw the Tucson House being built, shopped at Danny’s Market, bought freshly butchered chickens from down the road for 50 cents, and watched as the dirt roads were coated in tar and later in asphalt. He recalls the effort that his late sister, Roberta “Bobbie” Martinez, made to have streetlights and sidewalks installed by the City of Tucson. Roberta also led efforts to build Francisco Elias Esquer Park. Back then, Roberta lived in the house across the street from Arnold and served as President of the neighborhood association.

Arnold also takes the time to watch over his neighbors, as he has witnessed a decrease in neighbor-led surveillance. From his yard, Arnold keeps watch for potential burglars and other unfamiliar individuals that may be passing through on their way to Francisco Elias Esquer Park and the Salvation Army. “Sometimes I feel like I’m wasting my time and breath to tell people ‘Hey, you know you live in a neighborhood? You’re supposed to keep it secure for everyone.’ And some people, they do as I ask. But some say, ‘None of our concern, that’s why we call the cops.’ But you know what, the cops will not come unless it’s a priority call.”

Arnold also takes care of his family and is motivated by his desire to leave behind a legacy of support. He hopes to do this by gifting the family home to his niece and her two children. This is the family home that his mother, Dolores Martinez, and father, Henry Martinez, built after his father purchased the vacant lot and “cleaned it up real nice.” “I’m going to give the house to my niece. I tell her, ‘You don’t have to worry.’ I’m not afraid of passing on. But I just want you to have everything that I never had growing up.”

Arnold worked for the City of Tucson as a mechanic that serviced garbage trucks for 35 years. He says he is proud to have held onto the family property despite getting multiple offers from developers wanting to buy it.

The sidewalks his sister helped make happen are now the same sidewalks Arnold uses for his daily walks, as he recovers from a recent heart attack. Although his mobility is limited and he is currently on a strict diet that prevents him from eating rich foods like pan de huevo and menudo, he is persevering with his exercise routine and staying connected to the community. His recovery is aided by both his own tenacity and help from others. Neighbors, friends, and family check in on him and help him access health services too far to reach on foot, he says. Arnold would like to see more businesses, such as grocery stores and pharmacies, in walking distance from the barrio.

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Arnold’s sister, Roberta “Bobbie” Martinez (1960-2020) was the Barrio Blue Moon President in the late 90’s early 2000s. Photo from 2005 courtesy of Arnold Martinez.

Arnold’s sister, Roberta “Bobbie” Martinez (1960-2020) was the Barrio Blue Moon President in the late 90’s early 2000s. Photo from 2005 courtesy of Arnold Martinez.
Bobbie and Dolores Martinez, Francisco Esquer, and Andy Squire at the dedication of Francisco Elias Esquer Park

City Workers and Blue Moon Residents working together

Fred Ronstadt
Henry Martinez
Jim Rios

Max Torres (overlooking) parking his trailer called Netti.

Bobbie, Francisco, Delores, Andy, and others at the dedication of Francisco Elias Esquer Park

Southwest Folklife Alliance

Thriving Folklife: Tucson's 85705 Past, Present, Future
Brandon Varela, Director of the Old Pascua Museum & Yaqui Cultural Center
Interview by Elizabeth Eklund, Rachel Frank, Magda Mankel; Summary by Elizabeth Eklund

Brandon Varela is part of the team that put together old photographs, legal deeds, and other documents. A report he is working on is how the Yaqui have established roots here. The goal of this project was to include the area under a land trust. Pre-pandemic, the Old Pascua Museum had groups coming through frequently. As things continue to grow in Old Pascua, Brandon envisions an expanded museum and classes or workshops over at the Ritchey Center.

When the Pascua Village was formally founded in 1922, the Santa Cruz River was running, and Main Avenue was a dirt road. Just across the road from the museum were dairy farms including one at the site of the Century Movie Theater, demolished in February 2023. Brandon remembers that large salt cedar trees and carrizo, which could be bent into archways, grew readily.

What’s new is that the Old Pascua Museum is offering a tour of the Old Pascua Museum and Yaqui Cultural Center. Before these renovations, many of the houses in Old Pascua were made from scrap materials retrieved from a scrapyard on Speedway. The renovations that the Model Cities program provided residents of what is now Old Pascua are documented in the 1983 book Old Pascua Pueblo by Lorne Greenberg, available at the museum.

In the 1980s, the owner of the house, a rumored witch, gifted it to the city recognizing it officially. And the joke is that’s when we started paying taxes.

A well system, Brandon said, but added that most of those wells went dry. Brandon has found an old well that is still visible, although it’s been dry for years.

Brandon Varela gives a tour of the Old Pascua Museum and Yaqui Cultural Center.

The history of how the Yaquis arrived in what is now Arizona is still hidden. The violence and mistreatment that the Yaqui fled, Brandon said, is evident in the museum by Lorne Greenberg, available at the museum.

The Yaqui people came to Old Pascua, Marana, other parts of Arizona, and California, seeking work on the railroad. During that time, Yaqui were deported to the Yucatan to work on henequen farms. Henequen is a species of tropical agave used to make twines, rope, hammocks, bags, and other products.

Yaqui people came to Old Pascua, Marana, other parts of Arizona, and California, seeking work on the railroad. During that time, Yaqui were deported to the Yucatan to work on henequen farms. Henequen is a species of tropical agave used to make twines, rope, hammocks, bags, and other products. The ties to the henequen plantations is visible in how the Yaqui learned indigenous Maya art styles while enslaved in Yucatan. One of the traditional arts on display, is an embroidered blouse that shows a convergence of Maya embroidery and Yaqui motif styles.

The violence and mistreatment that the Yaqui fled, Brandon said, shaped Pascua Village, as many who settled in the area desired to remain hidden.

After the Yaqui gained reservation land in 1964 and were recognized in 1978, some families moved out of Old Pascua, but Brandon’s family remained. From Brandon’s perspective, Old Pascua was “swallowed up by the city and development. What makes this community unique is that we’re surrounded by all the development, but we still were able to maintain our culture and have their own ceremony and those have been going on for more than a century here.”

Jeffrey Markland, Good News Community Church
Interview and summary by Elizabeth Eklund

Good News Community Church, located at 701 W. Glenn St., was founded in the early 2000 by Steve Trost, former assistant director of Gospel Rescue Mission, who was leading prayer walks in the community.

As a student at the University of Illinois, he played football but sabotaged his career due to drug and alcohol abuse. Eventually, he found a better path and now works to help others. As Pastor Jeff described it, “You live your life the right way and do the right things, be kind to people in this neighborhood, fostering a space where people feel welcome.”

Pastor Jeffrey Markland brings his past experience to the gospel. As a Pastor he would like to see more events in the area, especially around Easter week. And if we can just keep on getting together like this—just a couple of people, doing the right things, living your life the right way and do the right things, be kind to people in this neighborhood, fostering a space where people feel welcome.”

Pastor Jeff said he would like to see more events in the area, especially around Easter week. And if we can just keep on getting together like this—just a couple of people, being together, having some interaction with healthy people—just a little seed that makes them better.”

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entertainment aspect of Miracle Mile. Greg had over 35 years as a general contractor and I had experience with property management. In addition, we both had many years of experience in music and performing arts.

During the transformation process, one very interesting discovery was learning that the bricks, which we had torn out of walls, came from the first local brickworks, which operated from A Mountain in the 1880s. One of the most amusing discoveries we made was that the former pump house for the motel had been used as lodging and was entirely covered (wall, floor, ceiling) in bright green shag carpet. One of the most enduring aspects has been the people coming in who stayed at the former motel in the 1940’s through the 1960s and sharing their stories. Some have even brought photographs from years past.

We like the unique historic character of the Miracle Manor area, and especially the mid-century culture along Miracle Mile. But many motels and mobile home parks—and even the Evergreen Cemetery—are no longer owned by locals, so they are not active participants in the efforts to improve or beautify the area.

We wish that the city, county, visitors’ center, and community leaders would give more attention to the efforts to revitalize the area. We never thought that eleven years would pass without more business investment in the area. The current efforts to improve things are primarily due to the city having grant funds and not genuine interest in the neighborhood. Ten of the 30 plots are currently active, most being maintained by the Blue Moon Garden numbers among those millennials, retirees, and a few grow for local markets.

Sasha would like to see the garden become a space where everyone is welcome and events such as markets and educational workshops, could be hosted by gardeners and community members. She said inclusivity is important and points out that the garden has elevated plots for those who use wheelchairs and scooters. She said she can also see wellness resources or services being offered through the garden.

Given the garden’s location and demographic, “the garden basically operates as a neighborhood mini-park,” Timpson says of the garden.

The garden is currently trying to improve its strained community relationships both with unhoused populations and Blue Moon neighborhood residents, said Sasha Timpson, the garden coordinator. Given the garden’s location and demographic, “the garden basically operates as a neighborhood mini-park,” Timpson says of the garden.

Today Victoria says she wants the residential quality of the neighborhood to be preserved for families who want to make a home. She also wants to bring back the feeling of freedom she experienced in the neighborhood as a child. She’d like to see more recreational spaces and walkable connections to basic services and natural features, such as the Santa Cruz River.

Victoria Robles Orosco, Barrio Blue Moon
Interview by Rachel Frank and Magda Mankel
Summary by Magda Mankel

We met Victoria Robles Orosco at the house of her granddaughter, Shay Jimenez, located in the Bravo Park neighborhood on the south side of Tucson. Treated to donuts from Le Cave and a warm cup of coffee, we sat around her kitchen table. Victoria, 86, came prepared with notes and a chronology of the events that shaped her life in Blue Moon. Between quiet sips of coffee, she moved us back through time and placed us on a dirt lot near the arroyo that would eventually become Mabel Street.

Victoria was a small child when her parents bought the lot where they would eventually construct a two room, adobe brick house. There, she grew up with her grandparents, parents, and siblings. Her father and uncles made the bricks and sourced the materials from the Santa Cruz River. With time the family added onto the property “piece by piece” until they had the essentials—a well, an outdoor stove, a food-rich garden, fruit trees, and an outhouse.

The house was small, Victoria said. “I didn’t know we were poor.”

In the early years, she spent a lot of time walking with her friends and siblings to places that would entertain and nurture them. They played baseball and other backyard sports, where they would flatten pennies, watch the circus roll into town, and spy on the occasional hobo. Other favorite hangouts included Holy Family Church, where Mrs. Leone gave Victoria treats, and the Chinese grocery store on Main and Mabel where she could buy saluditos con limon (salted plums on lemon). The family also traveled to Sonoyta to hunt deer and forage wild foods, such as bellotas (acorns) and mesquite pods for pinole.

Victoria remained in Blue Moon until 1963, when she married a Navy man and moved away. After living in Virginia, Illinois, California, and Japan, she eventually returned to Tucson and took care of her mother until her mother’s death in 1995. Although the original Blue Moon house was flooded and razed, the family rebuilt with the help of Chicanas por la Causa and the City of Tucson.
Timeline of Community Engagement & Action Activities
by Magda Mankel and Elizabeth Eklund

Shared below is a list of community engagement events (Action Activities) that SFA attended or hosted with the intention of engaging residents of the ‘05 and the general Tucson community in conversations about folklife and cultural resource mapping. Over the course of this program, over 200 individuals visited the SFA table at pop-up events. Together these activities demonstrate a variety of tools and strategies that others may use to inspire and engage the public.

April 22, Earth Day Celebration, Francisco Elías Esquer Park, North 14th Avenue

SFA’s engagement tools for this event included tote bags, notebooks, and a neighborhood mapping activities that encouraged people to identify folklife expressions in their communities, mark sites where folklife happens, and identify places of personal significance.

June 4, Fiesta in the ’05, Richey Resource Center

Old Pascua neighborhood

With the ’05 map in hand, the SFA team met with local residents and listened as they shared their connections to the area. As with other pop-up events, we used this as an opportunity to understand the place from the perspective of residents and to share information about the Community Folklorist Field School. Individuals who visited our table expressed gratitude and enthusiasm at the fact that the sporting areas at Richey were buzzing with energy. Event-goers enjoyed a free snack from the food trucks, connected with local organizations doing community work, took portraits at the butterfly mural, watched young folklorico dancers, and so much more.

July 15, Art and Talent Show, Tucson House

The Art and Talent Show featured a variety of booths from both the Thrive community partners as well as displays of artworks by residents of the building. Residents were also welcome to perform or simply wander between the booths. Those who visited the SFA table had stories to share about how the neighborhood had changed over the years. We heard accounts of what it was like to be an extra in movies and to work with famous actors during Tucson Studio’s heyday. Residents also shared their appreciation for Francisco Elias Esquer Park, easily accessible to dog walkers and those who rely on scooters for mobility. Others said they enjoyed the community garden, including one resident who said they loved taking their grandchild to the garden where they read to them and taught them where fruits and vegetables come from.

September 3, Barrio Blue Moon Work Day

The Barrio Blue Moon work day offered an intimate setting that introduced Field School participants to local business owners and organizers doing community-led work. Shay Jimenez demonstrated her work building compressed earth bricks and Arturo Ayón and Jeanette Dominguez shared a special BBQ birria.

Drone laptop map 2023.06.20.jpg

Drone laptop map 2023.06.20.jpg

Drone laptop map 2023.06.20.jpg

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Drone laptop map 2023.06.20.jpg

Drone laptop map 2023.06.20.jpg

Completed bricks laid out to dry

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Community folklorists met with Sharayah “Shay” Jimenez and her team at CUADRO to learn about the process of making compressed earth bricks with an Auram Press 3000. The intention of this work day was to learn about sustainable building materials and make bricks that could be used for Monuments to the Future, Shay’s public, interdisciplinary art project was funded by the Arizona Commission on the Arts and Ward 3. A collaboration with the residents of Barrio Blue Moon, the monument will feature a compressed earth block wall that will bear the blue moon logo and feature space for planters.

The project is still in the research and development phase, and the team is still learning how to efficiently produce bricks. In two hours time, the group only made about five bricks—a testament to the amount of labor, time, and careful calculations these bricks require. However, with time and experience, the team should be able to produce up to 1,000 bricks per day.

Shay’s interest in brick making was inspired by a desire to build sustainably, honor vernacular architectural styles in the barrio, and offer affordable building materials. These are timely interests as Tucson faces a housing crisis and a cultural landscape disrupted by gentrification. There is also a growing interest in building casitas or Accessory Dwelling Units, ADUs, usually no bigger than 1,000 square feet. For some low-income homeowners, building a casita is a sensible solution allowing for earned income as well as supporting needs for intergenerational living arrangements and housing. Shay’s dedication to this work is rooted in her professional background as an architect and her family’s intimate connections to Barrio Blue Moon. Her family is one of the founding families that transformed minimally developed (rural) land parcels here into family homes during the first half of the 20th century.

Within minutes, the lightly crisped tacos are ready to be topped with salsa, cilantro, cebolla morada curtida (pickled purple onion), and lima limon (lime). From there, folks have the option to dip their taco in the birria broth or sip it on the side.

For Arturo, the main ingredients are “the smoke and the fire” and “love,” a special touch coming from someone who knows how to fuse traditional and contemporary flavors. The result, an authentic crowd favorite, “dear to my heart,” says Arturo who learned to make the dish from his family in the United States and Mexico.
Arturo, she is organizing with Las Mujeres Verdes, a collective that regularly hosts a pop-up market at the Flowers & Bullets Midtown Farm. Together and in community, they are serving a contemporary take on a Sonoran classic.

October 28, Cyclovia and Paper Flowers

Produced twice a year by Living Streets Alliance (LSA), Cyclovia encourages Tucsonans to reclaim their streets and form connections to places through biking, walking, and movement through spaces temporarily closed off to vehicle traffic. Along the route, local organizations share resources and games with the public.

Paper Flowers with Josephina Lizarraga, SFA Master Artist

SFA invited Master Artist Josephina Lizarraga to demonstrate paper flower making. Given the Cyclovia’s proximity to Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), Josephina made about fifty dozen marigolds, which were then gifted to cyclists looking to adorn their bikes. General information about SFA at the booth also helped participants learn more about folklife.

Arturo Ayón, Phatbois BBQ Photo by Rachel Frank

Concluding Observations: Toward a Thriving ’05 Folklife

The stories, insights, and perspectives shared by the residents, organizers, and business owners we interviewed in the ’05 offer a multivocal patchwork of past and present-day life in this part of the city. This once rural area on Tucson’s northern “outskirts” was gradually urbanized by new residents, homes, a business district, and, to some extent, city infrastructure. This process of urbanization shaped and reshaped neighborhoods in the ’05, but also left gaps. Neighborhoods within the ’05 zip code developed unevenly, some drawing more investment, others left neglected. This is a familiar story in cities across the country, and the globe, but touches down uniquely based on the culture, and heritage present in any given place.

Our work aimed to highlight and celebrate the specificity of experiences in the ’05 by bringing attention to folklife—the things people make, say, and do in shared groups. Folklife also includes those aspects of life that offer space for self-actualization, celebration, safe hang-out time, and the communal sharing of food and traditions. What we saw and heard from residents is that the most important aspects of neighborhood and community life are easily overlooked. Residents expressed that greater attention should be placed on community-led, bridge-building efforts that connect barrio residents, visitors, businesses, and city planners. Such efforts could include folklife events (annual or ongoing), public meeting places, and recreational spaces. Opportunities for communities to connect in person and in healthy, safe spaces could lead to greater collaboration and a stronger sense of place for everyone.

We hope the perspectives shared by those we engaged in reflective, civic, and cultural discussions illustrate the importance of not only considering the region’s cultural heritage, but also working with communities to collaboratively uplift, preserve, and celebrate folklife in future city and regional plans. Further, we hope that future planning and ongoing efforts to revitalize the ’05 will draw upon these perspectives and prioritize the suggestions offered by those willing to share their stories.

Moving forward, it’s paramount for the City to continue listening to long-time residents, business owners, and newcomers in these neighborhoods—all of whom contribute to local culture and folklife. What we heard from these constituents also demonstrates that investment in walkable streets, traffic safety, street lighting, grocery stores, pharmacies, community-led events, public restrooms, inclusive public gathering spaces, and affordable intergenerational housing will go a long way in helping the ’05 to genuinely thrive.

We offer these insights with the understanding that the tools of folklife—listening, observing, documenting, reflecting, and relationship building—are key to creating meaningful relationships, a sense of belonging, and community well-being. Mobilized in specific places and by community members, such tools reveal the specifics that distinguish the cultural and geographical uniqueness of this area that is worthy of celebration, recognition, stewardship, and care.

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Folklife—the things people make, say, and do in shared groups.
This project was sponsored by the City of Tucson in partnership with Ward 3 and made possible with support from the following funders, organizations and community members:

Ward 3 Staff
Living Streets Alliance, Cyclovia
Phatboiis BBQ (@Phatboiis_bbq)
Sharayah “Shay” Jimenez, CUADRO

Thrive in the ’05 Community Folklorists:
- Julian Argote, Nicholas Bruno, Maria Cruz, Yasmine Cruz, Alexis Redondo, Julia Quiroga, Rebeka Quiroga, Aaliyah Urias, Alisha Vasquez, Victoria Vasquez

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- Graphic Design Team: Julie Ray Creative

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About the Southwest Folklife Alliance

The mission of Southwest Folklife Alliance (SFA) is to build more equitable and vibrant communities by celebrating the everyday expressions of culture, heritage, and diversity rooted in the Greater Southwest and U.S. Mexico Border Corridor. Nationally, we amplify models and methods of meaningful cultural work that center traditional knowledge, social equity, and collaboration.

SFA is an affiliate non-profit organization of the University of Arizona (UA), housed within the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. The Jim Griffith Chair in Public Folklore at the Southwest Center and UA School of Anthropology serves as lead curator for SFA programs and activities. We are the Arizona Commission for the Arts’ designated State Partner for Folk Arts for the National Endowment for the Arts. We also work in partnership with traditional and folklife communities throughout the state.

southwestfolklifealliance.org

On the cover: Armando Sotelo engages with volunteers during the Living Streets Alliance Block Painting Party in Barrio Blue Moon with kids, Mayari, Mardito and Tala Sotelo. October 1, 2022. Photo by Creatista.