

# BUSINESS

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BUSINESS BUZZ

## Inventor gear heads to Smithsonian

By all rights, Gilbert resident Lon Saffko's work in adapting computers to help quadriplegics conduct simple tasks should have made him a rich man.

For a variety of reasons, it didn't. But his pioneering use of voice-activation systems in the 1980s and '90s is about to get some much-deserved recognition. His inventions will become part of an exhibit on technology in medicine at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

The Smithsonian also is using the corporate records of his now-defunct Tempe company, Saffko International Inc., to document its rise from "garage to Wall Street."

"They called me in May and asked if I had any of the original documents and equipment that could be used," Saffko said. "I told them I'd be delighted for my company to reside in the Smithsonian."

Saffko first used his SoftVoice voice-activated software system in 1985 to adapt an Apple IIe computer for a paralyzed man in Yakima, Wash. It allowed him to control such functions as turning lights on or off, locking or unlocking doors and dialing a phone.

He continued working on the sys-



The SenSei computer system was invented by Valley resident Lon Saffko to help disabled people conduct basic tasks.

tem for nearly a decade, moving his company to the Valley in 1989. He had been selling the systems since 1986, but because they cost more than \$9,000 and insurance companies were reluctant to cover the costs for most patients, he was

forced to dissolve his company in 1996. He made his patents and copyrights part of the public domain.

"It was just too much," Saffko said, adding that the company broke even.

The Smithsonian exhibit is

scheduled to open in November, he said.

Not to mention ...

... Bubble, bubble, no Arizona trouble: The folks over at the Bank



Lee McPheters

One Arizona Blue Chip Economic Forecast aren't all that concerned about the dreaded housing bubble that some economists predict is about to burst. Contributing editor Lee McPheters says in the current edition that Arizona is in a

favorable position to withstand the forces of a deflating housing bubble because of its population growth and job creation.

"A decline in Arizona housing prices seems unlikely as long as job growth remains strong, interest rates are low, and the national economy is sound," McPheters said. "As the bubble ultimately deflates, housing price rises in the Grand Canyon State will continue at a moderate pace."

Contributor: Yvette Armendariz.