

Santan residents form advocacy group

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Residents in the Santan area are taking another stab at gaining control over their destiny.

Local business members, developers and residents have recently launched the Greater San Tan Area Coalition, an organization designed to advocate and develop a vision for the area.

The coalition is not a governing body, but a group that seeks to represent residents in the Santan area, said co-founder and former San Tan Area Chamber of Commerce president Jack Malpass.

"There are 46,000 people in Pinal County here (the Santan area) and they don't have a voice," Malpass said. "They don't have a voice in Pinal County government, and they don't have a voice when it comes to the surrounding municipalities deciding what they would like to do in this area."

For years, residents in the unincorporated chunk of Pinal County, that includes developments like Johnson Ranch, Copper Basin and San Tan Heights, have struggled because Santan is the size and has a population of a city but not the local control and amenities cities typically enjoy.

Malpass and others in the group have stressed that this is not an incorporation effort, but an organized effort to understand and communicate the wants and needs of Santan residents who don't have much representation beyond a single member of the county Board of Supervisors.

Political back fighting and tense opposition dogged the last two incorporation attempts and have some worried that this new coalition will drudge up more of the same hard feelings. But Malpass said people stuck in the past won't do anything to move the Santan community forward.

The coalition divides the Santan area into nine districts, with two representatives from each district. Those district representatives, or members of the "extended visioning team" will relay the opinions of residents in their district to a "core visioning committee." The core consists of five members from the development community, four members from the San Tan Area Chamber of Commerce and two co-chairs (Malpass and area resident Gordon Brown).

Once the coalition gets off the ground, members of the "core" will be replaced through elections, Malpass said.

The coalition will be in charge of collecting resident input on issues and forwarding recommendations to neighboring cities and towns or Pinal County officials on aspects such as education, economic development, transportation and quality of life.

"We want to avoid becoming a colony to where the decisions are made by other municipalities for us," Brown said. "We wanted to give the people that actually live here a voice in what their future is."

Pinal County Supervisor Sandie Smith represents the Santan area. As an elected official, she said getting opinions and a better feel of what residents want is always helpful.

"It's one more forum for the citizens to voice their opinions," Smith said.