

The East Valley Tribune

MESA ARIZONA CITY FLAG DESIGN CONTEST



A Report from the

North American Vexillological Association

January 2005

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SUMMARY

The readers of the *East Valley Tribune* have voted a winner among the 24 finalist designs for a flag for Mesa, Arizona, as selected by NAVA. The design would rank among the best U.S. city flags, and Mayor Keno Harker and other city officials have agreed to consider it for adoption as Mesa’s first official flag, replacing the “pretender” banner currently in use.



CURRENT “PRETENDER” FLAG



In NAVA’s recent American City Flags Survey, announced in October 2004, NAVA members rated Mesa’s current “pretender” flag at 1.7 points on a 0-10 scale, ranking it 146th out of the 150 flags rated.

BACKGROUND

In 2004, the North American Vexillological Association (NAVA) conducted an Internet-based survey rating the designs of 150 U.S. city flags, comprising the 100 largest cities in the country, all 50 state capitals, and at least two cities per state. These flags had all appeared in NAVA's groundbreaking 2004 book, *American City Flags*. On a scale of 0 to 10, Washington DC's flag ranked the highest with a score of 9.2; Pocatello, Idaho's ranked the lowest with 1.5, and Mesa's ranked 146th with a score of 1.7—equivalent to a failing grade. Other Arizona cities ranked were Phoenix (4th, 8.6), Glendale (102nd, 3.4), Scottsdale (128th, 2.8), and Tucson (135th, 2.7).

However, Mesa actually has *no* official flag. The flag NAVA judged is a pretender, as the *Tribune* learned in reporting on the NAVA survey. Although it had been provided by city officials to NAVA researchers as Mesa's flag during the preparation of *American City Flags*, in fact it is merely a backdrop/banner used by the city in trade shows. This “pretender” design suffers from a large amount of white space, complex design, use of lettering, and gradient coloring, which combine to make it expensive to manufacture and difficult to decipher at any distance. Still, it utilizes a highly recognizable logo that could be the basis of a new flag.

With 450 members in the U.S., Canada, and abroad, NAVA brings together people interested in the study of flags (vexillology), publishes a newsletter and a scholarly journal, hosts a website (www.nava.org), and holds annual meetings. NAVA's guide to flag design, *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, is available on its website. NAVA has helped several cities, states, and other entities with flag design competitions.

CONTEST

In late October 2004 the *East Valley Tribune* ran an article on the NAVA survey and the ranking of Mesa's "pretender" flag. Columnist Paul Giblin noted that Mesa would host the League of Arizona Cities and Towns conference the next year, and a (new) flag would be an appropriate symbol for the host city. Following up on the article, the newspaper soon announced a flag contest. It listed NAVA's five basic flag design principles: simplicity, meaningful symbolism, few colors, no lettering/seals, and distinctiveness. Readers submitted 131 entries.

The designers ranged from grade-school students (often as class projects), to design professionals, to retirees, mostly from Mesa, but including many from the greater metro area and across the state of Arizona. Designs were posted on the paper's website as they were submitted. After the submission deadline, the original designs were culled by the NAVA coordinator (consulting with the judges) and a final 24 were rendered into consistent artwork by another NAVA judge. In many cases words on the designs were removed, some colors shifted, concepts were simplified, and other minor changes made to make designs more competitive yet retain the spirit of their artists. The designs were given preliminary rankings, to facilitate publishing an indeterminate number: 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, or 14.

All of the finalist designs followed basic flag design principles; the most common symbols were a mesa, a sun, a symbolic "M", and a saguaro cactus. All of these have compelling symbolic meaning for Mesa, and all 24 finalist designs would make successful city flags.

The *Tribune* offered them up for its readers' vote, under the headline "The Great Mesa Flag Contest", while NAVA judges re-scored the finalists. The ballots asked readers to list their first-, second-, and third-place selections, and to mail them in, one per envelope. Readers cast 1,357 ballots.

NAVA judges awarded each design a score on a 0-10 scale for comparability to city flag scores from the 2004 NAVA survey. In the tradition of the Olympics, the highest and lowest score for each design were discarded, with the average of the central scores determining the overall score.

JUDGING

At the request of the *Tribune*, NAVA assembled a panel of judges representing a broad spectrum of flag-design expertise, to work on this project:

- **Peter Ansoff**, NAVA president, Alexandria VA, expert on the First Navy Jack.
- **Deveraux Cannon**, attorney, Nashville TN, author of numerous books and articles on Civil War flags.
- **David Martucci**, flag appraiser, Washington ME, editor of NAVA's newsletter.
- **Mason Kaye**, college student, Los Angeles CA, winner of NAVA's 1999 Driver Award for flag scholarship.
- **Ted Kaye**, financial executive, Portland OR, author of *Good Flag, Bad Flag*.
- **Peter Orenski**, lapel-flag manufacturer, New Milford CT, organizer of New Milford's flag design contest.
- **John Purcell**, retired professor of Spanish education, Cleveland OH, principal author of *American City Flags*.

CRITERIA

In their final evaluation, the judges scored the flags following the five basic flag design principles from *Good Flag, Bad Flag* (but substituting “attractiveness” for the fourth principle [“no lettering or seals”] since none of the finalists had lettering or seals). They give each flag a score, a maximum of 10 points, based on: Simplicity, Symbolism, Color, Attractiveness, Distinctiveness.

1) **Simplicity:** Scalability—from large flag down to lapel pin; Ease of drawing from memory; Appearance when limp, flapping, or at a distance; Reversibility—doesn't look “funny” on the reverse (but need not be symmetrical).

2) **Symbolism:** Representing Mesa—the symbols “say” Mesa to the viewer; Recognizable treatment—the symbolism can be easily identified; Significant, not a minor symbol; Colors, if carrying meaning, count here in symbolism.

3) **Color:** Colors come from the standard color set, number 2 to 3; Rule of Tincture is honored: lights don't border lights, darks don't border darks; Design “works” in black & white version.

4) **Attractiveness:** Overall aesthetics—attractiveness to viewer; Balance; Timelessness—the design is not “trendy”.

5) **Distinctiveness:** Not easily confused with other existing flags, especially other US city or state flags; If similar to another flag, that should be purposeful.

RESULTS: TOP 24

The following designs were rated by the judges. The numbering corresponds to their appearance on the *Tribune* website (the letter is the group; the number is sequential within the group).



All of these are exemplary designs; most would have placed among the top 20 U.S. city flags

in NAVA’s 2004 survey (the cut-off was 6.8 points). They are identified according to their initial sequence (order in which submitted), their appearance on the *Tribune* website, and the letters assigned to them in the contest.

The *Tribune* has asked its readers to vote on these finalists, supplying a ballot asking for first, second, and third place. To adequately recognize alternative selections, it awarded 5 points for first place, 3 points for second place, and 1 point for third place. Readers cast 1,357 ballots.

Flag per Sequence	Flag per Website	Flag per Contest	Readers’ Rank (Points)	NAVA Score	Name of Designer
3	A-3	A	11 (423)	8.3	Mary Dernik
12	A-11	B	12 (405)	6.8	Dolores Kohler
11	A-12	C	19 (113)	6.8	Nancy Rinehimer
15	A-15	D	9 (431)	8.5	Nicholas Dudley / Russell Paperman
46	B-1	E	17 (128)	9.1	Myles Uttke
40	B-2	F	5 (805)	9.3	Sandi Matthews
30	B-9	G	3 (1,153)	7.8	Wayne Jones
45	B-12	H	10 (423)	6.7	Shannah Wilcock
10	C-5	I	16 (139)	6.6	Charlene Cashatt
76	C-9	J	14 (199)	7.4	Gwen Callahan
84	C-12	K	8 (473)	5.7	Tommy Fox
97	D-13	L	21 (104)	7.2	Claudia Beltran
99	E-1	M	24 (32)	5.1	Glenn Young
110	E-5	N	23 (53)	6.0	Celenn Ramsay
108	E-10	O	20 (104)	6.2	Ulysses Cosio
48	F-2	P	6 (546)	6.5	Cindy Kustwan
50	F-4	Q	15 (185)	6.6	John Manick
53	F-7	R	18 (127)	6.4	Weston Stewart
62	F-16	S	4 (1,105)	7.8	Rebekah Matthews
67	G-2	T	1 (2,733)	8.5	Mary Jean Crider
68	G-3	U	2 (1,180)	8.4	Shirley DeLaet
72	G-7	V	13 (334)	7.9	Russell Paperman
112	H-4	W	7 (480)	8.2	Tony Dominguez / Troy Curtis
128	H-7	X	22 (80)	6.6	Steven Rawlings

The highest-polling flag, T (G-2) was designed by Mary Jean Crider of Mesa, a retired elementary-school teacher. Its original version had a counterchanged border which NAVA’s artist removed for simplicity. It received over twice the points of the second-place design, and 23% of all the points. In tallying just the ballots from Mesa residents, it received 24% of all the points. She intended to represent three of Mesa’s most distinct features: the mesa, the sun, and the saguaro cactus; the stylized “M” formed by the mesa was unintentional.

CONCLUSION

Mesa's citizens have selected a new flag for their city. NAVA is pleased to have helped the *East Valley Tribune* promote the design, selection, and adoption of that flag. However, NAVA neither designed nor selected a new flag: that role belonged to the people of Mesa.

NAVA commends and encourages the *Tribune's* efforts to work with city officials to pursue a change in the official flag design. NAVA cautions against legislative additions or deletions to any proposals, which can often detract from the design and run counter to the wishes of the citizens (some other cities that have embarked upon flag redesign have encountered last-minute and unfortunate changes). The best course, which the *Tribune* has followed, has been to poll readers on the flag, and then present the winning design "as is" to the city for adoption.

The *Tribune* can be proud of its readers' commitment to the city's history, enthusiasm for its symbols, and strong sense of good flag design. NAVA wishes Mesa luck with its new flag. Congratulations!

JUDGING CONTACTS

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