

## Facing the Phoenix we don't know: Valley's toughest economic job

**The New Economy**

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Dennis Tito, a California multimillionaire, apparently had nothing better to do with his money than pay the Russians \$20 million for a joyride on the International Space Station.

That's his business. But imagine what \$20 million would do in Kit Danley's world of broken neighborhoods and broken families.

For 20 years, Danley and Neighborhood Ministries have been working the meanest streets of this city, up to their elbows in what she calls "the Phoenix most people don't know."

It's a Phoenix where children grimly anticipate their own violent deaths, where poverty and pathology are pandemic, where hopelessness falls like dust on barely paved streets.

Truth be told, it's a Phoenix most of us don't want to know. Those of us who are from here imagine a city still small and new, free from the despair of "the East." Many newcomers came here to escape their old cities, and any reality outside the "gated community" is as irrelevant as a disaster in Bangladesh.

"It's not a conversation people are comfortable having," Danley says.

But have it we must. However ill-prepared, the Valley has become a new American melting pot. However much we deny it, pockets of poverty follow our sprawl outward.

Human capital is being squandered every time poverty carries forward to a new generation or a 12-year-old dies in a gang shooting. And although the poor may always be with us, Arizona's horrendous poverty statistics are an impediment to attracting quality companies and jobs.

Hope rises. Heroes step up. Neighborhood Ministries every year helps hundreds of families all over the Valley -- and poverty is mobile here, just like everything else.

Phoenix is honeycombed with groups like Neighborhood Ministries, working in small, effective ways. When President Bush talks of faith-based initiatives, these kind of organizations are on the front lines.

Danley says firmly, "We know government doesn't have the answers" to persistent poverty. But that doesn't mean the answers come free of charge.

Go to Danley's office in a careworn trailer hard against the railroad yards on West Fillmore, and she's eager to talk of the new neighborhood center. It will be a place for Neighborhood Ministries' many youth programs. The empty lot will give way to ball fields, playgrounds, clinic, food and clothing bank, even a bike shop.

Danley's group wants to feed souls as well as bodies. It emphasizes building relationships with children and families. But the 8 acre campus, which is to be built in phases on the former Valley Seed property, will give physical advantage to these aspirations. It could be a rallying point for the St Matthews neighborhood, where residents often feel besieged and forgotten behind barred windows.

Phase 1 will cost \$1.4 million. For Tito, who made his money investing for others, this would hardly be a comfort stop on his thrill ride.

For Kit Danley and her colleagues, it's not so easy. But when the work starts on the neighborhood center in the fall, guess which accomplishment will be sweeter.

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