

# Ring's Reflections

by Bob Ring

## Unique Partnership Provides Successful Adult Education

The Lew Sorensen Community Center is set to begin fall classes in pottery, fiber arts, and visual arts after a successful summer program in its new digs at 2300 N. Tanque Verde Loop Road.

The Community Center is named after dedicated educator Lew Sorensen (1936-2005) who was involved with greater Tucson schools for 38 years as teacher, principal, and superintendent for the Sunnyside and Catalina Foothills School districts, before becoming superintendent at Tanque Verde Unified School District (TVUSD) from 1980 to 1995.

In very difficult economic times, the new Community Center is a creative partnership among the TVUSD, Pima County, and the annual Tanque Verde Antique Fair. TVUSD provided the new facility, most of the equipment is leased from Pima County, and revenues from the Fair help maintain the program.

The Center's popular arts and craft program was formerly run by Pima County, in cooperation with the TVUSD, in the old Tanque Verde Elementary School, but in 2009, facing mandatory budget cuts, Pima County eliminated the program. The TVUSD then took over and built the new facility, honoring a promise to support adult education in the bond issue to build Emily Gray Junior High School.

The resurrection of the popular adult leisure learning program did not happen without a lot of help. People I've interviewed for this story tell me that TVUSD Governing Board Member Peter Livingston has been an especially strong proponent of the Community Center. Livingston told me that he has hopes for even increased cooperative partnerships in the future and that "TVUSD is happy to support the community because the community supports us."

TVUSD Superintendent Dr. Doug Price has also been consistently supportive and has been an effective force in bringing the Center to fruition.

And Karen Reifschneider, the Program Coordinator, has bridged the gap from the old facility to the new, as a constant driving force on expanding and improving program content.

Pat and I visited the Lew Sorensen Community Center in early July, met Program Coordinator Reifschneider, and got to spend a little time in three of the four new classrooms, talking with both teachers and students.

We stopped by an intermediate wheel pottery class taught by Linda Baker - a Community Center teacher for several years who sells her work at a number of craft fairs and events,

and Lori Kennedy Matheson – another longtime potter and teacher at the Center. The pottery program includes both wheel and handbuilt pottery classes and was bolstered last month by the addition of a huge new 24-cubic foot gas kiln provided by the school district.

Our next visit was to a tapestry weaving class taught by Ann Keuper, a renowned fiber artist, who owned Desert Weavers and Spinners, and teacher at the college level who was recently recruited to teach at the Community Center. Talk about equipment, the room was filled with looms of all sizes that support a fiber arts program that includes beginning and tapestry weaving, and rug-hooking. While I circulated around the happy classroom looking at each student's project, Pat enjoyed visiting with old friends – all fellow members of the Tucson Handweavers and Spinners Guild.

Our final stop was to a mixed-media drawing class taught by Larry Wollam, a longtime teacher and award winning artist, who describes himself as a realist. The emphasis in this class was drawing with colored pencils. I learned that several students have attended Wollam's classes for years. The overall visual arts program includes classes in drawing with charcoal, oil painting, and realism in watercolor.

Pat and I were impressed with the Lew Sorensen Community Center – not only the facility and equipment, but also the very positive attitude of teachers and students. Many expressed appreciation for the support and efforts of the TVUSD and Governing Board to make the Center the success it obviously is. When told that I was writing an article about the Center, one student chirped, “You mean we’ll no longer be the best kept secret in town?”

Fall classes begin the last week of August and the first week of September. The program will grow to include new teachers, including renowned portrait artist Saltness Parks who will offer classes in oil painting, charcoal drawing, and plein air (outdoor) painting. The program will also offer open lab time where students can work outside of class hours.

Registration for fall classes is now available at [www.tanqueverdeschools.org](http://www.tanqueverdeschools.org), click community programs, adult leisure classes. For more information you can contact Program Coordinator Karen Reifschneider at [lscc.kr@gmail.com](mailto:lscc.kr@gmail.com).



*The new Lew Sorensen Community Center has four classrooms for adult leisure learning.  
(Courtesy of Bob Ring)*



*Teachers Linda Baker (on right) and Lori Kennedy Matheson demonstrate  
their wheel pottery projects. (Courtesy of Bob Ring)*



*This new 24-cubic foot kiln was delivered and installed on July 16th.  
(Courtesy of Karen Reifschneider)*



*(LTR) Pat, Program Coordinator Karen Reifschneider, and instructor Ann Keuper  
discuss the current weaving projects. (Courtesy of Bob Ring)*



*Drawing teacher (standing) Larry Wollam talks about his class's pencil drawings.  
(Courtesy of Bob Ring)*