

# PHOENIX BUSINESS JOURNAL

## ENERGY

# Electric Horseman

Ted Geisler was a youngster when he learned to ride a horse. The experience spurred him on to leadership success as the CEO of Arizona Public Service



Ted Geisler, president and CEO of Arizona Public Service, at Hunkapi Farms in Scottsdale, where he trains horses to be used for equine therapy. He's with Scoot, a quarter-horse.

GREG BARR

Editor in Chief, Phoenix Business Journal

At age seven, Ted Geisler was invited by a friend whose family headed every year from Arizona to vacation at a ranch in Montana. Perched high in a saddle on the back of a horse in the summer sunshine, his life was never the same.

He spent most of the time learning how to ride, and it came naturally to him. He convinced his parents to take him up north again in a few years to repeat the experience, and when he came back, urged his mom to let him try to find a ranch in the Phoenix area. She agreed, if it was within bike-riding distance of their home.

Then 11, Geisler found a place with stables within the original Gainey Ranch area on Scottsdale Road. When he got there, the man Geisler spoke with said he had sounded like an adult on the phone, and had he known he was that young, he wouldn't have taken the appointment.

Apparently, Geisler was convincing. After promising to help clean out the stalls and help with any other chores at the ranch on weekends in exchange for the man teaching him how to train horses, he was hired. By the time he was 14 in the early 1990s, Geisler earned his spurs as a professional horse trainer.

While working at the ranch, he met Bill Stewart, who had moved to Arizona from Virginia for a new job, and he began teaching him and his wife how to ride. That eventually led to Geisler's other life-changing moment.

"You could just tell right off the bat, this was someone that really was a successful leader. We didn't talk business but you could just tell by his presence and the way he conducted himself. I immediately started looking up to him, almost like a mentor," Geisler recalls.

After convincing himself that trying to pursue a professional career in which he would be solely dependent on the physical condition of his body might not be the greatest idea, he ended up in college in Colorado where he studied science, figuring he would become a large-animal veterinarian.

Even after graduating from college and qualifying for veterinary school, though, Geisler had doubts. Sitting on the tailgate of Stewart's truck at the Scottsdale ranch one weekend, he asked his mentor how you can truly know what your career is meant to be.

"He said, 'You know Ted, I've coached a lot of youngsters about how they think about a career. My advice is if you're questioning it, see if you can get deferred enrollment to vet school, pause for a couple years and go work in an entirely different industry. Test yourself, and you'll learn a lot about your identity and what you're good at.'"

He asked Stewart what he did for a living. The reason Stewart had moved to Arizona a decade earlier was to take a job at Arizona Public Service within the utility's nuclear power division that oversaw the reactor facility at the Palo Verde Generating Station in Tonopah.

'I fell in love with the business'

After getting his deferment from the vet school, that night, Geisler looked at jobs on the APS website. He spotted one,

and was hired for an entry-level job at APS in 2001.

"Rather than just testing myself for two years like [Stewart] said, I fell in love with the business, the company, the industry and never looked back," said Geisler, who has stuck with APS for a quarter century and ascended to the top job as president and CEO of the utility company in April 2025, succeeding longtime CEO Jeff Guldner.

"I always wanted immense responsibility [in my early years at APS], but I never translated that into title or rank," Geisler said. "I just knew that I wanted roles that had big impact, even though you felt a lot of weight and pressure, because in my mind, that translated into having the ability to really make a difference."

Keeping the lights on for 1.4 million residential and business accounts, APS is owned by publicly traded Pinnacle West Capital Corp. And despite its size, with 6,400 employees, Geisler still refers to it as a hometown business, like an entrepreneur might think of his small, family venture.

And he's still training horses on weekends, through his volunteer work during the past 14 years for Hunkapi Programs Inc., the nonprofit organization that runs Hunkapi Farms, a 10-acre equine therapy facility in Scottsdale. The facility, run by founder and Executive Director Terra Schaad, offers therapeutic riding for special needs youths, as well as for first responders or military veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

#### Q&A with Ted Geisler

**When did you realize that you might one day be able to become CEO at APS?** I can't pinpoint that moment exactly, but one of my roles was director of strategy and I reported directly to our COO at the time, when I got to sit alongside the officers of the company as they worked through these big challenges. I learned they were incredibly smart, talented and experienced, and here they were wrestling with these big issues. Sitting there that night, I thought maybe, someday, I could be one of them around that table.

**As a manager, what's the biggest change you observed at APS over the years?** The biggest change was how we develop people. When I first got here, talent development was always about building individuals' subject matter expertise, and you were promoted based on that expertise. So you had leaders rewarded for deep expertise, but perhaps they weren't as good at leading people. And the other thing was people often stayed within a vertical pillar, promoted up and staying in one department. Then we had a couple leaders come in who had a very different view, encouraging people to take on roles throughout the company, even if they had zero experience in that area. I was a beneficiary of that new mindset, and that was a game changer, not just for me personally, but for our company. We were creating enterprise thinkers rather than subject matter experts in specific departments.

**How would you describe your leadership style?** I probably most subscribe to servant leadership. My biggest responsibility in supporting our organization is to make sure I'm helping develop our team and make sure they've got the tools, information and resources to be successful. I truly believe that I work for them. I do a lot of town halls. I like being very

#### THE GEISLER FILE

**Title:** President, CEO and board chair, Arizona Public Service and Pinnacle West Capital Corp.

**Education:** Bachelor's and master's degrees in large animal veterinary of science, Colorado State University; MBA, Arizona State University

**Certifications:** Utility nuclear operations, MIT; chief financial officer certification, Stanford

**Age:** 47

**Family:** Geisler met his wife when she worked at APS; two sons, one in the military overseas

**Favorite place for a business lunch:** The Stockyards Steakhouse on Washington, on the property of the original stockyards where the cattle were traded.

**Favorite place to take the family:** I'm a sweet tooth guy, so my favorite place is the Sugar Bowl. I've been going there since I was a little kid. The manager there still remembers me from when I was five, six years old, barely seeing above the counter and ordering a milkshake. I still get the same flavor milkshake.

present and visible to the entire organization from a strategy standpoint.

**As Arizona continues to grow at a rapid rate with huge economic development projects underway, the future of the power grid is a huge topic of conversation. What's your take on its current status, and where do we go from here?** In short, the grid is going to need to double in size in the next 10 to 15 years. That is the goal we are working to solve. The key to meeting the goal will be a balanced mix of resources, with a meaningfully expanded transmission system. The generation we add to the grid is useless unless you build transmission [infrastructure] to connect it to the customer base. Our [Palo Verde] nuclear power will continue to have a presence on the grid, and we believe long term in its ability to expand. For the foreseeable future, we support the Four Corners coal plant; we think natural gas will be a critical resource to add in the near term, because it's the most flexible, and given the solar radiation in Arizona, utility scale solar and battery storage can be a good resource, from an affordability standpoint, to complement natural gas. That blend of technologies will get us the highest reliability at the lowest cost. That's the formula we are constantly solving."

**With your work at Hunkapi Farms, how long does it take to train a horse for therapeutic work?** How long depends completely on the horse. You want to ride the horse to see if it will be suitable to work with the kids. Maybe [the horse] has one bad habit or is maybe doing something a little challenging, so they ask me to see if we can fix it. It's a way to use the experience I have, toward an amazing cause. They are truly changing lives. Parents come here and are in tears because they see their child show emotion or feelings they never show at home. Exposing an individual to horses for the first time, the stimulation of the senses that it brings out is truly amazing. There are a lot of kids where it completely changed their life.

**What has learning to train horses at a young age and continue to do it most of your life meant for your professional career?** Horses changed my life, you know. If it wasn't for horses, it wouldn't have given me the work ethic, the ability to focus on goals and achieve goals. A lot of my communication style comes from learning to train horses, because you're forced to learn how to communicate through influence without just using words, focusing on subtle cues and positive reinforcement. That's basic leadership. Often when I think about it, if it wasn't for horses, I don't know where I'd be today."

#### A Day in the Life

**We asked Ted to describe a typical workday:**

**4:30 - 5 a.m.** – Wake up, dress for a workout.

**5 - 5:45 a.m.** – Go for a run or to the gym while listening to podcasts.

**5:45 - 6:30 a.m.** – Get ready for the day, read news and trade publications, and check in with my oldest son who is stationed overseas in the Army.

**6:30 a.m.** – Drink a protein shake, then travel to one of APS's service centers or power plants.

**7 - 9 a.m.** – Meet with APS team members in the field or at one of our facilities. It's important to me to hear what our team members are seeing, hearing, and thinking about.

**9 - 10:30 a.m.** – Hold touchpoints with APS leaders to set our priorities for the week and ensure our teams are supported and ready to execute.

**11 - 1 p.m.** – Participate in discussions with community leaders about powering economic growth in Arizona and maintaining a reliable energy grid.

**1 - 5 p.m.** – Lead internal strategy sessions on infrastructure invest-

ments and ways to maintain affordability for customers while meeting growing demand.

**5 - 6:30 p.m.** – Respond to emails and wrap up action items from the day.

**6:30 - 9 p.m.** – Eat dinner at home with my wife and then head out to watch our youngest son's soccer match.

**9 p.m.** – Catch-up with my son, check in on his schoolwork, and prepare for the next day.

**10 p.m.** – Attempt to go to sleep!



APS President and CEO Ted Geisler



Ted Geisler aboard quarter-horse 'Scoot' at Hunkapi Farms in Scottsdale, where he trains horses to be used for equine therapy.



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