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## **East Valley to see names in lights on billboards**

Garin Groff  
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One of Tempe Marketplace's most notable features will include a few things that have been disappearing from the city for decades – billboards.

And not just any kind of billboard, but an electronic design that will be the first of its type in Arizona.

Tempe struck a deal with developer Vestar to replace four traditional billboards that date to when the site was an unincorporated area with landfills, junk yards and industrial businesses.

The new billboards will line the Loop 202 Red Mountain Freeway. The old ones stood along McClintock Drive and Rio Salado Parkway.

The boards are under construction now and could be working by April.

Tempe has restricted signs and billboards more tightly than most communities in the state, so the new billboards were a surprise to a local anti-billboard group.

But Vestar considers the billboards an important part of the center's architecture, and sees them as an upgrade from the junkyards that dotted the property.

"The displays will be unlike anything that exists in the Valley in terms of the design quality of the structures and the display," said David Larcher, executive vice president at Vestar. "As compared to what was on the site previously, I can't imagine anybody complaining about anything."

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The signs use LED displays instead of vinyl, so the operator can change advertising quickly and remotely. The ads will change every 8 seconds.

Billboard operator American Outdoor has started to install the signs. They'll stand 70 feet tall and display ads on screens sized 48 feet by 14 feet.

The signs show how skilled billboard companies are getting around bans and heavy restrictions, said Mark Mayer, a board member of anti-billboard group Scenic Arizona. Mayer said Tempe's sign regulations likely surpass Scottsdale, which banned billboards in 1969 and has just one remaining sign. Tempe has about a dozen left, but Mayer said he questions whether the new signs might signal a more relaxed attitude.

"As far as a full-blown electronic display, it would be a huge coup for the billboard industry to say, 'Tempe is doing this. Everybody else should too.'"

Tempe Mayor Hugh Hallman said the deal to swap the billboards – agreed to before he took office – likely will be repeated in the future. The agreement was the only way, short of spending millions to buy the billboards, to get them off McClintock while fixing up a blighted property.

"We are replacing what was a hazardous waste dump with a tax-producing, rather attractive outdoor retail center," Hallman said.

Also, the agreement requires that Tempe can use some of the advertising time for public service announcements.

Mayer said he suspects the displays will distract drivers because they're so bright and change frequently.

But Jonathan Levine, American Outdoor's general manager, said the signs aren't much different than traditional boards because they don't include flashing lights or moving images like some new signs. "It's static, so I don't see that being an issue at all," he said. The signs are more valuable to the company because it can post 1,542 images a day, instead of leasing it to a single company for a month. Clients are eager to use the new technology to get their message out, he said. "The advertising community we've talked to is very excited about it, to advertise on such a high-profile area."