



Photos courtesy Joan Fudala

JOAN FUDALA

SCOTTSDALE'S HISTORIAN ON HISTORY, FAVORITE SCOTTSDALE SPOTS, AND MORE

BY DAVID M. BROWN

As schools start up again—some online, some in-person—one lesson to remember is that not all educators teach in schools. For some, the community is their classroom.

One such educator is Scottsdale's Joan Fudala, who for three-plus decades has robustly served her city and the Valley as an author, communications executive, lecturer, preservation advocate, historical consultant, and member of numerous commissions, committees and nonprofits.

"Joan Fudala has effectively promoted and created a public awareness of our history in the greater Scottsdale area; contributed to our understanding of Scottsdale's historic people, places and events; and executed research and publishing projects that celebrate our vast historical resources," wrote Douglas B. Sydnor, FAIA, nominating her in a March 2 letter for a 2020 Governor's Heritage Preservation Honor Award.

President of the distinguished Scottsdale-based Douglas Sydnor Architect + Associates, Sydnor is a 2018 Honor Award

recipient and a founding chairman of the Scottsdale Historic Preservation Commission.

Fudala was honored on June 18 as one of 10 awardees in a virtual ceremony hosted by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Arizona Preservation Foundation—both based in Phoenix.

At the same time, eight honorees were awarded the 2020 Governor's Archaeology Advisory Commission Awards in Public Archaeology. The 18 men and women were selected by professionals in archaeology, cultural resource management, historic preservation and museum operations.

"Her many, many achievements are the product of decades of work helping Scottsdale understand, appreciate, and protect its history," says Christopher Cody, Esq., deputy state historic preservation officer for the SHPO at Arizona State Parks & Trails, of Fudala.

"Our mission to educate the public about the value of historic preservation and to promote it would be impossible without heroes like Joan taking the initiative in their own

communities,” he adds. “Joan has created opportunities for the public to be educated about local history, and, by facilitating that engagement, she has helped make history more tangible for people to be connected to the place where they live and to each other.”

Fudala has been totally engaged in the community, says her friend and former work associate, Sam Campana, a Scottsdale city council member from 1986 to 1994 and mayor from 1996 to 2000. “She knows all the camps, all the tribes, has friends and colleagues in the business/tourism sector from whence she came, hundreds in the nonprofit organizations where she has served diligently, and with everyone who has been a ‘player’ at city hall for those three decades. That’s quite an accomplishment.”

THE AIR FORCE, THEN FLYING HIGH IN ARIZONA

A baby boomer, Fudala was born and raised in a Cincinnati suburb “full of returning WWII veterans. My parents were very active in the community, both providing wonderful role models for me,” she recalls.

She majored in journalism with a minor in history at The Ohio State University. Among her electives was Air Force ROTC; the program was just opening for women so they could gain an officer’s commission.

“During this volatile period of the Vietnam War and anti-war campus protests, this was not a popular decision, but it did provide me with an instant career in journalism,” she recalls, noting that she later added a master’s in communications from the University of Northern Colorado.

One week after graduation from Ohio State, she became an Air Force public affairs officer (PAO), serving nine years at bases in San Antonio, Texas; Luke Air Force Base in Arizona; at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C; in South Korea; and in Hampton, Virginia. She followed this with 12 years as an Air Force Reserve PAO at the Pentagon. During this time, she also had civilian executive public relations/communications positions with a chain of department stores, two



regional airlines, and the Scottsdale Chamber of Commerce/CVB (1991–1998).

In 1976, while stationed at Luke, she met her late husband, Gene, a Luke fighter pilot. They loved the desert, attending activities, and patronizing vintage restaurants such as Reata Pass and Trader Vic’s.

“We vowed to eventually move back to the Valley when our careers would permit,” she shares, adding that they returned for vacations and then returned to stay in 1991. “Throughout my childhood in Ohio, I dreamed of living the Arizona lifestyle, watched Westerns on TV, read novels set in the Southwest, and camped at the Grand Canyon with my family in 1961,” she says.

Soon after moving to Scottsdale, she planned events to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 1997. She became a full-time Scottsdale community historian two years later under Joan Fudala Historic Consulting, focusing on researching and communicating Scottsdale area history, tracing to its founding in 1888.

“From family car trips to historic sites and museums, to reading historical novels and biographies, to watching history unfold throughout my life, I’ve always loved 19th- to 20th-century U.S. and European history,” she recalls. “I’m inspired by the actions and decisions of historic figures and fascinated by the cycles/repetitions of history.”

She also devotedly read Nancy Drew books as a child.

“Researching history fulfills that inner detective in me,” she says. “I love the thrill of discovery and connecting the dots!”

A YOUNG VALLEY NEEDS ITS HISTORY

Sydnor met Fudala when she became the Scottsdale Area Chamber of Commerce communications director in the early 1990s. Their community service together started with the founding of the Scottsdale Historic Preservation Program in 1997, and has continued for many years.

She has also served on many Scottsdale nonprofit boards and city commissions, championing preservation, human services and history, including Western Spirit:



Scottsdale’s Museum of the West, Scottsdale Historical Society and Friends of Scottsdale Public Library board of directors. As part of her long-term work with the Scottsdale libraries, she helped establish its digital archive of historic photographs in 2006, giving residents, students, and a global audience access to Scottsdale online historical material.

“She has contributed to our understanding of Scottsdale’s historic people, places and events; has brought to light many forgotten but fascinating areas of Scottsdale’s past; and helped the city, its businesses and organizations preserve and celebrate their legacies,” Sydnor wrote in his nominating letter. He calls her Scottsdale’s “relentless retro-preneur.”

Fudala has published seven books, beginning with one that benefited the McDowell Sonoran Land Trust titled *Historic Scottsdale: A Life from the Land*. This comprehensive Scottsdale history was the first to include Scottsdale’s grassroots effort to create the McDowell Sonoran Preserve, the largest municipal preserve in the country and a Scottsdale landmark.



Fudala visits the LOVE sculpture in Scottsdale.

In addition, she has written a monthly column about Scottsdale history in the Scottsdale Airpark News for 20 years, and articles for The Arizona Republic, Scottsdale Progress, Scottsdale Life and other periodicals. She also edited Sydnor’s three Arizona architectural history books in 2010, 2011 and 2013.

As mayor, Campana appointed Fudala to the Scottsdale Human Services Commission, noting, “Her great sympathy and passion for people served the city well over those years.

She found ways to increase the funds for our human services needs in our community, highlight gently the poverties and hardships almost invisible in our affluent city, and to befriend the Hispanic community around Vista Del Camino and help in efforts to sensitize our relationships with the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community.”

Awards and honors have followed: among these, Scottsdale History Hall of Fame (2016); Scottsdale Public Library’s Spirit of Literacy Award (2014); Scottsdale Leadership Frank Hodges Alumni Achievement Award (2002); and Scottsdale Woman of the Year (2002).

“To Joan, research and writing is the first step in telling the backstory of how people, places and events in Scottsdale have changed over the decades,” Sydnor continued in his nomination letter. “In all of her client and pro bono projects, her goal is to encourage pride and involvement among Scottsdale residents and businesses so that Scottsdale remains a special place.”

She views her role as particularly important in the comparatively young Valley, where many come from so many places.

“As a rapidly evolving area, it’s easy to forget the past as we rush to move forward,” she says. “By preserving stories, photos and significant sites of the past, we can share pride in the area’s historic record of innovation, civic involvement and cultural diversity, while learning lessons from those less-than-inclusive behaviors or missteps of past generations that we have the opportunity to correct and change.”

Her favorite Scottsdale places? Scottsdale’s McDowell Sonoran Preserve, Western Spirit: Scottsdale’s Museum of the West, Scottsdale Heritage Connection at Civic Center Library, Scottsdale Historical Museum, McCormick-Stillman Railroad Park, Cattletrack arts enclave, Scottsdale Civic Center Mall, Scottsdale Stadium, and Taliesin West, the National Historic Landmark winter home of Frank Lloyd Wright.

A SCOTTSDALE TREASURE

Every summer Fudala spends cool coastal time in San Diego, where she attends classes at UC San Diego.

She invited her friend Sam Campana to join her recently.

They found an outlier cinema specializing in, what else, yesterday’s hit movies. They watched *Jersey Boys* about the ‘60s pop group The Four Seasons. Perhaps the only other attendees were a couple, she remembers.

“We might have bothered them away by talking aloud through the entire thing and singing along, ‘I love you baby, and if it’s quite alright...’; ‘You’re just too good to be true,’ ‘My eyes adored you,’ and another ‘60s favorite, ‘Let’s Hang On,’” Campana recalls with a laugh.

“Well, Joan does that for me, she does that for her friends and colleagues, and she does that for Scottsdale: ‘Let’s hang on.’ Let’s hang on to our history, our collective memories, our misfires, and our real fires. Let’s hang on. That’s Joan Fudala’s message. She’s a true Scottsdale Treasure.”

.....
David M. Brown is a Valley writer (www.azwriter.com).