

Sun City's first and only movie theater – the ALCO *Signs of Sun City's Past by Ed Allen*

By 1971, Sun City's population had grown to more than 18,000, and a 4th shopping center was started – the La Ronde Center. Like the streets around it, the center was circular with Del Webb Blvd slicing through the middle. Surveys of residents had showed a desire for a local movie theater, and this center would include one – the ALCO.

DEVCO owned the building but leased the theater and parking spaces to a group of Phoenix-area investors. The 450-seat theater opened Jan. 12, 1972 with the film "Song of Norway."



While the movie theater had been widely anticipated, it was lightly patronized. DEVCO tried to help keep it going by reducing the leasing fees, but the theater struggled.

A deal was worked out with the Boswell Memorial Hospital Auxiliary to sell books of tickets at a discount to help build attendance, as well as raise funds for the medical center. In 1978, sales through the Auxiliary accounted for more than 60% of the theater's revenues but nowhere near enough to achieve profitability.

Along the way the theater tried to broaden its appeal by offering some "R" and "X-rated" films, but those were even less popular. A return to the "golden oldies" like "Gone with the Wind" spurred attendance for awhile, but the popularity of TV – and movies on TV for free – worked against the ALCO.

As a result, the investing group announced plans to close the theater at the end of their lease. This would be to DEVCO's advantage as they had been leasing the space for a much lower rate than could be obtained from a commercial tenant. Sun City Town Meeting Association members strongly protested the closure, and Meeker gave them the opportunity to show their support by providing a written promise to sell the number of tickets required for the theater to break-even. They had the hospital auxiliary's support, and only needed to marshal their members to add to the number of tickets sold to meet that goal.



The theater stayed alive and in subsequent years was managed for a time by Blair Theatres, and then by United Artists Theatres. Oddly enough, the greatest success of the Alco Theater would come as a place to host community meetings. While residents didn't turn out in great numbers for movies, they filled the theater for public meetings of SCHOA, the Sun City Taxpayers, and other civic organizations. Meetings to discuss Incorporation filled the theater to overflowing. Church groups used the theater until their memberships grew to the point they could build their own facilities.

But movie attendance continued to decline. An offer to turn the ALCO into a live theater fell through, and its last film, the police thriller "Q&A" was shown Feb. 4, 1990. Fewer than 40 people paid the \$2.50 to attend.

The building was soon converted to other commercial uses. The entire center was given a new façade a few years ago, but the curbside planter and two thin, twin pillars remind us of the ALCO's location on the west side of the center. Today, the building is part of the Maxwell Group clinic and offices.

Re: Just connecting

From: Jerry Svensen (jersven4@gmail.com)

To: edsonallen@yahoo.com

Date: Tuesday, November 10, 2020, 9:28 PM MST

Ed, I've learned more from you about ALCO Theater than I ever knew when employed by Webb. I'm surprised that John Meeker didn't send the PR dept. over there periodically at unspecified times to give out door prizes. Residents loved such occasions. They'd have attended more consistently in hopes of being there at the right time. I'm certain that we'd have come up with other promotional ideas to boost attendance.

I treasure the two decades of work in Sun City from late 1961 when the population couldn't have been more than 3,500 to completion of the community with a population of over 47,000. Working with my fellow employees and particularly with individual residents and groups was truly a pleasure. Together we built what today continues to be a Nationally Famous Resort Retirement Community. I was blessed to play a highly gratifying role in the creation of Sun City, Arizona.

Thanks, Ed.
Jerry

On 11/10/2020 3:44 PM, Edson Allen wrote:

OK ... here's the story I've pieced together. ED

You never fully appreciate what you have until it is gone. Toilet paper is a good example.

On Tuesday, November 10, 2020, 4:33:17 PM MST, jersven4 <jersven4@gmail.com> wrote:

Ed, just to let you know, message received. Looking forward to the read.
Thanks
Jerry

Sent from my T-Mobile 4G LTE Device

----- Original message -----

From: Edson Allen <edsonallen@yahoo.com>

Date: 11/10/20 3:53 PM (GMT-07:00)

To: Jerry Svensen <jersven4@gmail.com>

Subject: Just connecting

Hi Jerry! Tried contacting you a couple of days ago, but the emails came back as undeliverable. Turns out I was using your previous cox.net address from older emails.

Thinking you might have changed addresses, I tried calling you. 623-937-7378 The phone rang and rang ad rang, and finally told me that messages could not be left at this



Now Maxwell Group

REPUBLIC CITY
Thu. Feb. 16, '78 O The Arizona Republic

Theater closure raises ire

The planned closing of the Alco Theater, after seven years of showing movies in Sun City, has raised the ire of at least one group of Sun City citizens.

Nat Jampel, a spokesman for the Sun City Town Meeting Association, said this week his group is circulating petitions in hopes of keeping the theater open.

The theater, located in the La Ronde Centre, is scheduled to close June 1 when its lease with the Del E. Webb Development Co. expires.

Ed Metzgar, a retiree who manages the theater on the side, said this week he would like to keep open the theater, which in addition to showing movies has been used for civic and church meetings. "It is definitely an important part of the community," he said, "but it doesn't make enough money to satisfy Del Webb."

THE DEVELOPMENT COMPANY has been renting the theater building at a reduced rate, according to Dr. John Aiello, holder of the lease, but now wants a more commercial tenant in the building.

"Everyone is making a mountain out of a molehill here," Aiello said Wednesday. "The fact is Del Webb owns the building and has the right to decide who's in and who's out. That's free enterprise. It doesn't bother me. I would like to see the theater continue but the fact is the people of Sun City have not supported it."

Jampel, who says his group has collected about 3,000 signatures on petition to support the theater, said that the

Alco is a unique operation in a unique setting.

"THIS CITY IS A monument to the late Del Webb," Jampel said. "He understood older people and created Sun City for their comfort, convenience and safety. The Alco is part of that and should not be closed because the development company wants another dollar or two per square foot. It's a matter again of money against people."

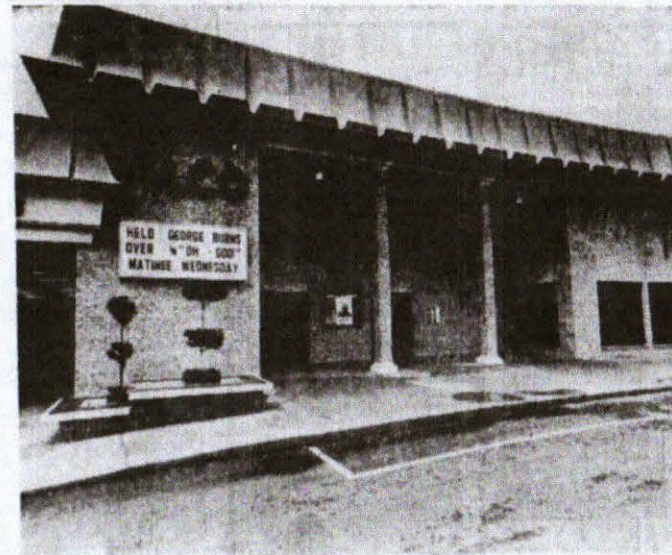
Jampel also charged that Alco closure will be a result of "terrible increases" in rent Del Webb is asking of businesses in the area now that the homes in the first phases of Sun City have been sold. "They want to get every nickle they can out of the storekeepers," he said.

Joe Bulkeley, Del Webb's vice president in charge of commercial leasing, declined to comment on the Alco, other than to confirm the June 1 closing, because John Meeker, head of the company, plans to speak on the subject Feb. 22.

"WE DON'T WANT to steal his thunder," Bulkeley said.

Dr. Aiello, who said he felt as if he's been caught in the middle between the citizens' protests and the theater's economic realities, summed up his comments by saying "Del Webb has been fair with me yet a city that size should have a theater. It would be ideal if one of the theater chains would take it over so it could get the better pictures but none of them have wanted it because the fact is that most of the people who go to movies are under 35 years old."

MIKE PETRYNI



Republic photo

The Alco Theater in Sun City

The Troc is no more

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — The Troc, where for years teen-age kids gawked at the wonders of the female anatomy and old men came in out of the cold, is closing — the victim of automated pornography.

It's been bought by a Chinese restaurateur, Stephen Pang, who plans to restore it to its original Victorian splendor, and then reopen it as a

JUMBO SHRIMP SPECIAL

Steamed Jumbo Ecuadorian Shrimp, Baked Potato, Cole Slaw & Sourdough Bread

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Alco Theatre



2003 Photo from the Adam Martin collection.

14668 N Del Webb Blvd
Sun City AZ 85351

CLOSED

Record #7936

Opened: **January 12, 1972**
Closed: **February 4, 1990**
Current Use: **Hospital**
Demolished:

Capacity: **400 seats**
Architect(s):
Architectural Style(s):
National Register:
Current Organ: **none**

Also Known As:

Previously operated by: **Blair Theatres, United Artists Theatres**

An article in the 1/12/1972 edition of the Arizona Republic reported that "Song of Norway" opened "the new Alco Theater in the La Ronde Shopping Center, Sun City, today..."

A number of articles in the Arizona Republic from early 1978 discussed plans for this theatre to close when its lease was up on 6/1/1978 as it was not supported by the residents of the surrounding Del Webb retirement community.

Blair Theatres operated this location in the 80s before selling it to United Artists.

The theater was used for town meetings for a number of years after and in 1990 a deal was rejected to turn it into a live theater. It has since been turned into a series of medical offices.

Ticket-sales pledge is sought to keep Sun City theater open

By JOHN HARRIGAN

SUN CITY — Town Meeting Association members who have protested the closure of Alco Theater were told Thursday they must promise written support to keep the action alive.

John W. Meeker, president of Del E. Webb Development Company (DEVCO), told Rotary Club members here Wednesday the company will continue to lease space to the theater at cost if the association would promise in writing to sell movie tickets for the hospital auxiliary.

Boswell Memorial Hospital auxiliary has helped support the theater and itself by selling tickets, but sales have dropped from 2,575 in 1975 to 2,000 in 1977. Auxiliary sales account

for more than 60 percent of the theater's revenue.

Meeker warned that the theater wasn't the only endangered species.

"The bus system and women's softball, both underwritten by DEVCO, are also on the endangered species list that are going to require community support."

Dr. John Aiello, the theater lessee said last week that the development company had been renting out the theater building at a reduced rate and now wanted a more commercial tenant. The theater has been scheduled to close upon expiration of its lease with the Webb company June 1.

Aiello could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Meeker said Webb had received many petitions and letters bemoaning DEVCO's closing of Alco.

"For the record, DEVCO is not closing Alco. The lessee, Dr. Aiello, up until now has given us every indication that he could no longer endure the losses," Meeker said.

Meeker claimed Webb was currently renting at a breakeven figure of \$3.86 a square foot per year. He also noted that Webb received no rent from Aiello from October 1976 through May 1977.

He said the majority of residents have simply given up on movies and watch television. The minority here who attend movies go to see only those that are not featuring sex, pornography, or violence, he said.

"We felt it could no longer succeed as a commercial operation," Meeker said, but added that DEVCO would keep it open if TMA would make its commitment.

Association treasurer Nat Jampel said the association would not make a decision on the matter until its March 13 meeting.

Jampel said he doubted that the current rent of about \$2,000 a month, was really a break-even figure.

"I don't care if only 100 people go to that theater. The point is that this something promised to us by the late Mr. (Del) Webb as part of the recreational complex," Jampel said. The present Webb administration, he claimed, has "no head, no heart, no consciences. They're only out for a buck," he said.

3 waken occasionally after hatchet assault

Central Arizona Bureau

Three members of a Coolidge family who were clubbed in the head early Wednesday with the blunt edge of a hatchet drifted in and out of consciousness Thursday while receiving treatment at the University of Arizona Medical Center in Tucson.

Dicky Ray Barnes, 20, and his brother, Terry Lee, 14, were listed in guarded condition. A sister, Neta, 11, was reported in serious condition.

The youngsters' father, Olf Dempsey Barnes, 48, has been charged with three counts of assault

The jailer said an order has been posted in the complex restricting Barnes from all visitors except his attorney. The jailer said he does not know whether the order was posted by law enforcement officials or by the suspect's attorney.

Barnes is serving five years probation on a plea-bargained aggravated assault charge in 1974 that was reduced from assault with intent to commit rape and lewd and lascivious acts.

That charge stemmed from an incident involving another of Barnes' daughters, court records show.

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Theater opens

"Song of Norway," the film musical, will open the new Alco Theater in the La Ronde Shopping Center, Sun City, today with continuous performances beginning at 1 p.m.

General manager of Alco Theaters is Frank Langley; house managers at Sun City will be John Pyrtle (one of the partners) who has had over 20 years experience in sound and projection equipment; and James Langley who will be in charge of service. Other members of the Alco organization are Dr. John S. Aiello and attorney Daniel Cracchiolo.

Arizona Republic January 12, 1972

Clipped By:



tericson
Mon, Nov 9, 2020

**Pyrtle Partner
in Sun City theater**

John Pyrtle has retired after 17 years with the RCA service department to become a partner in the Alco Theater to be opened in La-Ronde Shopping Center at Sun City. Pyrtle will be in charge also of installations for Alco, a fully automated system, Frank J. Langley announced.



Pyrtle



Hadley

Sun City gets 4th shopping center

SUN CITY — A fourth shopping center is rising here to accommodate the spiraling population, now tabbed at 18,217, in this retirement community.

The newest and largest, La Ronde Center, is at Del Webb and Thunderbird boulevards and Talisman Road in Phase

II, the north section of the city. Construction costs are placed at \$3.1 million.

The newest and largest, La Ronde Center, is at Del Webb and Thunderbird boulevards and Talisman Road in Phase

Firms take harder look at ventures

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Many companies are taking a harder look at the risk of failure before coming out with new products and services, a survey of marketing executives indicates.

The Conference Board said yesterday a poll of officials of 125 companies showed a trend toward tightening the screening and control of new ventures. Research is being intensified to be sure that market needs are thoroughly examined before new product ventures are launched, the board said.

On the average, about 10 per cent of the total sales of surveyed companies came from major products or services introduced over the last five years, according to the board.

Free-standing buildings already adjacent to La Ronde are the First National Bank, the Arizona Bank and First Federal Savings and Loan. A small park will back a service station on another corner.

First tenants are expected to open their doors in the new center in December.

Major tenants include Revco Drug Store, Mayo's Home Furnishings, El Rancho Supermarket and Wilcrest Restaurant. Other shops will be women's and men's clothing stores, beauty shop, shoe store and candy shop.

Sun City's other shopping areas, the Grand Avenue, Plaza del Sol and Sun Bowl Plaza centers, offer a total of 57 stores.

A Del Webb spokesman said that addition of the theater follows a recent community survey in which residents indicated they wanted a theater.

A bowling alley nears completion near Lakeview Center and a second miniature golf course is expected to be adjacent to Town Hall South.

Arizona Republic June 17, 1971

Clipped By:



tericson

Mon, Nov 9, 2020

Re: Alco Theater

From: Benjamin Roloff (bensuncity@gmail.com)

To: edsonallen@yahoo.com

Date: Monday, November 9, 2020, 9:26 AM MST

Hi Edson,

I apologize for the delay in responding, but after the election last Tuesday I consciously tried to detach from all the noise of the outside world for a week, which included TV, radio, Internet, etc. It was a nice break with movies, books, and music substituted. I'm back!

I do not know as much as I would like about the ALCO theater. Do we not have a 3 ring binder or two at the museum that contains all the SCAHS newsletters?

Anyway, I would go with the earlier date for sure as to the start. I know we have pictures of the groundbreaking for the La Ronde Center, and I think the group that was leasing the theater and parking spaces were represented. For some reason, I know that the theater was widely anticipated but lightly patronized. I recall that the very first movie to show there was "Song of Norway." For some reason, the first information I found on the theater led me to believe the location was on the east side of Del Webb Blvd. and I clung to that idea for several years. It was my assumption that the space was where Lou's "Tivoli Gardens" was operating back in the mid-90's when we first explored Sun City as a potential retirement home. In the last 3 years I found some short references to correct that idea but led me to another false assumption. I falsely concluded the location as to where the original "Lucky" (?) grocery store was located. (BPD's current site.) I remember asking Don Tuff's about that a couple of years ago, and he said, "No way!" He told me the theater was down on the other end of the center and the most SW lease space. I think that site was a furniture store when we moved here in '97. Maybe "Albin's"? You might check with Don tomorrow before or after the zoom meeting?

Yes, I know that the theater really struggled with profitability early, and I recall somewhere reading about DEVCO kind of helping them out as a community service. (reduce lease numbers for both interior space and for parking spaces.) Yes, I know about the deal cut between the Boswell Hospital Auxiliary and the ALCO owner to sell books of tickets and the arrangement had some initial success. However, even that was not sufficient to reach profitability and the original lessor gave up the lease. As I recall, two residents formed a partnership with an investor from Phoenix to take over the lease. They, too, renewed the agreement with the Boswell Auxiliary to sell books of tickets, and tried through news releases to coax residents into purchasing them in larger numbers than they had when working with the previous tenant. I don't know if the Auxiliary wearied to this fund raising activity, but I do know the results were even less successful than past efforts. The new tenants also vocally complained of the cost of the monthly lease per sq. ft. and for the required payment to use parking spaces.

One of the great successes of the ALCO was in hosting community meetings in a nice setting with its seating for 500-600 guests. During the 70's and 80's the number of meetings with large attendance by residents was staggering compared to today. It was not only meetings of organizations like SCHOA or the Sun City Taxpayers but also groups like the Sun City Retirement Community Association, Town Meeting Association, Incorporation groups, DEVCO, church groups, (services for churches before their buildings were finished etc.) who made pretty much constant use of the facility. I have never found any reference as to whether those groups paid for the use of the auditorium.

Back to the second group who held the lease. They promised to have one of the owners at the theater for each movie night to greet customers, answer questions, listen to concerns etc. The new group changed movie distribution companies and promised a wider variety of films including some "R" and maybe even an "X" rated film on occasion. However, to head off potential problems with concern over "edgy" offering, the new operators offered an instant refund to any patron who walked out because they were offended by either audio or visual transmission.

Ben

p.s. The AZ State History Archives began a "soft" opening about five weeks ago. They now allow me, and other register researchers, to make an appointment once per week to look at materials for a four hour block of time. I had a time slot last Friday and am scheduled again this Friday. The last three trips down there I was the only one in the reading room other than 3-4 librarians/archivists who were working. The reading room is the size of a small basketball gymnasium. Talk about socially distanced! Anyway, I have attached a copy of the notes I took on Friday, as they cover January 1 to April 1 of 1979 issues of the "Sun Citizen." A lot of the news items concerned building in Sun City West, the creation of PORa etc. I thought you would likely be interested so my notes are attached.

On Thu, Nov 5, 2020 at 1:45 PM Edson Allen <edsonallen@yahoo.com> wrote:

Greetings, Ben! Do you have any info in your files on the Alco Movie Theater that was in the LaRonde Center in the '70s and '80s? I thought I'd do an article on it for my "Signs of the Past" page in our monthly ACORN here at Royal Oaks, but can not find the article I did years ago for a SCAHS newsletter.

I did find some conflicting notes, however. Meeker in his report of developments by year, claimed it opened with the center in 1971. I have another source that shows 1974. I believe its final showing was May 31, 1990.

I recall there was quite a story about how interest was drummed up in having a movie theater, but the details are all in the lost article. Don't find anything on our website. Also discovered while working on the hospital history that at one point a deal was worked out so

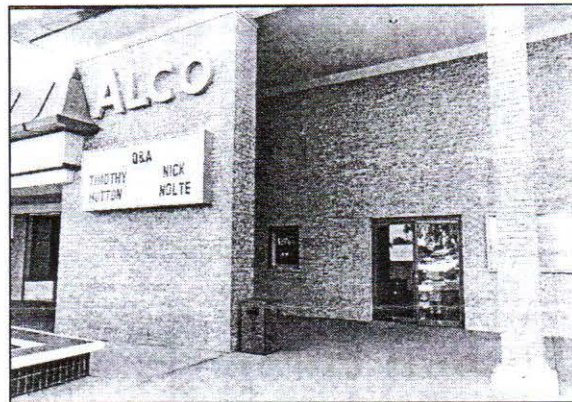
Before we give you the answers to the quiz in our Spring Newsletter, here's a new search for little known facts about our past. Be the first to call in the correct answer to the Historical Society at 623-974-2568, and you'll receive a set of 26 "*Memories of the Sun Cities.*" Call at any time of the day, as the answering machine will record your answer and tell us when you called. As before, the answers will be on display at the Society.

- 1) *What were the original names of the first three Sun City recreation centers — the ones we now call Oakmont, Fairview, and Mountain View?*
- 2) *What three things had been planned for the vacant land located between the former Sundome and the former Crestview/Vacation Headquarters building?*

Now for the answers to the last quiz:

The first question asked about Sun City's movie theater. It was named the **Alco**, and opened in 1974 in the LaRonde Center in the building that now houses the Amish Furniture Store. Its final showing, on May 31, 1990, was the police thriller "Q&A," starring Timothy Hutton and Nick Nolte. Fewer than 40 people were in attendance in the 437-seat theater.

Tickets cost \$2.50!



Our second question asked about the largest model home offered in Sun City West. It was the 4,580-sq. ft. English manor style **Tudor**, with a base price of \$395,000. It included a 900-sq. ft. "Great Room," a library, maid's quarters, butler's pantry, and an exercise room off the master bath.

Among the fine interior touches were a spiral staircase leading to a study loft, Roman columns lining the entry to the living area, arched doorways throughout, and a tiled garage floor. Outside security shutters could be programmed to close when the sun struck them. The deluxe features drove the price to more than \$500,000.

John Meeker, president of DEVCO, hoped that offering larger luxury homes would attract the affluent that were moving into Scottsdale. The Tudor, and a slightly smaller Spanish-style **Monterrey**, drew 25,000 lookers in the first three weeks — but no buyers. The two new luxury models were announced just as interest rates skyrocketed, and they are the only two of their kind in Sun City West.

The Search for Floyd Johnson's Museum

We wish we had met Floyd Johnson when he lived in Sun City! Like many who move here, Floyd had an intriguing background. But he had something more, a strong drive to start a museum.

Floyd loved the west. After returning from World War I, he worked as a game warden in Colorado and New Mexico. One time, he was assigned as an undercover agent in Louisiana, and brought a band of poachers to justice. His passion, however, was preserving the old west, and wherever he went, he collected items of historical value. Eventually, he moved to Sun City.

He wanted a permanent home for his collection, and he began to look for an old homestead to convert to a museum. Harvey Finks, a local attorney, recalls traveling throughout the state with Floyd, looking for the right location. He established a non-profit, tax-exempt entity known as the Johnson Historical Museum of the Southwest. Unfortunately, Floyd died in 1978 before finding the right location. Having no family, he directed that his estate be used to create the museum he had so hoped for.

Mr. Finks served as corporate secretary and continued the search on behalf of Floyd's estate. Events unfolding in the southeast corner of the estate would soon lead to the opportunity that Floyd Johnson had been searching for.

Let's step back to 1884, when a Texan by the name of John Slaughter bought a Spanish land grant near Douglas consisting of some 80,000 acres, most of which lay in Mexico. It was known as the San Bernardino Ranch. Slaughter died in 1922, and his widow continued to live on the ranch until she sold it in 1936. At that time, the Mexican government would not allow the land in Mexico to be sold to an American. As a result, the ranch was split into two pieces.

About 20,000 acres lay north of the border and was purchased by an American. In 1978, the Nature Conservancy acquired 2380 acres. This included a 130-acre section that had been designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL), and that included the ranch buildings. Four years later, the United States Fish & Wildlife Service took over the land from the Conservancy, but did not want to administer the NHL.



Mr. Finks learned of the opportunity and immediately took steps to acquire the historical section, as the ranch buildings would be an ideal place to house Floyd Johnson's collection. Johnson's estate, however, covered less than one-third of the funds needed for purchase and restoration. Mr. Finks was determined to realize Floyd's dream and raised the additional capital. After three years of planning and reconstruction, the Slaughter Ranch Museum opened to the public, administered by the Floyd Johnson Foundation. At last Floyd had his museum!

If you wish to visit the museum, take 15th Street east from Douglas. It becomes Geronimo trail, a well-maintained dirt road. It crosses high desert country for 15 miles, and then drops down into the lush San Bernardino Valley. Flowing springs and ponds dictated the location of the ranch house more than 100 years ago, and the springs continue to flow. The museum is open Wednesday - Sunday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. There is a \$5.00 charge for adults.

This “new look” really means giving visitors a better idea of how things might have looked in 1960 and the early years of both Sun City and Sun City West. A donation of furniture from **Julie McGlynn** of Sun City has started the process of returning the living room to a 1960s look. We envision splitting the room diagonally, with everything to the right of the door as you enter being circa 1960 . . . furniture, accessories, draperies, and carpeting. A life-sized likeness of Del Webb will greet you alongside a large photo of opening day.

Wall displays will be greatly simplified, with a shelf beneath holding “flip books” of photos. Eventually, on the wall to your left will be a flat-screen TV on which we will be able to play some of the early films about life in the new community.

Attending to the kitchen tasks will be a life-sized cutout of a 1960s housewife. Other than this, the kitchen and bathroom look like they did when this was a model home.

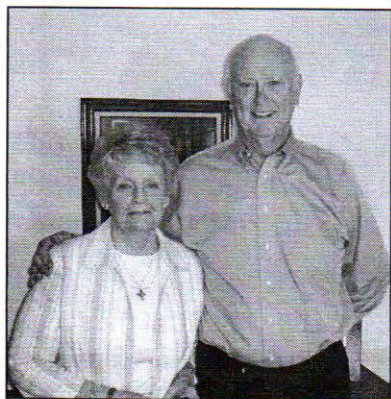
The front bedroom will become a display room for exhibits that change periodically. Perhaps one on baseball in the spring, or the story of the evolution of medical care. Other possibilities include a look at early transportation options, and the evolution of the church community. Each new exhibit will give you another reason to return to 10801 Oakmont.

The present meeting room will feature the birth and growth of Sun City West. The former sales office that was appended to the house will continue to feature the town of Marinette and the story of the years leading up to 1960. We have more ideas, but we need to take this step-by-step as funds permit. All donations toward this worthwhile project will be greatly appreciated.

We’re excited about the possibilities of telling an old story in a new and fresher manner. We’ll keep you posted on progress, and at some point will announce a “grand opening” for members to preview the first round of changes. Meanwhile, stop by and watch “the good old days” unfold.

1960 Webb Sales Manager Visits

Had you come out to Sun City on the opening weekend in January 1960, you’d have found **Owen Childress** busy marshalling his small sales force. They were completely overwhelmed by the crowds, never dreaming that 100,000 people would show up over the four-day weekend! Owen and his wife, Marie, stopped by the SCAHS house on Oakmont recently, and he admitted it was his first time back since the days of the five original model homes.



Looking out the window, Owen recalled running over to Safeway for receipt books, as the Webb sales forms were soon used up. He instructed his men to get names and addresses, along with \$500 deposits, and they would follow-up later with the proper sales forms. The paved portion of Oakmont ended at the fifth model, and Owen recalled one man running in, wanting Owen to accompany

him to a specific site further along the dirt path. “Here,” he said, “I want whatever lot has this tall tree.” Owen promptly wrote out a receipt specifying the tree and the approximate distance from the end of the paved road. Sales of 237 houses that opening weekend laid to rest any doubt about the success of a well-planned, active adult community!

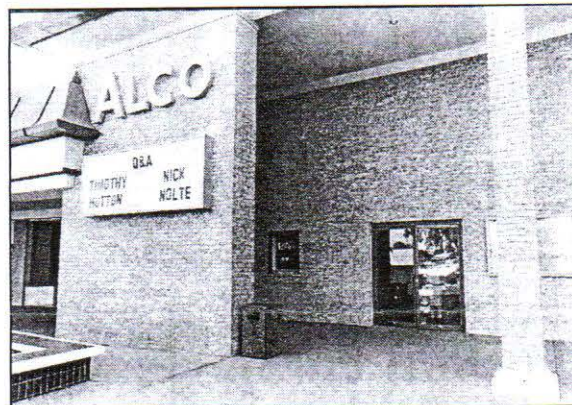
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Among the fine interior touches were a spiral staircase leading to a study loft, Roman columns lining the entry to the living area, arched doorways throughout, and a tiled garage floor. Outside security shutters could be programmed to close when the sun struck them. The deluxe features drove the price to more than \$500,000.

John Meeker, president of DEVCO, hoped that offering larger luxury homes would attract the affluent that were moving into Scottsdale. The Tudor, and a slightly smaller Spanish-style **Monterrey**, drew 25,000 lookers in the first three weeks — but no buyers. The two new luxury models were announced just as interest rates skyrocketed, and they are the only two of their kind in Sun City West.

running.

- Jimmy Durante was among the featured entertainers at the Sun Bowl.
- DEVCO produced a movie titled "**The Story of Arizona and Sun City**", and it was shown to sales complex visitors in a small theatre. It was narrated by Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater and was a bit corny, but it was very well received.
- Sun City became the 9th largest city in Arizona.
- A joint venture of Leisure World and Western Savings announced a new gated retirement project on the failed Golden Hills property. An intensive advertising program featuring television personality Arthur Godfrey was aired on television, radio, in newspapers, and on billboards with words to the effect: "Sure, visit Sun City, but then come to Leisure World and buy." It was the best free advertising Sun City ever received. There really wasn't any comparison between the two projects except in Gary Driggs' mind. Mr. Driggs was the executive vice president of Western Savings. Also, Ross Cortese began a paid column in the Sun City newspaper advertising Leisure World benefits such as safety.
- Ahwatukee was also opened as a combination retirement and conventional housing development on I-10 south of Tempe. This project was developed by the Presley Company out of Southern California. Initially retirement was the main focus but was not very successful, and it was subsequently phased out with only conventional housing being offered.
- Sun Lakes opened a mobile home retirement community late in the year south of Chandler one mile east of I-10. Lots were sold along with manufactured mobile homes around a circular golf course copied after Lakes West in Sun City. After the first subdivision was nearly sold out, mobile homes were dropped, and stick-built homes were offered. They continued to sell lots separately with the restriction that a home had to be constructed within certain time limits by Sun Lakes at prevailing prices.
- 107,600 sq. ft. **La Ronde Shopping Center** opened with El Rancho Market, Mayo's Home Furnishings, Revco Drug Store and Alco Movie Theatre. DEVCO made rental and other concessions to obtain the theatre, a highly requested facility, for the enjoyment of the Sun City residents. See Appendix No. 2.72
- Del E. Webb Corporation Contracting Division was approved to build all future commercial and recreation buildings for cost plus a five percent fee. DEVCO previously did all of this work with its own forces.

Fri., Feb. 24, 1978 O The Arizona Republic

Ticket-sales pledge is sought to keep Sun City theater open

By JOHN HARRIGAN

SUN CITY — Town Meeting Association members who have protested the closure of Alco Theater were told Thursday they must promise written support to keep the action alive.

John W. Meeker, president of Del E. Webb Development Company (DEVCO), told Rotary Club members here Wednesday the company will continue to lease space to the theater at cost if the association would promise in writing to sell movie tickets for the hospital auxiliary.

Boswell Memorial Hospital auxiliary has helped support the theater and itself by selling tickets, but sales have dropped from 2,575 in 1975 to 2,000 in 1977. Auxiliary sales account

for more than 60 percent of the theater's revenue.

Meeker warned that the theater wasn't the only endangered species.

"The bus system and women's softball, both underwritten by DEVCO, are also on the endangered species list that are going to require community support."

Dr. John Aiello, the theater lessee said last week that the development company had been renting out the theater building at a reduced rate and now wanted a more commercial tenant. The theater has been scheduled to close upon expiration of its lease with the Webb company June 1.

Aiello could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Meeker said Webb had received many petitions and letters bemoaning DEVCO's closing of Alco.

"For the record, DEVCO is not closing Alco. The lessee, Dr. Aiello, up until now has given us every indication that he could no longer endure the losses," Meeker said.

Meeker claimed Webb was currently renting at a breakeven figure of \$3.86 a square foot per year. He also noted that Webb received no rent from Aiello from October 1976 through May 1977.

He said the majority of residents have simply given up on movies and watch television. The minority here who attend movies go to see only those that are not featuring sex, pornography, or violence, he said.

"We felt it could no longer succeed as a commercial operation," Meeker said, but added that DEVCO would keep it open if TMA would make its commitment.

Association treasurer Nat Jampel said the association would not make a decision on the matter until its March 13 meeting.

Jampel said he doubted that the current rent of about \$2,000 a month, was really a break-even figure.

"I don't care if only 100 people go to that theater. The point is that this something promised to us by the late Mr. (Del) Webb as part of the recreational complex," Jampel said. The present Webb administration, he claimed, has "no head, no heart, no consciences. They're only out for a buck," he said.

Alco closes

Local theater dims the lights permanently

By JACQUE PAPPAS
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — The community's only movie theater will close its doors for the first time tonight after featuring stars for 14 years on the silver screen.

But it may not be curtains for the Alco Theatre if the property's landlord can find a new tenant to take over the establishment and show movies catering to retirees in the Sun City area.

Sources told the News-Sun Wednesday that United Artists Entertainment chose not to renew its lease at the 437-seat theater because of a notable drop in the number of moviegoers.

"We had shows where no one would show up. That's not common for a movie theater," said a worker at the theater who requested anonymity. "Apparently the company did not think they were getting



Daily News-Sun photo by Stephen Cherek

LAST PICTURE SHOW — The Alco Theater in LaRonde Centre West is closing after today's 7:30 p.m. show. Dwindling attendance has plagued Sun City's only theater.

enough business and making enough money."

Jerry Ruhl, a company spokesman, said United Artists decided to drop the lease because "the theater did not fit with our overall plans."

Ruhl said the fact that the Alco was located in a retirement community and reports that attendance at the movies was

down was not a factor in the company's decision.

"We are trying to have a concentration of multi-plex and multi-screen theaters," Ruhl said.

The Alco is a single-screen theater.

Movies such as "Driving Miss Daisy" and "Cocoon" were big hits at the theater — the latter

playing several times a day for more than six months.

But many movies, such as "Short Circuit" and "Q & A," which is now playing, slumped at the Alco. There were 20 people at the 2:30 p.m. Wednesday showing of "Q & A."

Randal Miller of CBS Property Services, which manages See Alco, A4

OVER

Alco closes its doors

—From A1

the community's major shopping centers, said the company will soon decide whether the Alco will re-open or if the property will be converted into retail shops.

"From the standpoint of the shopping centers, we do not have anything to announce right now, but we are active in getting someone to take it over. It will definitely be a loss if we have to convert it," Miller said.

The Alco is the closest movie theater to the Sun Cities. Movie times at the Alco are noon, 2:30, 5 p.m. and 7:30, which will be the last showing tonight. Tickets are \$2.50.

Tonight's final movie is a police suspense thriller that stars Nick Nolte and Timothy Hutton.

But some say the feature is exactly why the Alco has been suffering low attendance in recent years.

"The movie has lots of profanity," one person said. "We've had a few people walk out and leave."

Miller said the key to a successful theater most likely depends on an owner "who will make this Sun City's theater."

"A chain operation by its nature does not cater to the needs of a particular city like ours," he said.

The theater, in the La Ronde Shopping Centre at Del Webb Boulevard and Talisman Road, opened in 1976 and has seen five different owners.

Pascal "Pat" Agosta, who owned the theater from 1982 to 1986, said he saw attendance at the Alco drop by 30 percent during his years in Sun City.

"The overscreening in the Glendale and Phoenix area has paid its toll on the Alco. It needs a personal touch ... and not necessarily what a big company is dictating," Agosta said. "I think the Alco is an institution in Sun City. It can work if the people feel it's their theater."

Alco marquee is now blank

By JACQUE PAPPAS
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — Bill and Betty Williams have watched Oscar winners and box office flops at the Alco Theater for 10 years.

Thursday evening, the Sun City West couple sat in the 437-seat motion-picture house perhaps for the last time.

The Alco closed its doors Thursday after the final 7:30 p.m. showing of a movie that brought less than 40 viewers all day.

"We came for the closing. We like to come here — otherwise we would have to go a long ways to see a movie," said Betty Williams, her voice almost echoing in the empty theater.

"We heard that they may make this into a dress shop or something and I think that would be an awful shame."

Employees at the theater told the Daily News-Sun Wednesday that United Artists Entertainment chose not to renew its

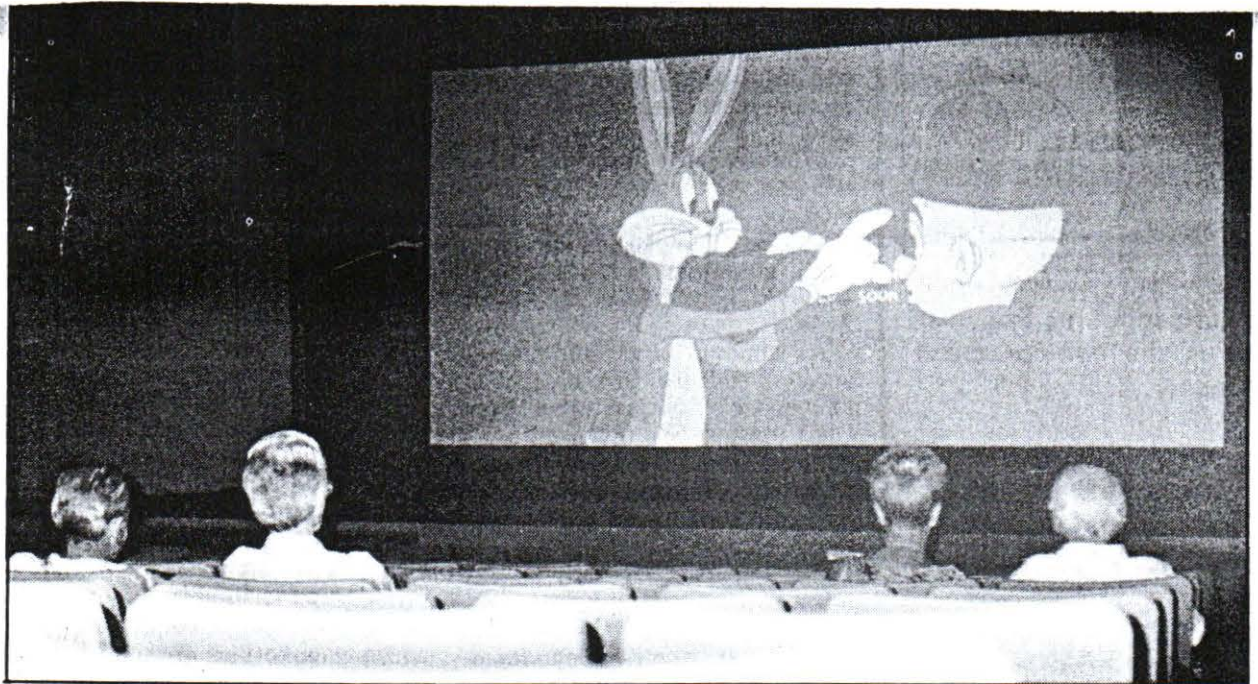
lease because of a notable drop in the number of movie-goers.

"When the movies were \$1 and the volunteers from Boswell helped out, they really got the crowds. In the long run they would make more money with cheaper movie prices," she said, as two more people walked into the 5 p.m. showing, bringing the grand viewer total to four. "I think it's sad that it has not been supported well by the Sun City people."

As the community's only movie theater, the Alco has seen five different owners and a number of strategies to boost attendance since it opened in late 1974.

At one time, volunteers from Walter O. Boswell Memorial Hospital sold tickets at the theater, in the La Ronde Shopping Centre at Del Webb Boulevard and Talisman Road.

Sun Citians Henry and Roberta Wehrfritz used to attend See Lights, A4



Daily News-Sun

LAST SHOW — Four residents watch the cartoon preview before the 5 p.m. movie showing at the Alco Theater Thursday. The theater, suffering from a lack of moviegoers, closed its doors after about 16 years in Sun City.

Lights are dimmed at Alco

—From A1

Sunday church services at the theater in 1975.

While Faith Presbyterian Church was under construction, Wehrfritz said the congregation met for several months in the Alco.

"I have more than movie memories at the Alco. It was a place of worship," Wehrfritz said. "We went to the movies quite a bit. It was fairly well patronized and the price was much different then."

Although the theater's landlord has said he would like to find a new tenant to take over the establishment and show movies catering to retirees, some residents were upset that United Artists did not give the community more notice of the

closure.

Shirley, who did not want her last name to be used, was upset that company employees would not give her a refund for \$10 worth of United Artists movie gift certificates she got for Mother's Day.

"They won't give me a refund because they say there are other United Artists theaters. Well, I don't want to go to 43rd Avenue and Bell to see a movie," she said. "I would have never known the theater was closing unless I read it in the paper. I think they should have given us a little bit of advanced notice. I love to go to the shows. I really enjoyed coming here."

The movie "Q & A," an R-rated police thriller, was the single-screen theater's last fea-

ture.

Several of the residents who attended the final showing said they were surprised to hear the Alco was closing.

"It's a nice little theater. I hate to see it go," said Doris Sullivan.

Sun Citizens Bill and Dorothy Williams said they have attended the theater for more than four years.

"It's been very handy, especially for some of the seniors who are not able to travel far from the areas for one reason or another," Dorothy Williams said. "But I'm sure one reason it had to close was because of a lack of business. I don't know how they kept it open with the cost of employees, rent and air conditioning."

Theater will reopen

By JACQUE PAPPAS
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — A Phoenix couple whose lives have reeled around the movie business have signed a two-year contract to operate the now-vacant Alco Theater.

Roger and Frances Cherry signed the papers in July and plan to open the theater by Oct. 1.

The Alco, Sun City's only theater, closed its doors July 31 after featuring stars for 14 years on the silver screen.

United Artists Entertainment chose not to renew its lease at the 437-seat theater because of a notable drop in the number of moviegoers.

The vacancy opened an opportunity for the Cherrys.

"This has been my dream for years," said Roger Cherry, who has worked in movie theaters for more than 30 years. "I'm really excited about this and I can't wait to get it open."

Roger Cherry started work as an usher in a movie theater in the 1950s when stars such as Doris Day, Rock Hudson and Elvis Presley got top billing. He eventually worked his way into a management position and since 1978 has managed UA Cinema 6 at Christown.

The movies united the Cherrys, who met while they were both working at a drive-in theater in California.

The Alco, in the La Ronde Shopping Centre at Del Webb Boulevard and Talisman Road, opened in 1976 and has seen five different owners.

Roger Cherry said he hopes to make changes at the theater to bring in big crowds.

"But if the community does not support the theater they will end up not having one. The support of a single-screen theater must be there or it will not



Daily News-Sun

MOVIE BUSINESS — Roger and Frances Cherry have signed a two-year lease to operate the Alco Theater, which closed in July. The Cherrys plan to reopen Sun City's only theater by October 1.

survive," Cherry said. "I don't mean that as a threat. It's just a fact."

Although the Alco was formerly run by UA Cinemas and the Cherrys also worked for UA, the new theater will be independently run, Cherry said.

"There needs to be some special attention here and we have to cater to the Sun Cities residents' needs," he said. "Working as an independent, you can make more changes to accommodate a specific community."

Cherry said ticket prices will depend on whether he uses "first-run" or "second-run" movies. First-run movies cost more because they include the new releases while second-run movies are more dated.

Frances Cherry will manage

the day-to-day operations at the theater.

She said the Alco will be recarpeted and painted before the reopening.

Randy Miller of CBS Properties Services, which manages the community's major shopping centers, said the landlord wanted to maintain the Alco as a theater if possible.

He said several last-resort alternatives were considered to convert the theater into retail shops.

"We think a theater can benefit the community and the shopping centers and we want to give it a chance. We had a number of phone calls from people lamenting the fact that the theater had closed," Miller said.

■ DAILY NEWS-SUN EDITORIAL

A landmark no more

The Alco theater was a landmark for 14 years in Sun City — its only movie house and once very popular. Now it's gone.

Movies have changed, but the Sun City audience hasn't; they're retired and remember another day when films were less violent and less vulgar in the language used — and dealt with real life, but with innuendo rather than specificity in regard to love and sex. Lately, few of today's movies have filled the bill for Sun Citians, and as a consequence, attendance at the Alco has dropped so far down that United Artists decided to drop the lease.

No blame to United Artists; the company is not in business to underwrite a 437-seat theater where some nights no one showed up. Obviously, in addition to Sun Citians' preferences, there were other attractions such as regular and cable television, and other local entertainment as well.

So Sun Citians probably will not lament the loss of the Alco as they did the loss of the Sun City Stadium a few years back. They can still see movies on television and good old-time cinema at recreation centers programs.

But there's still the question of what will happen to the Alco theater space. Rumor already has it that the theater will be converted into a dress shop. Somehow, that seems a shame, when you have a stage and a 437-seat auditorium just sitting there.

For a long time now, the Sun City Players little theater group has longed for a home. They've been staging their plays at Mountain View Auditorium, but that has a flat floor, folding chairs and is rather large for intimate theater. In addition, there are musicians and singers, individual and groups performing in church halls and wherever they can who might relish the idea of presenting their talent in a real theater. And, of course, there are political meetings, forums, lectures and others who might appreciate having a central and well-known hall to use.

Maybe somewhere in Sun City are people — entrepreneurs — who can envision such an all-purpose hall being of benefit to the community through a variety of presentations rather than just movies — although an occasional movie wouldn't be amiss, either. Wouldn't it be interesting if they formed a corporation to rescue the Alco with private funds and public subscriptions, and turn it into Sun City's special presentation hall?