

Surprising fun flourishes all around us

I take back everything I said about the “Scottsdale ladies” who seem to be unable to nudge their cars across the city borders.

What happened is that I just received an e-mail from a gentleman in Scottsdale inviting me to hook up with the “north side happy hour” group on Shea Boulevard tonight. See, the club picks a different establishment every week for libations. The idea is to mix things up, give members a chance to try out new venues. However, this guy is unwilling to make the arduous 20-minute journey all the way down the 101 to the club’s scheduled happy hour in Chandler.

So, apparently, it’s not only women who are loathe to leave Scottsdale.

I was tempted to concede the pointlessness of going into Mesa or Chandler when I had an epiphany. (I couldn’t wait till Jan. 6.) I had been talking to a 10-



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year-old boy who is absolutely nuts about military airplanes but, amazingly, his folks had never taken him to the

Champlin Fighter Museum in Mesa.

What I suddenly realized is that sometimes we forget about the hidden treasures — unique, locally owned and operated establishments, magical hideaways, sometimes in funky interesting buildings, run by funky interesting people — in each of the Valley cities.

Now, I should say up front that I’m all in favor of grabbing a beer and chicken fingers after volleyball at one of the convenient franchise restaurants that populate every strip shopping center.

But now and then it’s nice to cross a city line and see what kinds of treasures are lurking in seemingly unlikely places.

Here are a few of my favorites:

■ **Champlin Fighter Aircraft Museum** – Mesa’s Falcon Field: Get there before it (the museum, not the city) moves to Seattle.

■ **Quintessence Art Gallery** – Chandler: Fine art without so much fine attitude.

■ **Kokopelli Winery & Bistro** – Chandler: The only winery in the metro area. Nosh on!

■ **Guadalupe cemetery** – A charming sacred place hidden just outside the current Guadalupe border. I don’t know if it’s appropriate to direct anyone to go there so I’m not giving its location. But it’s a great place to “happen upon.”

■ **A small green park in south Tempe** – As with the cemetery, I’m not going to tell you where it is because I don’t want you overrunning it. But I will say that it is encircled by trees, has a lovely pond with ducks and koi fish, quiet pine-tree lined walkways and is completely hidden from the rude glares of the roadside. I bet you can find your own hidden park if you try.

■ **The river walk in Tempe** – Its Zen-like koans are embedded in the wall. Take some time to read them.

■ **Changing Hands Bookstore** – Tempe: Urban ritzifying chased it out of downtown, but they’re still kicking in south Tempe.

■ **Star of India restaurant** – Ahwatukee Foothills: Alas, no chicken fingers or grilled cheese sandwiches, but otherwise highly recommended by genuine natives of the subcontinent.

■ **The Monastery** – Central Phoenix: Volleyball, pingpong, horseshoes, pool, fire pits and guys in brown robes who serve you beers: Nuff said. Catholic school never prepared me for this.

■ **On the Spot Theatre** – Central Phoenix: You probably won’t find them staging a production of *Miss Saigon*, but you will find original, thought provoking plays performed by accomplished professionals. Sometimes you get free snacks. Get there before they close up shop in December.

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