

Order In And On The Court

The Valley knows [Grant Woods](#) as the media-savvy former Attorney General and one of the nation's top trial lawyers. But did you know he was John McCain's very first Chief of Staff? He's written a movie. He could be appointed Senator without going through a pesky election — and he's one of the biggest sports fans you'll find.

BY BROOKE AVANA

PHOTO BY TRACY RASINSKI

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Grant Woods

If this story were about *all* the interesting things Grant Woods has done or the major things he's accomplished in his life, well, we might have to kill a few more trees than what would be considered environmentally or politically correct. But a feature on one of the most interesting men you'll find wouldn't do him justice if we didn't list some of the things the Mesa native has seen and achieved, so for Valley newcomers we'll list a few. Like being elected Attorney General of Arizona twice. Being the point man on the mega-billion-dollar national tobacco settlement case. (Do an archive check on the *New York Times* website and see who was standing front and center on the front page after the verdict was reached over a decade ago.) Contributing either in a major or behind-the-scenes way in many of the big deals needed to bring teams to the Valley, keep them, or get stadiums or arenas built. For years he hosted a popular radio talk show; he contributes to or handles some of the highest-profile trials in the state, including a recent big murder case; he was recently inducted into the International Academy of Trial Lawyers, limited to the 500 best plaintiff and defense trial lawyers in the world; and most importantly of all, he's married to a former local TV anchor (Marlene) and together they have five great kids.

Okay, now let's concentrate on some of the things even lifelong Phoenix residents might not know. Starting with this one — you know the white-haired gentleman who serves as the Senior U.S. Senator from Arizona who is possibly a few months away from being the leader of the free world? Well, Grant helped launch John McCain's political career as his first Chief of Staff not long after he got out of law school. "I was with John or talked with him pretty much every day through a good part of the '80s," Woods described to *POST* in his spacious, memorabilia-laden Phoenix office. "After he won the Senate seat, we took a trip to Micronesia and made it back to DC the day before he was sworn in. We really didn't have any time to take it all in. We walked over to the Capitol, and as he entered, he patted me on the back and said, 'Well, boy, I guess we did it.' I went up to the gallery, and when they

called his name and he was sworn in, it was very emotional for me. Because we had done it, and I was so proud for him and for the country."

What a way to launch yourself into politics. But Grant and McCain formed a bond in those early years that is still strong, even though they obviously don't spend as much time together. But the time they are together isn't wasted. Case in point, this past winter. Grant joined McCain on the campaign bus at just the time the momentum was starting to build. "This whole thing has happened pretty fast, so I'm still kind of absorbing the real possibility that he may be President. I was with him in New Hampshire and we really didn't know how it would turn out. Two months later he had won it all [the Republican nomination]. But he won because he was the best candidate and never gave up, and he worked harder than anybody else. Those are the same reasons why he won all of the earlier races where I was involved."

While being named Ambassador to Tahiti or Monaco would be a decent gig for anyone in McCain's inner circle should he claim the White House, Grant might be too busy for that. But hey, anyone could make some room in their schedule for a night or two in the Lincoln Bedroom, you'd think. "I don't know how much my life will change if John wins or if it will at all, but the Lincoln Bedroom would be cool. I will just be happy for the country that we have a true great American as President. It's been a while."

Grant has been very successful in politics himself, and obviously has a lot of influential friends in both political parties. The itch of politics does surface personally for Grant every now and then, as you would assume it would. He's just not sure if he needs to scratch it. And if he ever does get involved in public office, he will be sure he does it his way.

"I've never ruled it out completely, but then again, I haven't run again. There are a lot of down sides, but I am passionate about the issues and the need for change in this country. I ran for Attorney General to focus on civil rights, the environment, consumers, and victims of crime. I felt I had done my best, so there was no real reason to run again.



“I decided a long time ago to play every sport I could for as long as I could. I turn 54 this year and I’m still playing most of them. I play tennis or basketball just about every day and still love the games. I am competitive, no doubt, but hopefully not as big of a jerk as in decades past.”

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There are a lot of things in life worth doing, so you don’t have to stick to just one thing.”

What he said about never running again means this. If McCain is elected President, it will create a hole in the Senate that Governor Napolitano will have to fill with an appointment. You can safely assume Grant is on her very, very short list of potential appointees.

But whatever the future holds in regards to politics and public service for Grant, he will not let it get in the way of his love of sports. He’s a season ticket holder to most of the teams in town, and it’s a rare summer night you don’t see him at Chase Field sitting in his seat not far behind home plate. Oftentimes with one of his kids, including daughter Ava, who for a four-year-old sees a lot more of Conor Jackson, the first baseman, than she does Dora the Explorer. “My kids log a lot of time at sporting events. Ava has been going to Diamondbacks games since she was a baby. She helps me help the umpires call the balls and strikes from our seats.”

He’s at a place in his life now where he can totally control what adventures and challenges he takes on next. Professionally, he stays as busy as he wants with his private clients and public trials. He’ll have about five major ones this year. And when he’s not in a court, he’d prefer to be on one. Be it tennis or hoops, he’s made staying active a major priority. “I decided a long time ago to play every sport I could for as long as I could. I turn 54 this year and I’m still playing most of them. I play tennis or basketball just about every day and still love the games. I am competitive, no doubt, but hopefully not as big of a jerk as in decades past. But I don’t understand people who are indifferent to losing. Losing is no fun, and I want to have fun.”

You could learn from Grant a lot of things about how to be successful and make a difference in life, without ever losing sight of what’s it all worth if you can’t enjoy it. It’s why he can make most things he does seem effortless. But make no mistake, the circles he rolls in and the work that he does is far-reaching and affects a lot of people. He adds a human touch to a cutthroat world, and it’s one of the reasons he’s on the speed dial list of a lot of athletes and high-profile people when they need legal help. “I mainly negotiate a lot of deals and litigate a lot of cases. I’ve spent my life in the courtroom, so people know that I’m not afraid to go all the way if necessary. This generally helps get a better result without having to go to trial. If not, then we get it on in court. This year it looks like I will have four or five major trials, for example. I have represented a lot of athletes over the years, but mostly quietly and behind the scenes for one reason or another. But I like athletes and understand them, so I think they are great clients.”

He’s made a career out of seamlessly excelling in his given field of law, but never failing to constantly reinvent himself as well. And right now some of the more exciting deals Grant’s

negotiating are his own – in the entertainment world. He’s written a crime novel called *Pop Bottle Charley* which is being shopped around publishing houses in New York through his literary agency of Sterling Lord. And he might be spending a little more time in his family’s summer home in Santa Monica if the momentum continues to build for his original screenplay *American-Mexican Girl*. You know how a lot of people like to talk about the screenplay they are working on or have a great idea for? Well, this isn’t one of those fairy tales. *American-Mexican Girl*, which Grant also wrote the title track to, has been in development at Warner Bros. for over a year, and there could be an announcement soon about a shooting schedule for it.

Life has been and is good for Grant Woods, and he’s the first to be thankful for it and not take any of his successes for granted. He’s spent almost two decades in the public eye, rolling with heavy hitters in politics, sports and business, and his office is a testament. Photos, clippings, and other incredible memorabilia line the walls. But right behind his high-backed leather chair is his newest and currently favorite piece. “I saw a great photo of Steve Nash last year in the *New York Times Magazine*. I tracked down the photographer in Europe and talked him into selling me a giant print. Steve was nice enough to sign it (*To Grant: It’s good to be old and crafty, Steve Nash*), and it now hangs right behind my desk. Nash has been my favorite athlete for some time now and he seems to be as great a person as he is a player. We are really lucky to have him in our town.”

That last line is something that most people who have met and dealt with Grant Woods feel as well. **P**

