

# Cards finally celebrate win

By Lee Shappell  
The Arizona Republic

It looked and felt more like a New Year's Eve party than a place where game plans are formulated.

Upbeat music — selected by "the younger generation," according to owner Bill Bidwill — blared in the background Wednesday afternoon as light glistened off metallic ribbons trailing from red and white helium-filled balloons

that had floated to the top of the auditorium at the Cardinals' Tempe headquarters.

Like the balloons, Proposition 302, the sports and tourism initiative, finally had floated to the top in an election that was initially too close to call. Supporters had to wait more than a week to celebrate while absentee and contested ballots were processed by Maricopa County elections officials.

The measure carried with just under 52 percent in fa-

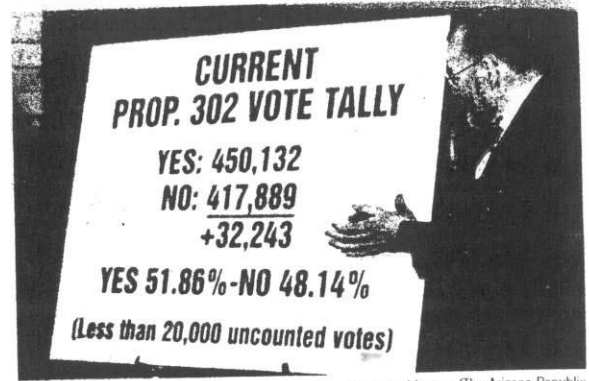
vor.

For Bidwill, the Cardinals owner who brought his team to the desert in 1988 on a promise from Phoenix civic leaders that a new stadium would be built, the wait for a victory celebration had been more than 12 years coming.

"But I'd have gladly waited another week if that's what it took," Bidwill said. "It very definitely is worth the wait."

Proposition 302 provides

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Emmanuel Lozano/The Arizona Republic

Cardinals owner Bill Bidwill was cautious about the stadium vote, but the numbers finally said it was time to celebrate.

## Stadium

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funding for a retractable-roof stadium for the Cardinals and the Fiesta Bowl, as well as funds for the Arizona Cactus League, the Arizona Office of Tourism and Valley youth sports programs by creating a tax on automobiles and hotel/motel rooms rented in Maricopa County and a surcharge on tickets to events in the new stadium.

Bidwill, who on election night said he would wait until the vote was certified to thank supporters and campaign workers, followed through, thanking them "from the bottom of our heart because this is something that's going to benefit the state."

"And, of course, at this stage of the game, I'd like to thank 452,549 voters," Bidwill said.

Since moving to the Valley, the Cardinals have produced only one winning record, 9-7 in 1998 when they went two rounds into the NFL playoffs. Bidwill often has been criticized as being an inept owner. Drumming up public support to help him build a stadium was an arduous task for supporters.

Bidwill, who operates one of the few remaining mom-and-pop teams in the NFL, claims he needs streams of ancillary income — naming rights, luxury suites, signage, parking and concessions — that a new building would provide to be competitive.

His son Michael Bidwill, the team's vice president, legal counsel, and its liaison to the campaign — and who acknowledged that it had, in fact, been he who selected *Celebrate* as the background music for the victory party — said the Valley now will pursue the 2007 Super Bowl, the next one that is available. The new stadium is to open for the 2004 season, assuming that a site is selected by February and that ground is broken next summer.

The Cardinals also announced that the press box in the new stadium will be named in memory of Steve Schoenfeld, who covered the Cardinals and the NFL for *The Arizona Republic* for 12 years. Schoenfeld was struck and killed by a hit-and-run driver in downtown Tempe three weeks ago.

"I'm very touched," said Schoenfeld's widow, Robin, who was the Cardinals' guest at the celebration. "This means so much, but Steve would have hated being the center of attention today."

That was shifted back to the senior Bidwill and those close to the team who persevered through the defeat of the Rio Salado Crossing project 18 months ago, through the resurrection of the movement in the Plan B Task Force created by Gov. Jane Hull, through a close vote in the Arizona Legislature last spring to place the initiative on the ballot, and through the campaign to the voters of Maricopa County.

Whether Proposition 302 was the team's last chance to stay in the Valley, Bidwill said, "Not necessarily, but I can't answer that because I don't know."

"I do know that I didn't want to go through what we would have had to have gone through if it hadn't passed," Bidwill said. "We're glad we're still here."