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A LEAGUE FOR TODAY — AND TOMORROW

For 75 years, the League of Arizona Cities and Towns has been providing Arizona’s communities with high quality services and valuable advice. Think about what our state was like 75 years ago, when the League was formed. In 1937, the population of Phoenix was about 55,000 — the size of Lake Havasu City or Buckeye today! In fact, the entire state was home to just 480,000 people! Arizona in 1937 was just emerging from its Wild West days, and the Arizona Municipal League was born to promote and defend municipal home rule and self-determination. Sound familiar?

The staff in 1937 used mimeographs; “snail mail”; and, if the cost was justified, telephones. Today, the League is equipped with the latest electronic communications and digital media. We can get the word out to hundreds of municipal elected officials and staff members within minutes of a newsworthy event. But the core job of the League — protecting and promoting local control of local issues — has not changed one iota!

Today’s League is the professional, well-equipped organization that we need to take us all into the 21st century. Our staff is the most highly trained and experienced the League has ever had, and the results are clear. While the Arizona Municipal League and the League of Arizona Cities and Towns share DNA, and while they both have the same goals, today’s League is much more effective and efficient than it has ever been in the past. Of the more than 380 bills we tracked in the 2012 legislative session with direct impact to cities and towns, only a few got through and became law, and even those were influenced by the League along the way.

Today’s League and the League of 1937 both serve the same customers — Arizona’s cities and towns — but today’s challenges are much larger, they hit us faster, and their impact is greater than ever. Rest assured, though, that today’s League is ready to meet the challenge, helping you and your city move forward into the next 75 years!

Doug Von Gausig
League President
Mayor, Town of Clarkdale

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Seventy-five years is a significant milestone; it’s a long time for any organization to be in continuous operation. This anniversary gives us the opportunity to reflect on the qualities that have enabled the League to survive and thrive while so many other entities have come and gone in that time.

There are many characteristics that have had an impact on our longevity, but I would like to discuss three in particular: need, leadership and adaptability. Our original organization, the Arizona Municipal League, was created in 1937 out of a sense of needing to unite in order to speak with one voice. Mayors from cities and towns across the state were frustrated by the actions of the state Legislature in enacting a minimum-wage mandate that applied to municipal employees. Cities had had enough. An editorial in the very first League newsletter put it this way: “It is clear that the cities are the victims of deliberate persecution by the state authorities. It will be necessary either to dissolve the cities or to make the municipalities such a vital factor in state administration that such discrimination will cease.” Clearly there was a need to present a strong, unified position for cities and towns, and the League became the vehicle to fulfill it.

Arizona’s cities and towns are fortunate to have visionary leadership from their elected mayors and councilmembers, and many of them have lent their skills to the League as members of our leadership team. The Executive Committee is the governing body of the League and is made up of 22 members and three officers, all elected officials from our 91 municipalities. Over the years, the League has had 50 different individuals serve as president and hundreds of others as members of the Executive Committee. Their leadership has been crucial in developing wise policy choices, providing strategic direction and ensuring that the League is operating in the best interests of cities and towns of all sizes and in all parts of the state.

Adaptability has proven to be essential in fulfilling the League’s mission. When the Legislature was unable to pass a shared-revenue system, the League went directly to the ballot to ask the voters to create the shared-revenue system that has served the state well for decades. The League has developed a reputation for presenting excellent conferences and training events; for being innovative in its communications methods; and for taking action in court, if necessary, to preserve our rights.

But some of the tools that worked in the past are no longer effective in today’s world. To remain a leader with the media, the legislative process and our citizens, we have to constantly evaluate what we are doing and how we are doing it. The League leadership and our staff are committed to excellence and to developing innovative ways of doing our work.

It’s hard to imagine what the state will be like in another 75 years — in the year 2087 — but I have no doubt that, as long as there are cities and towns in Arizona, there will be the League of Arizona Cities and Towns, working effectively on their behalf to improve the lives of everyone who calls our communities home.

Ken Strobeck
Executive Director

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012 marks the 75th year of service for the League of Arizona Cities and Towns. In this edition of Arizona City & Town, we invite you to take a walk with us down memory lane to learn about how the League was formed, where it’s been and where it’s headed.

The League is a voluntary membership organization that exists to provide vital services and tools to its members, focusing principally on representing the interests of Arizona’s 91 cities and towns before the Legislature and secondarily on providing technical and legal assistance, coordinating shared services and producing high-quality conferences and trainings.

Editor’s Note: In this article, we’ll visit several landmarks and assuredly miss many more along the way. A complete history is available through the “History of the League: 1937-2007,” a publication authored by former longtime executive directors Jack DeBolske and Cathy Connolly. The publication offers the organization’s story through the voice of two individuals who not only lived through but were also at the helm of many important decisions and events contained within the book’s pages. Check out the “Publications” tab of the League website, www.azleague.org, for more information.

In Review: A Look Back at League Membership Through the Decades

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Interesting fact: In the 1990s, only one town incorporated: Sahuarita in 1994. Since statehood, it is the only decade to have just one community incorporate.

In the Beginning
The League was formed in 1937 by a group of mayors who hoped that, by joining together, they could preserve local decision-making over local matters.

Cities and towns throughout the United States came to similar conclusions — some before and some after Arizona. There are municipal leagues in 49 of the 50 states, with Hawaii being the only exception. The Iowa League is considered to be the first municipal league and was founded in 1898. By the turn of the 20th century, five state leagues were in existence: Iowa, California, Wisconsin, Indiana and Michigan. Sixteen predate World War I, and 37 were formed prior to 1940. Arizona falls approximately 36th on that list.

Arizona’s Growth
In the last 75 years, Arizona and its municipalities have experienced tremendous growth. Utilizing the 1940 and 2010 census data as benchmarks, Arizona’s population has grown nearly 13 times since the League’s founding. In 1940, the state’s population totaled 499,261. Approximately 39 percent — or 194,470 people — lived within an incorporated city or town. In 2010, the state’s population had grown to 6,392,017, with 78.6 percent of citizens living within the 91 incorporated cities and towns.

Interesting fact: In 1937, when the League formed, there were 30 incorporated cities and towns with a combined population of just slightly more than 190,000.

Dues and Early Legal Challenges
In the 1940s, the legal foundation of the League was questioned in two court cases: City of Phoenix v. Michael (1944) and City of Glendale v. White (1948). The League’s operations were first challenged in City of Phoenix v. Michael, when the Arizona State Supreme Court ruled municipal payment of dues to the League was unconstitutional, as it was not for a public purpose.


1959 — First amicus brief offered by League general counsel.

1950s — Several League affiliate groups form under newly expanded member services program, including: the Arizona City/County Management Association (ACMA), the Arizona City Attorneys Association (ACAA), the Arizona Municipal Clerks’ Association (AMCA) and the Arizona Chapter of the American Public Works Association, among others.
The ruling was a serious financial blow to the League. However, a number of Arizona mayors believed that the League was such an important part of local government that they funded the organization out of their own pockets until the Supreme Court reversed its decision in City of Glendale v. White (1948), citing a similar case in California as precedent. Today, dues from the 91 cities and towns in Arizona serve as the primary funding source for the League. Dues are determined by population, with a set base fee plus a per capita rate.

Interesting fact: In 1960, League dues brought in $28,589, with Phoenix contributing nearly $12,000 and Jerome contributing $23. The annual budget was just over $23,000.

Governing Structure
League activities are directed by a 25-member Executive Committee, consisting of mayors and councilmembers from across the state. Members are elected to two-year overlapping terms.

This governing structure remains intact from the very early years of the League, although the size of the committee has changed. In the 1940s, there were eight members and three officers. By 1979, this number increased to 22 members and three officers, which remains in place today.

Interesting fact: The League of Arizona Cities and Towns was originally called the Arizona Municipal League. In 1957, then-League President Don Hummel, mayor of Tucson, led a successful effort to change the organization’s name.

League Leadership
The first president of the League was William Sullivan, mayor of Globe, who assumed the role in 1937. A total of 50 presidents have led the organization. Nearly all presidents have been mayors or councilmembers, with only two serving in other roles: in 1947, Franklin Goodman was city engineer of Winslow; and, in 1949, Park Miller was city clerk of Prescott. Of the remaining 48, five were councilmembers, one was a vice mayor, and 42 were mayors. The League’s current president, Doug Von Gausig, serves as mayor of Clarkdale.

Interesting fact: When Jack DeBolske retired in 1997, his tenure as director spanned 40 years — the second longest tenure as a director in municipal league history. The only director to have served longer is Franklin G. Pierce of the Iowa league, who served as director from that league’s founding in 1898 until 1946.

In late 2005, the Executive Committee appointed Ken Strobeck as executive director. Strobeck, who was then serving as executive director of the Oregon League of Cities, also brought with him experience as a former state representative of the Oregon Legislature. He began his post as executive director of the Arizona League on January 2, 2006.

League Offices
The League established its first permanent office in 1948 at 15 South First Avenue in Phoenix, where it stayed until 1954, when offices were moved to the Security Building on Central Avenue in downtown Phoenix. A third office was located on Central and Clarendon avenues in Phoenix.
1970 — League plays pivotal role in the establishment and early development of the six councils of government (COGs), from helping draw the boundary lines under the auspices of Gov. Jack William’s office in 1970 to working with local elected and appointed officials to set up each of the COGs.

1970s — Many larger cities designate intergovernmental coordinators to represent them at the Legislature and in a variety of other venues.

1972 — Cities and towns granted authority to participate in the state procurement process, saving jurisdictions significant dollars in purchasing big- and small-ticket items.

1979 — League successful in negotiations over the newly proposed spending limits to include an alternative expenditure limitation provision, which quickly became known as the “home rule option.”

In 1969, the Executive Committee authorized the purchase of land for a new League building in the immediate vicinity of the state Capitol. The total construction cost for the League offices, which stand at 1820 West Washington, was $400,000. The building was completed in 1972, and the loan was paid off in 1987.

Interesting fact: Prior to the first permanent League office in 1948, Executive Committee meetings were held at various locations, including the Adams Hotel in downtown Phoenix and the offices of the current League president.

Involvement in the National League of Cities (NLC)
The Arizona League formally joined the National League of Cities (then called the American Municipal Association) in 1950. Two Arizona mayors have served as president of NLC: Tucson Mayor Don Hummel in the ’60s and Phoenix Mayor Terry Goddard in the ’80s. Current Avondale Mayor and NLC Second Vice President Marie Lopez Rogers will become the third Arizona mayor to serve in this capacity when she assumes the role of president at the 2012 NLC Congress of Cities and Exposition in Boston, Massachusetts.

Numerous Arizona local elected officials have served on the board of NLC and as chairs and vice chairs of NLC committees over the years. Directors Ken Strobeck, Cathy Connolly and Jack DeBolske have each served a term on the NLC board as well.

Interesting fact: In the 1930s, topics at state league conventions around the country were remarkably similar to topics that are still being discussed today. Examples included: providing recreation programs in hard times and municipal employee salaries.

Annual Conferences
The first known semiannual conference of the Arizona League was held in Prescott in the spring of 1937, and the second was held in Bisbee, November 19-20, 1937. The following year, members met in Nogales in April 1938.

There has been at least one annual meeting of the League members since the organization’s inception, save the World War II years of 1942-1946, during which time conventions were banned by the Federal Office of Defense Transportation. A tally of the League’s records indicates that 85 semiannual or annual conferences have been held.

Twenty cities and towns have played host to the League Annual Conference. Tucson and Yuma are tied for hosting the most annual conferences — each has hosted 10. From its humble beginnings, the League conference has grown to the largest municipal event of the year in Arizona — drawing nearly 1,000 local elected officials and guests each year.

One of the most popular activities at the conference is the Showcase of Cities and Towns (formerly the Festival of Cities and Towns), where communities spotlight their history, programs or activities for conference attendees. The original idea is credited to Harry Mitchell, who was then mayor of Tempe and president of the League. The first festival was held in 1989 in Tempe.

Another League conference tradition began in 2000 — the Parade of Flags. Mayor Elaine Scruggs of Glendale came up with the idea to honor member cities and towns and to learn more about each of them.

Interesting fact: In 1957, 255 delegates attended the conference with an entire expense, including meals, of $2,219.93. The League made $330 on the conference to cover staff expenses.

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Key Legislative Issues and Voter Initiatives

As with any organization that has endured for three-quarters of a century, the League’s story is one marked with both legislative victories and defeats and its fair share of compromises. At the center of it all reside two guiding principles: home rule and local determination.

Over the years, the League shepherded through the Legislature many important pieces of legislation, including the basis for current planning, zoning and subdivision authority; and it actively participated in the passage of landmark legislation, like the groundwater management act in 1980.

When the legislative process failed to bring positive results, the League went directly to the voters in a series of initiatives for state revenue sharing. These initiatives resulted in cities and towns receiving a share of the gas tax (now the Highway User Revenue Fund), the state sales tax and the state income tax.

**Interesting fact:** With the 1942 initiative, voters directed that 10 percent of the state’s 2 percent sales tax be shared with the cities and towns of Arizona. The margin of victory for the initiative was 55 percent, with the annual receipts from this early revenue sharing of $735,315 for FY44.

The first successful initiative was in 1942, when cities working through the League ran an initiative campaign for a share of the state sales tax. Four years later, in 1946, the League ran another successful initiative for a share of the state gas tax. In the 1960s, the League ran its third initiative for a larger share of the state sales tax. And, in 1972, voters approved the fourth League initiative, Urban Revenue Sharing, which resulted in 15 percent of the state income-tax proceeds being distributed to cities and towns.

These initiative drives, backed by the type of determination demonstrated by mayors and councilmembers who themselves funded the League, have made the League a political force representing viable local government.

**League Today**

In 75 years, many things have certainly changed; mimeographs have been replaced with tweets, and gentlemen’s agreements have been replaced with collaborative task forces. Yet, despite all the changes time has wrought, the organization’s guiding principle remains the same: Local decisions are best made at the local level. Arizona continues to be blessed with countless local elected officials and staff members who are dedicated to bettering their communities and the state through their work with the League. We look forward to the next 75 years.


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