

Palestinians map plan

West Bank leaders will ask U.N. to recognize state

By Mohammed Daraghme
Associated Press

RAMALLAH, West Bank — The West Bank Palestinian leadership on Sunday formally decided to press ahead with efforts in September to win U.N. recognition of a state in the West

Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, in what could be a blow to efforts to restart Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

The leadership, made up of the Palestine Liberation Organization's decision-making body and officials of the Palestinian Authority, the self-rule govern-

ment in the West Bank, said in a statement that the goal was to bring a state of Palestine into the family of nations of the world.

It approved the approach in principle, according to the statement, without adding operative steps about what to do af-

ter obtaining recognition.

The idea of asking the U.N. General Assembly to recognize a Palestinian state inside the cease-fire lines that held until the 1967 Mideast War is a reflection of Palestinian frustration with stalemated peace talks with Israel.

In recent weeks, however,

See PALESTINIANS, Page A4



Tips for a sparkling, safe July 4

With the Fourth of July weekend just a few days away, fireworks are getting snatched up at stores and holiday stands. But for parents of young children who are concerned about the risks, there are safer alternatives. For tips on safely enjoying fireworks and a guide to other fun options for kids, see **Arizona Living, D1**.



Cutting the electric bill to NEARLY ZERO



Fred Hermann, southwest region president for Meritage Homes, walks through an unusual model home in the Verrado community in Buckeye. The home, designed to be green, has its walls and ceilings cut out to showcase its environmentally friendly, money-saving features. **Top:** Solar panels are a standard component. PHOTOS BY MICHAEL CHOW/THE REPUBLIC

House is at leading edge of energy-saving trend

By Catherine Reagor
The Arizona Republic

Bruce and Kerry Ploeser were shopping for a new home. The couple and their four children lived in the West Valley but needed a smaller place because their in-laws were moving out and one kid was starting college.

The Ploesers have a friend who

works at Meritage Homes, and he persuaded them to come out and look at the company's new "green" houses in Buckeye's Verrado community.

"We went into the sales center, and there were all these cool exhibits showing exactly how the houses were built more environmentally friendly," said Bruce, a restaurant owner. "And each exhibit showed how much we could save on our utility bills."

The Ploesers found a 3,400-square-foot home they loved for \$250,000 and decided to buy it. But by then, Bruce, an Air Force veteran, wanted to know more about the green-building techniques and see if they could incorporate even more energy-saving materials in their home.

He talked to the company's envi-

See HOUSE, Page A5

Leeway given on Afghan pullout

Obama lets commanders shape troop withdrawal

By Robert Burns
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In promising that a U.S. military pullout from Afghanistan will begin in July, President Barack Obama is permitting his commanders to decide critical details, including the number of troops to depart first and whether any of those will be combat forces, administration and military officials said Sunday.

Providing that leeway is important to Army Gen. David Petraeus, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan. It allows him to pace this year's phase of the withdrawal in a way that preserves combat power through the end of the traditional fighting season in October or November.

Obama said in a national address Wednesday that he was ordering 10,000 troops home by year's end. As many as 23,000 more are to leave by September 2012.

The 33,000 total is the number that Obama sent as reinforcements in December 2009 as part of an effort to reverse the Taliban's momentum and hasten an eventual political settlement of the conflict. The U.S. and its allies plan a full combat withdrawal by the end of 2014.

"Starting next month, we will be able to remove 10,000 of our troops from Afghanistan by the end of this year," Obama told the nation last week.

He did not say how many would

See AFGHANISTAN, Page A4

One man's naked truth about javelinas

And the life lesson provided by a pack of peccaries

By Sean Holstege
The Arizona Republic

There's an old saying that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

But Arizona native Michael Shapiro offers this wrinkle: What doesn't kill you makes you wiser.

He has a story of survival, which he calls "Naked With Javelinas," but it really isn't about survival or strength at all. It's about something uniquely Arizonan and more profound than just toughing it out.

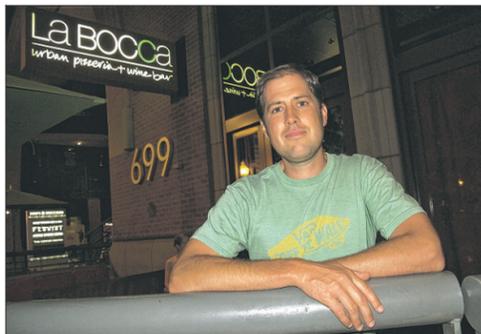
To understand why Shapiro found himself naked with javelinas in the wilderness, you have to understand a

little about him.

Shapiro, a 34-year-old grade-school teacher in Phoenix, grew up in Prescott. As a boy of around 12, he first visited his great-aunt Carol and great-uncle Roy "Stuffy" Williams on their ranch outside Wickenburg. The place is two hours up a steep and bumpy dirt road and is nestled between the foothills of the Bradshaw Mountains and the Hassayampa River. The couple have lived on the ranch for decades without electricity or a phone.

When he met Uncle Stuffy, he found a man as tall and rugged as a sa-

See STORYTELLER, Page A5



At *The Republic's* Storytellers event in Tempe, Michael Shapiro shares the tale about his naked encounter with a "multitude of javelinas." EMMANUEL LOZANO/THE REPUBLIC

ARIZONA STORYTELLERS

Tell your story

To celebrate the state's upcoming 100th birthday, *The Arizona Republic*, 12 News and azcentral.com present Arizona Storytellers. The site, supported by Blue Cross Blue Shield, is dedicated to telling Arizonans' stories in their own voices. Today, a video of Michael Shapiro joins the collection. Watch videos and learn how to share your own story at **storytellers.azcentral.com**.



» View the story on your smartphone by scanning the QR code at left.

VALLEY & STATE

Amid heat, aid key to homeless

With temperatures soaring above 110 degrees, officials and outreach groups are taking steps to offer the homeless a respite from the heat. Shelters and water-distribution sites are aiming to prevent heat-related tragedies. **B1**



NATION

N.D. communities survey flood damage

Emergency workers head out to survey flood damage in Burlington, N.D. The Souris River, which runs through Burlington and nearby Minot, has flooded thousands of homes in the state. Most of the homeowners lack flood insurance, but grants and loans will help with rebuilding. **A3**

SPORTS

D-Backs pounded: The D-Backs end their road trip with a disappointing loss to the Detroit Tigers. Detroit scored seven runs in the eighth inning to win 8-3. **C1**

BUSINESS

Store adjusts focus: Owners of Phoenix health-food grocer Luci's Healthy Marketplace turn their setbacks into an opportunity to reinvent their business. **B4**



House

Continued from A1

ronmental-building expert, who had long wanted to try to create a "net-zero home" but hadn't come across the right buyer.

Net zero means a building uses no energy except what it receives from solar panels and other environmentally friendly building techniques.

"The plan sounded radical," Bruce said. "But the chance to cut our electric bill to almost nothing and do the right thing for the environment sounded great."

Hundreds of much more expensive net-zero custom homes have already been built in the country, but until now, they were cost-prohibitive for the typical buyer.

Meritage and the Ploesers built the house they planned. Now, they believe it is the first net-zero home in Arizona.

Building green

The trend toward incorporating more environmental features in homes and office buildings has grown during the past few decades. But most buyers still weren't willing to pay the extra money for a green building.

Recent surveys by the National Association of Home Builders and consulting groups show green building is becoming more popular among buyers than other amenities like golf courses, parks and larger homes.

But those surveys haven't translated to buyers' actual decisions until lately.

For the past few years, homebuilders have had to compete with a glut of cheap foreclosure homes in metro Phoenix. Many of those homes were built in recent years and have plenty of upgrades, making them stiff competition for newly built homes.

That competition plus the recession left most homebuilders buckling.

Scottsdale-based Meritage took a write-down on



Workers install energy-efficient roof tiles on a house in the Meritage Homes development in Verado (above). Energy-efficient homes are often constructed with better insulation and solar panels. PHOTOS BY TOM TINGLE/THE REPUBLIC

the value of its land, downsized its home plans and did away with upgrades like granite countertops to keep prices low enough to compete with foreclosure homes. It worked, and the builder survived and eked out a small profit.

Then it found a new niche: green houses that save owners on utility bills.

Every home that Meritage builds now in Florida, Texas, Arizona and California comes with an environmental package, and the builder's chairman, Steve Hilton, said buyers aren't being charged any more for it.

"Home buyers can cut their average electric bills from \$200 in a regular home to \$100 a month in one of our new homes," he said.

Showing off green

To interest more buyers in green homes, Meritage realized it needed to explain how what it was building would save people money.

The builder's new sales centers look like deconstructed houses. Bright signs point out green-building techniques and give estimates of how much money each one can save a homeowner.

In the kitchen, a sign explains only Energy Star appliances are installed. They use 10 to 50 percent less energy than other appliances.

The ceiling is open to expose the "air sealed" insulation that is supposed to be 200 percent more energy efficient than regular insu-

lation. A yellow sign points to a light fixture and tells potential buyers that at least 80 percent of all lighting in the home is fluorescent, which uses 75 percent less energy and produces less heat. The toilets are outfitted with dual-flush activators that consume 75 percent less water.

Everything from the wood studs in the wall to the water heater and plumbing is also displayed, with signs explaining how each feature saves energy and money for the buyer.

"Meritage's new sales offices are like environmental-education centers," said national housing analyst Tim Sullivan with the Irvine, Calif.-based John Burns Real Estate Consulting. "It's fascinating. A pro-

duction builder has finally been able to build true green homes and explain them to buyers."

Meritage has sold more than 200 of its green homes in the several states where it operates.

Outfitting a home with the material Meritage is using for its green houses would typically cost \$50,000, homebuilding analysts say.

Hilton said Meritage is able to avoid raising the cost of a home by purchasing the materials in bulk at lower prices.

Net-zero home

The Ploesers' attractive brown stucco and stone home looks like any other house on the block, unless you go around the back and

see some of the 25 solar panels attached to it.

Net-zero homes generate energy through solar panels and other methods to "bank" the power with utilities. Homeowners use more power from the electric supplier in the summer when bills are higher, and they feed the solar power they generate back to the utility at other times. Essentially the homes operate solely on the energy they produce.

Because the amount of power generated depends on the seasons and the weather, a net-zero house typically takes a year to produce enough energy to offset the electric bills.

The Ploesers moved into their home on Earth Day, April 22.

Bruce said that last month, they used the washer and dryer during peak times at midday and kept their air-conditioning at 76 degrees. His electric bill was \$90, but he expects it will be \$15 next summer. It won't be zero because he still has to pay the basic maintenance fees required by utilities.

Green trend grows

More production builders are incorporating money-saving green building into their plans. Beazer Homes offers upgrades for tankless water heaters, dual-flush toilets, recyclable carpet and more-efficient air-conditioners.

Del Webb/Pulte's green home additions include high-efficiency vinyl windows, water-saving showers and toilets, and more-efficient insulation. Joseph Carl Homes come with a solar-power system that generates electricity and heats water.

"Everyone talks about green homes. It's cool, like when everyone bragged about buying a Prius," said Jay Butler, director of realty studies at Arizona State University. "Now homebuyers are most concerned about getting the most for their money. So if they can get a green house for a good price, builders might sell some more of the homes."

Storyteller

Continued from A1

guaro, in his 60s. He was shoeing a horse. The horse had other ideas. It kicked the rancher in the forehead, leaving a red, perfect U-shaped welt. Uncle Stuff wheeled, squared his shoulders and punched the horse.

"I thought, 'I'm never going to fight this man,'" Shapiro said.

Then Uncle Stuff extended an enormous and calloused hand, saying, "Nice to meet you, son."

Aunt Carol wasn't much different.

Later that night, she told a story of how she was stung by a scorpion while washing dishes. Uncle Stuff was away. Feeling light-headed, she wrote a note telling him that she loved him and they'd had a great marriage. Then she got in bed for her final rest. But she lived.

"She woke up the next day, tore up the note and washed the dishes, finished them up," Shapiro said.

Intimidating? Maybe, but they became like grandparents and more to Shapiro.

"They are rough, rugged people, but beautiful. Just like the desert, there is a subtle beauty," he recalled.

But this isn't a story about Uncle Stuff or rugged survival.

Years later, in 1999, Shapiro returned to the ranch after graduating from college. He wanted to head into the wilderness, up the Haysayampa River, to wash his soul and think about what was next.

"I was on that ranch to get some perspective on life," he said, describing his life then as a bit like the movie "The Graduate." It was on that trip he would resolve to hike from Mexico to Canada.

When Uncle Stuff handed him a revolver, Shapiro thought it out of place for his mission. He didn't want the extra weight. On this trip, Shapiro's sole companion would be a book by Thomas Merton called "Thoughts in Solitude."

He started walking through the shallow river, with his uncle's words echoing in his mind: Watch out for quicksand.

Sure enough, as he mulled that idea, his footing failed and he melted into the soft riverbed. He sank into quicksand up to his shoulders. He threw his backpack to the bank. Slowly, he pushed his way through the sand, eventually freeing himself from the deadly trap.

Shapiro retells the story as matter-of-factly as if he were buttering toast. For most city folk and newcomers to the state, that would be tale enough to tell.

Get the whole story

Michael Shapiro's story of the javelinas and the wilderness and his nakedness was revealed publicly at an Arizona Republic storytelling event on June 22.

Shapiro's story was deemed the best of the bunch (by a scientific measurement of how loudly people applauded).

But there were many others that were compelling.

The next Storytellers event, all part of *The Republic's* celebration of the state's pending centennial, will be held on July 28 at Beckett's Table, 3717 E. Indian School Road, Phoenix.

The event will begin at 7:30, but you may want to arrive a little bit early. The response to the June event was so strong, fire-safety regulations prevented some people from entering. Apparently everybody loves a good story.

—John Faherty

But survival isn't the point of his story.

By then, everything on him was saturated with wet sand.

"So I took off all my clothes," he said.

"I felt, 'This is quite liberating,'" he added.

But full exposure to the desert can make you vulnerable. Almost everything in the desert — lizards, scorpions, snakes — is designed to bite, scratch, prick, poison and burn intruders. Even the ants secrete a welt-forming toxin.

Shapiro pitched his tent, started a fire and tucked into the words of spiritual writer Merton.

"The great work of the

solitary life is gratitude," Shapiro read.

"I felt at peace," Shapiro said.

But peace can be fleeting.

"And then I heard a snort."

Then he saw, blending into the shadows as the sun was setting, "a multitude of javelinas." Up on the hill, "they were flowing in off the hills like water flowing toward the river."

They formed a semi-circle around him and became crowding him.

"They were hairy. Some looked liked footballs. There were little tiny ones. Some looked like luggage. They were coarse. They

had yellow fangs, beady eyes," he recalled. "and they smelled."

"My first thought was, 'I'm naked.' My second thought was, 'I'm naked.'"

So he did what anybody would in such a predicament.

"I went to war. I went to battle."

He poked a stick in the fire, grabbed a rock and began waving them in a frenzy.

"I stood up like a naked madman and started flailing," he said.

It was "Lord of the Flies," Arizona style.

The javelinas were unimpressed.

As the flaming stick flickered out, Shapiro found the biggest javelina, aimed his rock and hit the beast with a thud. The beady-eyed creature grunted, shifted an inch and remained unimpressed.

Shapiro backed away. The throng advanced. This was looking bad. But after a while, the animals shuffled off to the side.

Shapiro lay down in his tent and tried to rest. Throughout the night, all he heard was the thump-thump of his heart and the

snorting of his desert companions.

When he awoke, he noticed he'd pitched his tent in the middle of a path of animal tracks.

"They were just politely trying to get around me to get to water," he said.

Shapiro had learned a greater lesson. In an age in which many people despaired over a pink slip or an investment loss, he found value in solitude. In a time when people spent thousands of dollars on self-help seminars and New Age fads, he found grace in a pack of hairy javelinas.

And for the price of a scary naked encounter with the beasts, he found one thing more: "I thought to myself, as I was coming back to the ranch, how beautiful the desert is and how it has a subtle beauty and how, as soon as you think you know it, and as soon as you think you understand it, it catches you off guard," he said.

"And it gave me a greater appreciation for my relatives, who've lived in the desert many years. They bear the resemblance and beauty of the desert."

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