
Signs of Sun City's Past by Ed Allen

A name missing from Sun City's Past

It seems strange that we have to venture to Sun City West to find a sign honoring the man who saved Sun City... John Meeker.

Meeker was not one of the major decision makers when Webb decided that an active adult community could be a new business opportunity. He came on the scene as the community unfolded, involved on the building side.

1960 had been a smash success! The Webb people had set a goal of selling 1700 homes the first three years – and 1300 were sold that first year! But appearances were deceiving, and sales declined the next four years. By 1965, they had fallen to less than 400 for the year!

Enter John Meeker, a man with a radically different plan! It was common at the time for homebuilders to feel their job was done when the house was completed. They ran ads to draw new prospects, built houses, and then repeated the process. Meeker realized they were selling a new lifestyle for retirees, and they needed help adjusting to it. They had come from many different states, and needed to build a sense of community, of belonging. He had the insight that if the residents were actively involved, they would become the best sales personnel of all!

Del Webb was impressed with Meeker's ideas and made him president of DEVCO, the development company. Meeker immediately took the millions spent on national advertising and redirected it toward the residents. If they were happy, he felt they would be the best source of all for referrals. He realized that Sun City needed a

gathering spot and built the Sun Bowl. National talent was soon appearing there – Lawrence Welk, Bob Hope, Rosemary Clooney, and more. Residents were soon boasting to friends back home who they had seen – and FREE!

Meeker initiated a 60-day warranty to resolve the problems all new houses present. Homeowners listed all defects in their new home, regardless of who caused them. DEVCO came in at the end of the period and made all the repairs at once. A simple approach that resulted in more goodwill.

To build interest in club activity, Meeker surprised attendees with drawings for color TVs, and attendance soared. Members found they enjoyed being with others of similar interest, and club activity took off! States Days promotions -- annual events like the Watermelon WhingDing & Sing, Father's Day Root Beer Bust, and Grape Festival -- were just some of the activities that bought people together and built great pride in the new community. Meeker's philosophy of

converting residents into sales people paid off, and house sales picked up year-by-year. In 1970, the 10,00th home was sold, making Sun City the 12th largest city in Arizona!! Sales continued to grow, reaching nearly 3500 in 1977 – and causing Sun City to fill up earlier than planned. Meeker then turned his attention to a "Brand New Sun Rising in the West" – Sun City West.

John Meeker was one more example of Del Webb's uncanny ability to spot good talent, encourage it, and entrust it with increasing responsibility. Webb first met Meeker at the Phoenix Country Club where John quickly became his favorite caddy. After he graduated from high school, he enlisted in WWII. Webb told him there'd be a job waiting for him at the Webb Corp. when he got out. The young Meeker also had another club member for whom he was the favorite caddy. That man was a doctor, and promised John a full medical school scholarship when he got out of the service. But after receiving his discharge, Meeker was eager to marry Ann Kort, his sweetheart of many years, and ready to go to work! He started in the mailroom of the Webb Corp., and quickly made his way up the ladder of increasing responsibility to president of DEVCO in less than 20 years.

