

# Tucson Weekly

## **The Skinny (01-08-09)**

### **MEANWHILE, BACK AT SAGUARO RANCH...**

By **MARI HERRERAS**

The Skinny recently took a trip to the exclusive Saguaro Ranch development near the Tortolita Mountains to get a better view of the mountain-loop road that's part of a public-access dispute between developer **Stephen Phinny** and his neighbors.

Those neighbors haven't been too pleased that Phinny keeps blocking the road, ignoring a county-recorded public easement that goes through the Saguaro Ranch property and has provided access to the Tortolitas going back to the 1960s.

Taking in the rock formations, saguaros, caves and petroglyphs makes the Skinny question why Pima County and Marana have worked so diligently to help Phinny--especially in light of his continuing legal and financial problems.

In other Saguaro Ranch news: Rumors surfaced that McClintock's, the restaurant at the development open to the public only through reservations, lost the chef that put the restaurant on the regional eating map. A call to the restaurant confirmed that executive chef **Virginia Wooters**, who went to McClintock's after stints at restaurants including the Dish, is gone.

A May 2007 press release said the restaurant was one of two upscale eateries slated to open at the development. Wooters is credited with creating a menu with items like Scottish salmon, truffles and Italian cheeses--the kind of haute cuisine one is served when the only way to get to the restaurant is through a 700-foot tunnel blasted through a mountain.

Although Wooters is gone, her name remains on the McClintock's Web site as the restaurant's chef.

The Saguaro Ranch Web site, however, is down.

Things aren't only hot for Phinny in the kitchen. The Skinny has discovered that four lawsuits were filed against Saguaro Ranch in Maricopa County, on top of the ones filed in Pima County last year.

Linthicum Corporation, a Scottsdale-based high-end custom construction company, filed two lawsuits--one last May and another in December. Spark Design, a Web site design and marketing firm in Tempe, filed a lawsuit in December. (Maybe that explains why Saguaro Ranch's Web site is AWOL.)

A lawsuit from Programs for the Arts was filed in October for unpaid contract debt. The Phoenix-based company sells advertising for magazine-style programs used in productions from groups such as *UApresents* and the Arizona Theatre Company.

Along with the ongoing lawsuits, Phinny also has an oh-so-fashionable foreclosure in the making on a Saguaro Ranch parcel near the corner of Moore and Thornydale roads. The parcel has a building on it that still says it's the Saguaro Ranch Sales Office, although the development's trademark Land Rovers with the purple Saguaro Ranch logo were nowhere to be seen during our visit. The property's slated to go to the highest bidder in a public auction on March 20 at 10:01 a.m., according to a trustee's-sale notice filed on Dec. 17.

And regarding those boulders that Phinny keeps using to block the public easements, using the backhoe that remains on the property: His neighbors keep removing them so they can hike and drive the loop road that goes through Saguaro Ranch and Pima County property. Those same neighbors who filed a public-access lawsuit against Phinny last year got a break when they recently asked a judge to allow them to return to court to argue their case based on information from a recent deposition from Marana attorney **Frank Cassidy**. Cassidy contradicted Phinny's claim that the town abandoned the road.

With this information, the judge gave the neighbors a new date to head back into Pima County Superior Court, on Jan. 26--a lot sooner than their original June date.

One final thought on access along the mountain loop road: A large red-and-white sign is posted in front of the entrance--going onto county property--warning hikers that they are entering private property owned by Saguaro Ranch. This is a surprise to those who know where Phinny's property ends and the county's property for the Tortolita Mountain Park begins.

The misleading sign happened to be bent and folded over the day we traveled through.  
<http://www.tucsonweekly.com/gbase/Currents/Content?oid=oid%3A120508>