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Tempe Marketplace site once was contaminated

Katie Ruark
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What soon will be the site of a \$250 million shopping, restaurant and entertainment center recently was the location of a \$30 million cleanup in Tempe.

Tempe Marketplace, at the intersection of Loops 101 and 202, once was an industrial parcel impacted by pollution and classified as a Superfund site by the Environmental Protection Agency.

"Over a decade the property was not well regulated," said Tempe Mayor Hugh Hallman. "There were some business practices going on there that were less than honorable in my opinion."

David Larcher, executive vice president of Vestar Development, developer of Tempe Marketplace, told The Business Journal in January the property had become filled with wrecking yards and industrial sites.

The property had three landfills over 10 years and contained high levels of methane gas, contaminated soil and hazardous materials.

Hallman said the property cleanup was necessary to protect the public. Had the area not been cleaned, there was potential for leaking materials to contaminate the city's groundwater. The lack of precipitation from the drought, however, helped to protect the groundwater up until now, he said.

Buildings in the area, many constructed without permits, also were a danger to the city's police and fire departments, he said. Parts of the area also lacked sewer and water service, and there had been several tire fires.

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Vestar shouldered much of the \$30 million cleanup costs, but \$1 million was contributed in the form of a grant from the Brownfield Economic Development Initiative, which U.S. Congressman J.D. Hayworth fought to secure. U.S. Housing and Urban Development also provided a \$7 million loan.

"I believe this is a classic case of balance," Hayworth said. "There were environmental concerns that needed to be dealt with."

Hayworth said the project is vitally important to the people who live in the area and it will help improve the quality of life.

"We were able to ... take brownfields and make them green," he said, referring to the number of new jobs that Tempe Marketplace will create. "I think this will work out well for all parties concerned."

"Undoubtably all of those involved with the redevelopment -- from the mayor and city council to the staff to Brad Wilde and Miravista Holdings -- will look back with pride once the project is completed as to the transition from dangerous conditions to what arguably will be one of the shining stars of shopping complexes in the Valley," said Larcher.

Larcher said the cleanup, started in late 2004, included "significant geotechnical remediation with unstable soil conditions, undocumented fill on a majority of the site, and environmental remediation, with the main one being methane common throughout the site."