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## Nontraditional spirituality has East Side homes

**Druids, neo-pagans among the groups that get together for services**

**By Kevin Smith**

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Look closer. The East Side is home to various groups seeking spirituality that don't always involve attending church on Sunday.

From druids who wake up early on Saturday mornings to celebrate to those just looking to answer the big questions, the East Side is diverse.

"It's gorgeous out here," said the Rev. Kirk Thomas.

In 2001, Thomas decided to build a stone circle on his 6.5-acre East Side property for his personal use but wound up letting his druid group, the Sonoran Sunrise Grove, use it instead.

Thomas said the group is trying to raise money to build another worship area, hopefully on the East Side.

"Tucson is very neo-pagan- friendly," said Senior Druid Rev. David Foster.

The owner of the Spirit in Action Center, Vickie Wortman, said she started up on the East Side to be closer to her former residence in Rita Ranch.

The East Side is difficult to draw interest from, Wortman said, since many are already settled into faiths.

"It's a tough nut to crack," she said.

People in three groups said their membership comes from across the city, and sometimes, from across the country and world.

"Most of the neighbors haven't even been here," Thomas said about his property.

East Side resident Hannah Thandi, 37, said you usually have to travel to Downtown Tucson to find things like the Spirit in Action Center.

"I'm happy they're on the East Side," she said.

• Contact reporter Kevin Smith at 434-4079 or [ksmith@azstarnet.com](mailto:ksmith@azstarnet.com).

A brief look at what's available in Tucson

Sonoran Sunrise Grove, ADF

East Broadway and Freeman Road

**Why on the East Side:** The Rev. Kirk Thomas, 53, decided to let his group worship on his East Side property around 2001.

**Background:** After previously meeting in parks and homes around Tucson, the group got its own worship site on the East Side property of Thomas, who described building the stone circle as "an exercise in piety."

**What it does:** Public, pan-Celtic, polytheistic religious organization that meets every Saturday at the Summerlands Stone Circle on the property of Thomas' home. Group beliefs include respect for nature, religious freedom, and celebrating solar and lunar cycles. Members can also participate at any level.

**You may not know:** Sonoran Sunrise Grove does not have any rituals that involve the spilling of blood, according to Foster. Typical offerings run more like oats and corn for the Earth Mother. The group is also very ecologically friendly.

**Cost:** Free for attending ceremonies but to officially join the group there is a \$15 annual fee. Membership in the national organization is also \$15 and a quarterly newsletter will run you \$15 annually.

For more information, visit [www.ssg-adf.org/](http://www.ssg-adf.org/).

Spirit In Action Center

6979 E. Broadway, Suite 125

**Why on the East Side:** Owner Vickie Wortman said she saw the need for something like the center on the East Side since most metaphysical centers and bookstores were in Midtown and on the Northwest Side.

**Background:** Run by principal founder and owner Wortman since 1998.

**What it does:** Assists people who are looking to engage and get educated in various forms of spirituality. Boasts a members' library on topics from Buddhism to metaphysics. Offers a mentoring program for people searching for awareness and realization, according to Wortman. Hosts classes and various practitioners. The Spirit in Action Center contains a healing room, a counseling room, a community board for people to post messages and a large room for teaching martial arts.

**You may not know:** The center does not provide spiritual gurus. Instead, the center helps people understand their choices, according to Wortman.

**Cost:** Automatic membership for attending any class; they usually run runs three hours and cost about \$25.

For more information, visit [www.siacenter.com/](http://www.siacenter.com/).

The Temple of the Presence  
11902 E. Irvington Road, when facility is completed.

**Why on the East Side:** Carolyn and Monroe Shearer found an attractive property on the East Side and purchased it, where a Temple of the Presence facility is under construction. The Shearers moved to Tucson around 2000 from Vermont, says spokeswoman and daughter Maria Shearer

**Background:** The Temple of the Presence was started by the couple around 1996 because "it was what they were meant to do," said Maria Shearer.

**What it does:** The Temple of the Presence aims to follow the strain of truth through various world religions, according to Maria Shearer. Basic beliefs include reincarnation and karma. Goal is self-realization. Some sermons are broadcast over the Internet, where the temple has a following. "Everyone is looking for something," Maria Shearer said. "It just depends what you're looking for."

**You may not know:** The Temple of the Presence has weekly meetings on the Northwest Side until the East Side facility opens

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