

**Freedom Watch**  
**September 2003**  
**Volume 12, Number 5**

**Vision, mission set tone for our second decade**

By Greg Borom, executive director

Thank you, Colorado Springs! Citizens Project celebrates a decade of education, advocacy, and activism in this community. The organization has benefited from the support of our donors, board members, volunteers, and staff for ten years. As the organization embarks on a second decade of service to the community, staff and the board of directors have taken some time to reflect on the past and envision the future of our community.

At the end of this reflection, Citizens Project's board approved revised vision and mission statements that better articulate Citizens Project's role in continuing to transform the Pikes Peak region. I'd like to share these new statements with you.

**Vision**

We envision a Pikes Peak community that is a vibrant democracy in which equal rights are protected, individual freedoms are secure, differences are respected, and people fully participate in civic and community life.

The phrase I'd like to highlight in this powerful vision statement is "vibrant democracy". Our nation claims to be the model of democracy for the world. We have a legacy of amazing men and women who have helped strengthen the foundation of ideals and the walls of tradition and reform. However, the house they've built needs some cleaning and repair. Yes, we have a democracy, but it's not vibrant. Too few people vote in elections, big-money special interests disproportionately influence policy to the detriment of ordinary people, prejudice and discrimination still undermine opportunities for all, and civil liberties are sacrificed for security in our never-ending "war on terrorism". It is time to reclaim our democracy. A vibrant democracy means viewing democracy as a dynamic verb rather than a static noun.

**Mission**

Citizens Project spotlights issues in the Pikes Peak region and mobilizes people to strengthen the traditional values of our nation: equal rights, individual freedoms, separation of church and state, respect for diversity, and civic engagement.

Citizens Project is a traditional-values organization. Our lineage lies in the traditions that have promoted and expanded the values enshrined in this country's founding documents. Even though those documents partially tried to institutionalize exclusion and discrimination (for example, the Constitution's original prohibition on anyone voting who wasn't a white, land-owning, male, and its legalizing slavery) our nation has seen countless movements and leaders that have worked (and died) to realize the expansion of equal rights, individual freedoms, and government separation from religion. The result has been a nation truthfully boasting an astounding diversity of ideas, religion, traditions, culture, and race. Citizens Project wants to build on these traditions in the Pikes Peak region. We want to continue to identify those issues that hinder the progress of our traditional values, and to heal the prejudice and discrimination which continue to haunt our community.

When I read these statements from our board, I get excited about the next decade. The diverse voices featured in this issue underscore both the progress made in our community and the

mountains yet to climb. The values of Citizens Project resonate both with those interviewed in these pages and with those of you reading this issue. Indeed, our democracy requires the vigilance of organizations and individuals to ensure its relevance and vibrancy. As we journey into Citizens Project's second decade, we invite you to find your niche in our work. It will take all of us to make our ambitious vision a reality. I'll leave you with Margaret Meade's famous quote: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

## **Who are the people in your neighborhood?**

by LeAnn Baca Bartlett

This month, Freedom Watch turns to you, the community, to tell us what's on your mind as we unveil our new mission and vision. Citizens Project interviewed a cross-section of people in the Pikes Peak Region - about their neighborhoods, what they do for a living, where they're from, and the diversity they bring to the region. We asked them about their activities, sense of community, and what they see in the mission of Citizens Project. Some were more familiar than others about the work of CP, and that is a reflection of our community's diversity as well.

Talking to people about their concerns and their visions was exciting as well as daunting. You will see that some believe that improving the taxes, keeping the city income strong, and re-examining TABOR are the best ways to improve the community. Some people would like to see a strengthening of community events in which people from all parts of the community can celebrate and participate. Others see education - in schools and through community discussion - as a starting point to those areas. Still others believe we create a vibrant democracy through voter turnout.

What do you think of the new mission? We'd like to hear from you. It's a tall order to complete this mission, but with your help we can all be a part of making Colorado Springs a great place to live.

We invite you to get involved. Citizens Project will celebrate its 10th anniversary on October 9th. Join us as we continue to spotlight the issues and act as a community. (profiles continued below)

## **Stan and Arwilla Cook**

Stan and Arwilla Cook are eager to share how they've seen the Springs grow since they arrived in the 1940s. They are modest about their views, saying that they don't run the city ... they just read the paper and discuss among themselves.

Mr. Cook is a third-generation (at least) carpenter of German ancestry. He earned his living as a carpenter after he was wounded and honorably discharged from the Army. Mrs. Cook is from North Carolina; she met her husband while vacationing in Washington D.C. Not having firm community roots, she agreed to move to Colorado Springs. She volunteers her time assembling Braille books.

They enjoy the Springs for the climate and schools, and it's just been where they've grown roots. Mr. Cook built their home on what was farmland then - just blocks from the Uintah Gardens King Soopers. While they've seen a great deal of growth, they sense that the rate is much greater than at any other time. There is certainly a need for more affordable housing, but neither is sure about the subject.

Doug Bruce is not a well-received name in their house. They believe in the principle behind taxation and support the benefits that tax revenue brings, even when it does not directly benefit them.

Mr. Cook thinks that improving public transportation would benefit the community and ease the challenges of the rapid growth rate. Another area of concern is water supply. The rapid growth creates higher demand for water. There were restrictions in place when they first settled in the Springs. The Cooks hate to see water restrictions - the recent restrictions have been the only they can remember since their arrival.

Colorado Springs has been good to them and they still believe the city holds much opportunity.

## **Sherri Ladzinski**

Sherri reacts most to the phrase "civic engagement" in the new mission statement. There is a lack of it. She has often wondered if this is because of the transient nature of the military community, but among more-permanent residents, she still feels that people are resistant to invest their time or money in the community. People need to realize how low the mill levy is in El Paso County and understand that we sacrifice programs and services for this reason. She sees this through her experiences working at the District Attorney's office, as a homemaker, and as someone active in her church ministry.

She hopes that the phrase "mobilize people" addresses citizens involved in the community on all levels, from raising awareness of issues to volunteer service to voting and/or running in elections. With a focus on civic engagement, she thinks the rest of the mission's issues will fall in line, especially equal rights, individual freedoms, and respect for diversity. When people are involved in their community and with other citizens, there is less of a chance for them to become isolated and lose touch with issues that affect other people.

She holds a degree in art history from Colorado State University, and has felt less support for the arts. She is disappointed that the Springs has a less vital arts community than other cities of this size and even smaller communities. She had one experience in the arts volunteering, but was disappointed when there wasn't enough work for her.

She was born in Colorado Springs, and after college stayed because of her family. In recent years, she and her husband have decided to stay because they love the area, the community, and would like to raise their children here and show them all the reasons they love Colorado. Locally, the areas they use most are the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo and the Parks and Recreation programs.

## **Sonya Love**

Equal rights and respect for diversity are the parts of the new mission statement that interest Sonya most. Sonya says with sincerity that Citizens Project has a huge responsibility ahead. Those taking on these issues should keep in mind the power of education and the impact of placing one individual or group above another. Everyone has something to contribute, regardless of their present position.

How can people respect one another's religions if we cross the line of separation of church and state and consider one person's religion superior to another's? When people do not suspend their opinion of one group's superiority over another, there are conflicts between religions (as well as for those without religion), racial profiling continues, and individual freedoms are not upheld. The resultant lack of understanding promotes disrespect.

Sonya believes that a greater diversity of life experiences in local leaders would help. The greater the diversity in politicians, the broader the discussion and ability to impact people. People should see themselves reflected in their leaders. Leaders need to understand the hearts of people; this can help give them the courage to make severe changes to the law, when those are called for.

One of the most important tools is education-especially teaching people their roots and history. This kind of education empowers kids. Among the more important community programs, Head Start gives kids of all colors and creeds a good start. Those with fewer resources still need that access to education. She comments that government is starting to cut back on these programs and says, "how sad."

Sonya came to Colorado Springs by way of the military. It has been convenient for her to stay in Colorado Springs, especially since she has been able to continue her education. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a minor in social services from the University of Southern Colorado. She will complete her master's degree next summer.

Her educational background and work experience related to that education have left her with strong views on families and children. The subject of her work is family reunification; she works for the El Paso County Department of Human Services.

[back to top](#)

## **Andrea Lucero**

Andrea says with a smile that she was born 25 years ago at Penrose Hospital, in Colorado Springs. She started school at Penrose Elementary and she's stayed in the Springs because it's both a small town and a big city. She knows many people in our town, but at the same time, she can meet new people and keep a sense of anonymity because of the city's size.

Community is important to her. The size of the Springs offers many different types of neighborhoods. The neighborhoods she's lived in range from closed to very supportive. She was surprised to learn from other parents at her daughter's preschool that even kids can show excluding behavior. Parents told her that in their neighborhoods kids were reluctant to welcome newcomers and at a young age formed cliques. In Andrea's neighborhood, which is not affluent, she's proud to say that neighbors know one another and look out for one another's kids. Recently, she's seen people offer shelter and support to a quarreling couple as well as help to a man with a flat tire.

Her neighborhood is mostly Mexican American, but she's lived in African American and Mexican National neighborhoods as well. Overall, she thinks Colorado Springs is a good town with ghettos, but not as extreme or dangerous as other large cities such as Harlem or L.A. She warns that if the neighborhood segregation continues, areas might arise which could become places of high crime that trap people and close options to them.

Diversity, not only in the workplace, but also in the places people live, provides people with the chance to learn more about others and cuts down on the fear people have towards one another. We need community because it's healthier. It's unfortunate that during a time of national crisis, the President focused on commerce, encouraging people to shop. Instead, after September 11,

he could have promoted unity. He also could have challenged people to decrease their dependency on oil, through buying hybrid cars (getting some tax relief in the bargain!).

On the day of our interview, she had just applied for a position at a department store. She was one of the persons that waited the least amount of time, but she went through a series of three interviews. There were a significant number of black women also applying, but none were interviewed that day  $\frac{3}{4}$  although they all had been waiting longer than Andrea  $\frac{3}{4}$  and they were given other dates to come back.

Looking at the new mission statement, she reflects on individual freedoms. She hopes in the near future that same-sex couples are allowed health benefits not only on the city payroll, but everywhere in the city. She is not married to her partner, but still receives health benefits through his employer. She says this is not fair. Because we have a kid together-does that mean that we love each other more than a same-sex couple? Who is the insurance company to decide the depth of their commitment?

Equal rights are also a concern in her area. She can't help but look at police with suspicion because of the different treatment her significant other receives from law enforcement. He's been pulled over a number of times. After his visiting a bar - that was closed - police followed him. His offence was swerving. There were no lines on the road, and numerous potholes. The bar was closed; he didn't go in and hadn't been drinking, but police searched him. Another time he was stopped for failing to come to a complete stop. His car was searched, all items were thrown out of the car, and it was torn apart. He is a cooperative person and even-tempered. Because her partner looks Mexican, Andrea finds it hard to believe that his appearance isn't at least a small factor in this treatment.

## **Dr. James Sauls**

Because of his experience as an educator - in both the military and the public school system - Dr. James Sauls emphasizes individual responsibility and open participation in community building. He has enjoyed helping students define their goals and interests. He came to Colorado Springs through the army in 1976. The weather, scenery, and people kept him in the Springs.

Through his years of service, he's learned that to grow a strong democracy, the city needs an educated public and the participation of its people. Sauls has devoted a great deal of his time to creating change in the community. He started with a program which he praises highly, Leadership Pikes Peak. The year-long program builds awareness of the civic agencies that shape the city and helps those agencies define and understand where they can make a contribution.

A strong belief of his is that every person should do what they can for their community. There are a number of ways that one can participate: the city, county, and school boards use community volunteers to review their work and provide input through committees. He's served in this way and has been proud of the positive ways he's been able to effect change.

A basic aspect of the community is voter turnout. It is terrible that under half of the citizens consistently choose the leadership for all of us. He just doesn't understand how that can be democracy.

Besides voting, Dr. Sauls is personally concerned about increases in housing costs. A person's putting more than half of their salary into a home payment doesn't make sense to him - it's especially troubling that home prices have increased at a rate much faster than the average income level. He noticed that at the Parade of Homes there were no houses under \$140,000. You have to ask, who is the Parade of Homes for? One solution he sees is for the local government to set priorities on creating low-income housing, and to help guide developers.

Dr. Sauls thinks CP's new mission statement is a good one. The change in wording doesn't really change the focus of the organization. The separation of church and state continues to be a significant issue in the community. The church and the state operate in different areas; they operate with different currencies. What one has to do to clear the soul is different from what one does to make a living for the family. Both entities have an interest in education and he predicts that the issue of school vouchers and the role of the churches in education will continue to be under scrutiny.

He'd like to see Citizens Project function as an ombudsman, providing a balanced view of community issues. It could serve as a critical entity evaluating adherence to the constitution, city charter, and other tenets of civic life.

His emphasis remains on education - first as an individual process, and second as a necessity of democracy. Education takes place anywhere. While it is a personal responsibility, you never know when you are going to make an impression on someone. You can be a catalyst in your community. Read the paper, know what your elected officials are doing, vote, and add your opinion. Get involved and do not let your voice go unheard.

## **Amber Vigil**

Amber's experience of the Springs started at Colorado College. As a member of the Junior Olympic Shooting Team in high school, she wanted both to keep up her practice and to attend college. Colorado Springs provided those opportunities.

After graduation in 2000, she was accepted to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. She had learned that there was much about the Colorado Springs community that interested her and couldn't see herself enjoying Washington, D.C. as much. She took a job in the Springs and decided to make this city her home. However, in 2001, she was laid off twice because of downsizing.

After picking up odd jobs and bartending, she's now a Certified Nurses Assistant and works at a nursing facility. The nursing and health care fields have not been exempt from the effects of the economy, and while a career in nursing is "reliable" in that there is always a demand for healthcare workers, there is no employment area that remains completely untouched.

She's curious about the role of government in economics, since she's felt the impact of a weakening economy. There may be links between her personal situation and politics that would lead to a legislative solution, but her highest concerns have been covering expenses and taking care of herself.

Public safety and water resources are areas she's considered. She's kept up on the issues of her Westside neighborhood, signing petitions against the speed of city buses out of concern for the children and dogs. The neighborhood has tried to get signs and speed bumps, but other neighborhoods take priority. She has thoughts of fairness when it comes to neighborhood actions and the affluence of certain groups.

Direct-service programs such as the Partnership for Child Development have impressed her. People are providing opportunities like wilderness excursions, visits to colleges, scholarship funds, after-school activities, and equipping kids with computers that empower poor and disabled kids. She admires the range of programs that help ¾ families, single parents, and kids ¾ with daycare, art, and social skills.

## **Laurie**

Laurie contacted Citizens Project after finding us on an Internet search. She and her husband had a few relocation possibilities and they were considering a move to Colorado Springs. She'd heard about intolerance in our city and wondered about her family's safety. Part of her concern was the fact that she is Asian and her husband is Latino. As an interracial couple, she wondered if they would face physical danger. She had heard about the extremely conservative political nature of the city and was familiar with Amendment 2. She wanted to know how the community had changed since then.

I told her that we continue to document acts of hate, such as the distribution of hate-filled flyers by neo-nazi groups. There are also unanswered questions surrounding the burning of the Gay and Lesbian Pride Center last summer. I also know people of color who are uneasy in certain areas of the city.

(At the time, I was able to boast to her the approval of domestic-partner benefits to city employees. Since then, there's been a reversal of the city's stance, but individuals and organizations continue to keep the issue alive.)

I stressed to her, however, that there are a number of people striving to understand one another, that Citizens Project continues to receive the majority of its funding from individuals throughout the Springs, and that the number of people interested in discussing and improving controversial areas continues to increase. I encouraged her to be a part of that group and consider the strengths she could bring as an active community member.