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The Cubs' championship march began in February, when pitchers and catchers reported to Sloan Park.

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Posted: Sunday, January 1, 2017 6:00 am

By Gary Nelson, Tribune Contributing Writer

In the annals of America, now surpassing two centuries and twoscore years, some dates stand as indisputable watersheds, cleaving one era from another.

The list would begin, of course, with 1776. It would include 1865, 1941 and maybe a few others of your choosing.

If 2016 is someday added to those ranks by virtue of a spectacularly unconventional presidential election, let the record show that the East Valley played its own part in the great drama, standing for the most part with the victorious Republican, Donald Trump.

That is not to say our cities alone accounted for the nearly 85,000-vote margin by which Trump defeated Hillary Clinton in Arizona. Election maps do show a decided Democratic tinge to the vote in Tempe. But go east and south from there and the tide turns red, the decisions made in thousands of East Valley homes echoing millions of similar ones around the country.

The campaign washed into the East Valley several times.

Clinton stumped for votes at Arizona State University just six days before the election.



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not bring him to the East Valley, but his running mate, Mike Pence, came to Mesa in early November as Trump's momentum surged.

During the tumultuous campaign, one East Valley politician made national headlines by defying his party's nominee. U.S. Sen. Jeff Flake, a Republican from Mesa, declared his opposition to Trump during the primary elections and, unlike many in his party, never wavered.

"Donald Trump's views are coarse, ill-informed and inaccurate, and they are not representative of the Republican Party," Flake said in July as Trump prepared to visit Arizona.

As it turned out, more Republicans sided with Trump than with Flake, and the senator could be in for a tough fight if he seeks a second term. He already faces opposition in the 2018 primary from former state Sen. Kelli Ward of Lake Havasu City.

Another East Valley political veteran, meanwhile, called it a career in 2016 when U.S. Rep. Matt Salmon, who has represented the Fifth Congressional District since 2013, decided not to run again.

Salmon was first elected to Congress in 1994 during the much-touted Republican Revolution. He honored his pledge to serve only three terms and then lost the 2002 Arizona gubernatorial election.

Salmon's seat will be occupied by conservative Republican Andy Biggs of Gilbert.

Apart from the thunderous national election, the year brought its share of headlines to the East Valley, some of which will make their own indelible marks on the future. Here's a city-by-city look at some of them.

MESA

More than 1,700 miles lie between here and Chicago, but Mesa basked in the Windy City's reflected glory when the Cubs—at long, long last—won the World Series in early November.

The Cubs' championship march began in February, when pitchers and catchers reported to Sloan Park. Mesa opened the 15,000-seat stadium in 2014 and the park once again set Cactus League attendance records in 2016.

Voters rejected a 0.4-cent sales tax increase that would have funded police and fire operations and helped build a downtown campus of Arizona State University. City officials said, however, they will pursue other options to build the campus without a tax hike.

Three longtime City Council members—Dave Richins, Alex Finter and Dennis Kavanaugh—were prevented by term limits from seeking re-election. They will be replaced in January by Mark Freeman, Jeremy Whittaker and Ryan Winkle, respectively.

Mayor John Giles, meanwhile, was unopposed for re-election.

Construction began on the \$153 million light-rail extension from downtown to Gilbert Road. The project will be complete about two years from now.

Shouan Pan, who served as Mesa Community College president since 2008, left for a job in Seattle. Sasan Poureetezadi, the school's vice president for information technology, became



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Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport kept setting records, with 1.4 million passengers expected by the end of the year. The airport also now has two airlines offering nonstop flights to Calgary, Alberta, the first international flights in Gateway's history.

Mesa got its first female fire chief when department veteran Mary Cameli replaced the retiring Harry Beck.

Artspace, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit, won approval for tax credits allowing it to build a 50-unit low-income housing project for artists in downtown Mesa.

Mesa made national headlines in March when a newborn named "Baby Jane" was found in the front yard of a home near Alma School Road and Ninth Place. Mesa police never located the parents.

Police Chief John Meza announced his retirement after 30 years with the department and was replaced on an interim basis by Assistant Chief Michael Dvorak. Meza had served as chief since April 2015.

CHANDLER

Two new faces will join the City Council, replacing term-limited incumbents Rick Heumann and Jack Sellers. The new members are Sam Huang, who won election outright in the August primary, and Mark Stewart. Incumbent Nora Ellen was re-elected in August.

Chandler became one of the world's hotspots for automotive technology when Google began testing self-driving cars on the city's streets. In December, the project was spun off from Google and rechristened Waymo.

Jan Vesely, a former assistant school superintendent in Tucson, became superintendent of the Kyrene School District. Thirty other candidates had sought to succeed David Schauer in the post.

Seeking to ensure the viability of future growth, Chandler agreed to pay the Gila River Indian Community nearly \$43 million over the next four years in exchange for 5.5 million gallons of water a day for the next century.

Tom Dwiggins, an 18-year veteran of the department, became Chandler's fire chief after Jeff Clark retired.

GILBERT

Jenn Daniels, who has served on the Town Council since 2009, was chosen interim mayor in July after John Lewis left to lead the East Valley Partnership. Daniels then won a four-year term as mayor, running unopposed in the August primary.

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Preserve, will be Gilbert's newest Town Council member. He and Vice Mayor Jared Taylor defeated two other candidates in the November general election.

Saint Xavier University folded its tent in downtown Gilbert after only a year. The private Catholic university, based in Chicago, opened its Gilbert branch in 2015 in a \$34.2 million building funded by the town's taxpayers. With only about 25 students enrolled, the university said it couldn't keep operating in Gilbert amid uncertainty over funding for its home campus.

Twice in 2016, Gilbert firefighters battled massive blazes that destroyed large portions of under-construction apartment complexes. The first, in April, hit a complex near Warner and Gilbert roads; the second occurred just north of downtown in October.

The town unveiled plans for a 272-acre, \$174 million regional park near Higley and Queen Creek roads. Early phases of the park could be open by 2018, but full construction may take 10 years. Related to that, voters in August approved the sale of 142 acres for which the town spent more than \$50 million in 2009, ostensibly for the regional park.

TEMPE

The Arizona Coyotes announced in November their intent to build a \$400 million arena on land owned by Arizona State University, but major questions remain over the project's funding. The team's 13-year tenure in Glendale has been marked by nearly constant financial and political turmoil.

Mark Mitchell, running unopposed, won another four-year term as mayor. Council incumbents Joel Navarro and Kolby Granville also won new terms, while newcomer Randy Keating replaced Corey Woods, who decided not to run for council again.

Voters approved five bond proposals totaling \$254 million for a wide array of city infrastructure projects. City officials said the bonds can be issued without a property tax hike.

Seeking to boost the city's already sky-high high-tech profile, the City Council agreed in August to partner with three companies to build a biomedical and technology campus on 18 acres west of the Tempe Center for the Arts.

The last pieces of a failed rubber dam were removed from the west end of Tempe Town Lake; the new steel-gate dam is expected to last 50 years.

Mitzi Epstein, a Democratic political veteran from Tempe, ousted 12-year legislator Bob Robson from his seat in the Arizona House.

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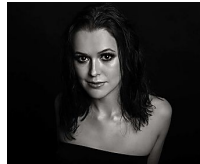
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