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# Replace emptiness with community

The knock on the door came at 6:45 on a Tuesday morning. "Have you seen my computer?" my roommate asked confusedly as we both attempted to wake up.

I looked into the living room realizing both our new laptops, my cell-phone and her purse containing a camera, iPod, and credit cards were gone. We had been robbed while sleeping of more than \$3,000 of merchandise in the gated community in downtown Phoenix that we moved into only months ago.



BRADEN  
KAY

I grew up in the District of Columbia, spent two years living across from housing projects in St. Louis, and recently lived in Chicago and worked in Gary, Ind. Those cities have all graced the top 10 most dangerous cities in the United States.

But Phoenix is the city that now inspires fear in me. None of my previous homes have the reputations for being safe, but Phoenix is the first place I have been burglarized while in my own home.

The burglary exacerbated a tension I have felt since I moved here. I bought a condo downtown when I was accepted as a doctoral student in the new School of Sustainability at Arizona State University. I could have lived in Tempe, but I chose to live downtown in order to invest in Phoenix's redevelopment and be a part of its exciting change.

However, the social emptiness as I walk through the

quiet, almost-untouched manicured landscape of my planned community, coupled with a fear of getting robbed

## MY TURN

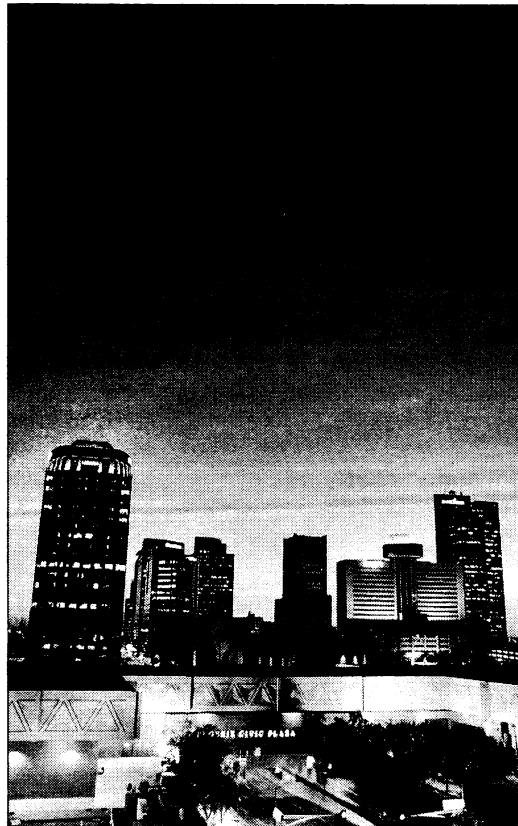
with no help in sight has inspired a fearful loneliness I never felt in D.C. or St. Louis. In those urban neighborhoods, children were constantly playing in the streets, people talked on stoops and porches, and neighborhood dog walks and meals were the norm. People came from diverse backgrounds and lived together with strong support groups; excited to help each other out.

While I have enjoyed and appreciated the community that I have experienced at the biweekly farmers market, morning chats with my few talkative neighbors, First Fridays and the establishments from Heritage Square to Grand Avenue to Roosevelt, it hasn't been enough to assuage my fears.

Many of the downtown communities, from gated establishments like mine to the newly open Taylor Place residences, still lack social connections and a sense of excitement. Instead the lack of people and action create an urban wariness that can turn to fear at some corners at night.

This is not an issue that will be solved by one person or entity. It won't be solved by monetary investment and planning strategy alone.

If downtown Phoenix is to turn around and reach its potential, more than just convention centers, themed restaurants, stadiums and classrooms need to be built. We as neighbors need to build community with barbecues, happy hours, children's events and identity-building festivals, not



Downtown Phoenix has a growing skyline but a sense of community is lacking, the writer says.

EMMANUEL LOZANO/  
THE REPUBLIC

with more chain-linked fences, double-bolted locks and security cameras.

Every section of the downtown community — City Hall, local businesses, ASU and residents themselves — needs to socially connect as people that share a place that has the potential to be a welcoming, invigorating and safe home. Every aspect of our city, from hosting conventions, to sup-

porting entrepreneurs and educating our children, will improve if our social connections improve.

We must see beyond new buildings and security gates to reach out to each other to create a safe and exciting downtown.

*The writer is a student in the School of Sustainability at Arizona State University.*

## Let's talk about this

ASU student Braden Kay finds a "social emptiness" in his downtown community that inspires a fear he never felt in cities with much tougher reputations than Phoenix has.

Are his fears well-founded? Is his prescription for a better, safer downtown — more social-connection activities — on target?

This is a conversation worth having. Send us your thoughts. **E-mail:** [central.letters@arizonarepublic.com](mailto:central.letters@arizonarepublic.com). **Fax:** 602-444-7985. **Mail:** Letters to the Editor, Phoenix Republic, P.O. Box 2244, Phoenix, 85002.