

Mandela

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“Because I’ve lived here (in Arizona) for 20 years now, I would love to put a sculpture in Scottsdale,” Barker said.

The ballots sell for \$57.50 individually or \$129 framed on Barker’s website, Afridom.com.

Mandela, a political prisoner for 27 years, rose to power to serve as South Africa’s president from 1994 to 1999.

He was hospitalized in early June to treat a recurring lung infection, and his health was said to be improving Friday, according to the Associated Press.

Barker, 74, said the commemorative bronze sculptures could depict Mandela alongside his great-granddaughter Zenani Mandela, 13, who was killed in a car crash three years ago in South Africa.

“I’m not a wealthy person myself,” Barker said, “but I’ve been given a tremendous opportunity here.”

Representatives of Scottsdale Public Art had not heard of Barker’s proposal, though Jana Weldon, senior project manager, said the program allows citizens to initiate public art.

An example is the “Passing the Legacy” bronze monument on the Marshall Way Bridge, just south of Camelback Road in downtown Scottsdale, she said.

“We have others,” Weldon said. “Generally, citizen-initiated ideas do tend to be memorial art.”

Barker also talked about placing sculptures on tribal land of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, as well as in Kansas, his home

state, and Africa.

Barker, who holds dual citizenship in the United States and South Africa, has been an entrepreneur, tennis champion, activist and teacher. Born in Wichita, Kan., he attended Wichita State University and served in the Army from 1962 to 1964.

In 1970, Barker founded Jeans Unlimited Inc., a chain of blue-jeans stores that later shuttered.

After his marriage dissolved, Barker jetted off to Africa in 1982, settling as a teacher at private “street colleges” and, later, integrated government schools.

“My journeys through Africa lasted for nearly 15 years,” Barker said.

Barker now owns Afridom.com, a website and LLC, and teaches math to high-school students who need to pass Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards exam.

Barker bought the ballots, put up for auction by the South African government, for \$2 million, according to past *Arizona Republic* reports.

Todd Belfer, Barker’s former business partner, has donated a portion of his ballots to school districts in recent years, he said.

“Right now we’re trying to give back,” said Belfer, a founder and managing partner of Scottsdale-based Canal Partners LLC. “It’s pretty informative and educational for these kids.”

With the spotlight on Mandela and South Africa, Belfer said he could sell ballots again.

“We might revive it with all the attention,” he said. “I’m glad people are finally paying attention to Mandela and all the great things he’s done in the world.”