

D'Anna: The Republic's Clark Kent is hanging up his notebook



John D'Anna, The Republic | azcentral.com 7:05 a.m. MST October 30, 2015



(Photo: The Republic)

One of the best things about moving over to *The Republic* from the late, great *Mesa Tribune* was the fact that I could be on the same team as [Jim Walsh \(/staff/18391/jim-walsh/\)](#) instead of having to compete against him. And one of the great things about having Jim Walsh on your team is that he'll literally drop what he's doing to help you in any way he can.

Just a couple of weeks ago, [when there was an arrest in the I-10 freeway shootings case \(/story/news/local/phoenix/breaking/2015/09/18/doug-ducey-phoenix-freeway-shootings-suspect-custody/72439462/\)](#) late on a Friday after the newsroom had cleared out, I tried to reach Jim on his cell phone several times, but no avail. I was about to go to plan B, when he finally picked up.

"Jim, where are you?"

"I'm at Target, buying dog food. What's up?"

"There's been an arrest in the freeway shootings, and we need someone to go to his father's house and see if he'll talk."

Jim didn't even bother hitting checkout.

"I'm on my way."

To an editor, those are mighty comforting words.

Jim got the interview that night and gave [Republic readers an exclusive window \(/story/news/local/phoenix/breaking/2015/09/19/phoenix-freeway-shootings-bullet-fragments-lead-suspect-leslie-allen-merritt-jr/72487660/\)](#) into the world of the man who had just been arrested in connection with one of the Valley's highest-profile crimes of the moment.



Jim Walsh (Photo: David Kadlubowski/The Republic)

It wasn't the first time. Jim has a knack for getting people to open up to him, even after they've slammed doors in the faces of other reporters. As a police reporter, Jim's usually approaching people who are not at their best -- people who've been involved in a crime or a tragedy. But they always talk to Jim, and the reason is because he treats them like people and not like stories.

When I was editing the *Mesa Republic*, I was reunited with Jim after many years, and we did some great work together, covering the big disasters like a transformer fire that left half of Mesa without power in 2011 in the middle of summer and the vicious storm that pounded the Southeast Valley in 2010 and caused widespread flooding and millions of dollars in damage.

But some of Jim's best work wasn't on cop beat. I'm thinking of the series he did on the [importance of preserving Mesa's past by saving its historic buildings \(/community/mesa/articles/20130329mesa-diving-lady-future-bright.html\)](#). If you drive down Main Street near Lindsay at night, you'll see the gorgeous 1950s neon "Diving Lady" motel sign. After that 2010 storm, it lay in shards in a motel parking lot. But when Jim began reporting on its significance, he raised enough community awareness that a campaign was started to restore it to its former and present glory.

Jim's retiring from *The Republic* this week, but it's more than just *The Republic's* loss. It's your loss as well. I'm sure there will be a lot of baseball, hiking and hanging out with his dog in his future. As for ours, we'll have to finally figure out what that Plan B is.

[Our big Give a Journalist The Bird food drive \(/story/news/local/mesa/2015/10/09/mesa-tempe-chandler-gilbert-thanksgiving-turkey-drive/73539428/\)](#) is moving full speed ahead. The good folks at Mesa Community College, who have spent more than a decade raising awareness about hunger through the Empty Bowls program, have joined the challenge, as has Benedictine University. And next week I hope to have exciting news from a certain major institution in Tempe.

For the uninitiated, every year I do a turkey drive to benefit United Food Bank in Mesa, which helps supply 51,000 meals a day for the less fortunate in the Southeast Valley. This year, I decided to challenge all of you to hold your own drives. Thanksgiving is just a few short weeks away, but there's still time to get involved. In fact, there's no better time to get involved. To find out how, contact the food bank at unitedfoodbank.org (<https://unitedfoodbank.org/>) or call them at 480-926-4897. Or, if you'd rather yak at me, contact me at the e-mail address below.

John D'Anna writes an occasional column for the Southeast Valley editions of the Republic. That is, when he's not dozing off at his day job. To contact him, e-mail him at john.danna@arizonarepublic.com (<mailto:john.danna@arizonarepublic.com?subject=Republic%20column>). Follow John on Twitter @azgreenday (https://twitter.com/azgreenday?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwqr%5Eauthor).

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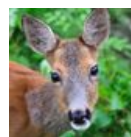
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Police here opt to use nunchucks

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Deer hit by car. walks into emergency room

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What is the status now between Khloe and Lamar?

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