

## **Arizona Republic, The (Phoenix, AZ)**

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#### **SUNSCAPE VILLAS OFFERS STATE'S 1ST VIRTUAL CONCIERGE**

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Scottsdale residents now have an online "errand master" with the launch of the state's first virtual concierge service at Sunscape Villas, southwest of Indian School and Hayden roads.

The idea is a brainchild of Southwest Concierge Inc., a personal-service and time-management company founded two years ago by former information-technology guru Tim O'Connell.

The virtual concierge kiosk was installed at Sunscape Villas in early October and has been a hit with residents, sales and marketing coordinator Teresa Santiago says. The service, which uses a computer with a camera and wireless Internet, connects users with an offsite personal concierge who is available from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. six days a week. Requests for theater tickets, housekeeping, grocery shopping, floral delivery, car rentals and wake-up calls are arranged through live sessions online.

Clients provide credit card information to O'Connell, who bills vendors separately and charges \$7.50 per transaction.

"It's a secure service for customers, because their credit card isn't going out there to a bunch of different people," O'Connell said. "We keep their billing information on file, charge the client, and I write a check to the vendor for services."

The virtual kiosk is built around the Intel-based Apple iMac. The computer is "locked down" from general use and Web surfing and is dedicated to interactive conversations with the concierge service.

The Scottsdale kiosk will serve as a pilot program. Future clients need only to have wireless Internet access for the service.

Santiago was sold on the concept after arranging errand services through O'Connell's company.

"When Tim and I met, we started talking about how his IT background brought him into this business," Santiago said. "We wanted to find a way to provide concierge services to clients without having to provide the physical space on site. This seemed like a perfect solution."

People like the concept, Santiago says, because "it's not just a voice on the phone; there's a person on the other end."

The virtual service is a perk that will help sell the one- and two-bedroom condominiums, she says.

"Our one-bedroom units start at \$169,500. For that price, very few condos offer amenities like a personal concierge," she said.

Sunscape, built in the late 1970s, has 442 units. To date, about 300 have been sold. Future enhancements for the concierge system include printable menus, an online calendar of events and theater reservation capabilities.

Sunscape resident Mike Smith was one of the first users of the virtual kiosk. Smith's parents received flowers and chocolate as birthday gifts at their home in Provo, Utah, via arrangements made through the service.

"Their birthdays are just two days apart, and I hadn't gotten them anything yet," Smith said, adding that the surprise gifts "made them so happy they were in tears."

"This made me look like a million bucks," Smith added.

"Everybody works today," O'Connell said. "Most families are two-income earners, and time is at a premium. The virtual assistants do the things that need to get done but no one gets around to."

Southwest Concierge has about 4,000 clients Valley-wide, including Chandler Regional Hospital, and Biltmore Towers on East Camelback Road. Some professionals also use the firm for short-term office help.

"Once people use us, they wonder how they ever lived without it," he said. "If it's not illegal or immoral, we'll do it."

Southwest  
Concierge Inc.

For more information, call (480) 888-8674 or visit [www.swconcierge.com](http://www.swconcierge.com).

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