

AZ Insider: A Wrigley Field of Dreams for Arizona

Written by Written by Kathy Shayna Shocket

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Kathy Shayna Shocket has the stories on people who make a difference.



Kathy's chatting with Thomas Ricketts of the Chicago Cubs.

When the Cubs leave their Chicago den and head to Arizona for spring training- they add about \$140 million annually into Mesa's economy. But the outcome of Proposition 420 to build a new spring training stadium could change that – with the Cubs possibly heading to Florida for spring training.

The **Ricketts** family (the team's owners) and those who endorse the "Keep the Cubs" campaign are asking voters to recognize that the financing for a new stadium won't be paid for by raising sales or property taxes. "The city of Mesa will sell land it owns in Pinal County," explained **Thomas Ricketts**, as we chatted over ice tea about his dreams to build a Wrigley Field type atmosphere in Mesa.

The soft spoken Cubs' chairman hopes Mesa voters understand that the only tax in the funding plan would be the two percent hotel bed tax. (By the way, the land Mesa would sell for the funding is land it bought in the 1980s for water rights. However, Mesa has developed other water resources, and the land is no longer needed.)

Although tall, **Thomas Ricketts**, a father of five who met his wife in the bleachers at Wrigley Field has an unimposing demeanor. And beneath his understated manner, the successful investment banker and University of Chicago graduate is a visionary. He inspired his family's \$845 million purchase of the Cubs (finally convincing his father and Ameritrade founder **Joe Ricketts**, during a family birthday bash on the rooftops of the high rises above Wrigley Field) and Chicagoans have embraced the new owners of the team and vice versa. **Tom** is typically seen mingling among the fans.



(Pictured above is Thomas Ricketts with fans)

"Wrigley Field is such a magical and special place," stressed **Tom** who once lived in an apartment across the street from the legendary Chicago ball park. It's his dream to transplant that electricity of Wrigley Field and its surrounding ambiance to Arizona.

He and his family envision their privately funded "Wrigleyville West" to recreate that Chicago experience with an entertainment and retail complex boasting shops, Chicago- themed restaurants and sports bars. "It will generate more jobs and business revenue all year round," he added.



Ernie Banks and Joshua

And look who's banking on it. Former Cubs player and Hall of Famer **Ernie Banks** was in Mesa stumping for a yes vote on Proposition 420. In fact Ernie and Tom met with many Mesa residents and civic groups prior to the election, answering concerns about the stadium proposal. During one of those meetings with a group of Mesa's clergy, Tom was approached by a young boy named Joshua. "He was disappointed that he had been unable to get player autographs after a game," noted Tom who then offered Joshua the chance to spend a day as a ball boy.

Besides **Ernie Banks**, the Ricketts have also engaged other heavy hitters such as baseball greats **Ron Santo**, **Billy Williams** and **Fergie Jenkins** to help endorse the "Keep the Cubs" campaign. (Not to mention the Mesa mayor, Chamber of Commerce, Mesa Convention and

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Visitors Bureau, the United Mesa Firefighters Association and other civic groups.)

If the proposition passes it will allow Mesa to spend up to \$99 million on facility and construction could begin next year with a completion date of 2013. Stay tuned.



Kathy Shayna Shocket is a freelance Writer, and TV- Field Producer based in Phoenix, AZ. The former **TV-Reporter** has written for publications such as **TIME Magazine**, **Money Magazine**, **PEOPLE Magazine**, **The Hollywood Reporter** and **The NEW YORK TIMES**. You can reach her at redkarpetgirl@aol.com