

Former Sierra Vista resident Diane Smith Joens elected mayor of Cottonwood

Diane Joens, formerly Diane Smith of Sierra Vista, recently took office as mayor of Cottonwood, a city of 10,900 people in Yavapai County.

Prior to winning the mayor's seat, Joens (pronounced like "Jones") served four years as a Cottonwood city councilwoman.

Joens is the daughter of Elaine Smith of Spirit Lake, Iowa, and the late Eugene Smith, who worked for the Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Co-op in the 1950s and installed many miles of electric poles and lines in the Fry and Charleston areas. Joens was born in Iowa, but moved to Sierra Vista when it was still called Fry. "I remember the hoopla of the townspeople who disagreed about whether the town should be named Fry or Sierra Vista," she said. "I was only 5 years old then, but I remember the uproar."

She attended Carmichael School and Buena High School her freshman year. The family moved to Iowa when she was 15. "When we moved away, Sierra Vista's border ended where the Jack in the Box restaurant is now located," Joens says. "It was called Sue and Herb's then."

Aunts and cousins include Sierra Vista residents Marjorie Spencer Fox, Jeff Spencer and Vi Attkisson.

Joens is active in Verde River issues, and sees many parallels with the San Pedro River. The Verde River also serves as an economic engine for the Verde Valley, with excellent wildlife and bird watching opportunities.

Tourism is important to the city and Verde Valley area. Mingus Mountain is a major asset.

Joens has served on a number of water committees in Yavapai County, and is a founding member of the Stewards of Public Lands. This group organizes resources from federal, state, county and municipal governments, private businesses, organizations and volunteers, working across jurisdictional lines to clean up public lands. The goal is to increase recreation and public enjoyment of the lands, reduce wildfire fuels on the urban rural interface, and protect the area's aquifers and drinking water. In the past three years, the city of Cottonwood purchased four private water companies and started its own municipal water utility. Joens supported these purchases and believes it helps the city "control its own destiny."

Visit dianejoens.com or ci.cottonwood.az.us.