

Signs of Sun City's Past by Ed Allen

The Tower in Our Midst...



One Sun City landmark that can be seen for miles is the red-and-white tower on Oakmont Drive behind the Grand Shopping Center. In case you are ever asked, it is 380-ft high – one of the tallest, free-standing towers in the state - and the second tower at that location. Here's the story...

A 150-ft tower rose over the Grand Ave shopping center in 1962, giving Sun City its own radio station, KTPM-FM. Its studio was in the shopping center, and the 1000-watt station went on air June 1962, broadcasting from 6 AM to midnight.

The studio was equipped with state-of-the-art equipment that was claimed to be the first stereo console in the nation. A large window allowed passersby to look in and watch the announcers. One was Otto Highfield, formerly with NBC and now a Sun City resident. Old standards and classics were popular.



Unfortunately, the station only lasted six months, and it would be 13 years before SC had another station, KWAO-FM. Power was increased to 3,000 watts and the station could reach for ten miles. Occasionally, programs would be heard as far away as Scottsdale.

KWAO-FM was very community oriented offering music plus hourly news reports, the community calendar, interviews and guest speakers, along with subjects of importance to the entire community, such as sewer and water rate hearings, which were broadcast live.

In May 1983, the station was purchased by Canyon Communications, which took over the frequency as KMZK, and became

a light rock music station. The local studio was vacated and broadcasts were made from studios located outside Sun City. To increase reach, a new, 380-ft. tower (foreground at right) was erected and the old one (in rear at left) was taken down.

The station lasted into the '90s, and the tower then stood unused until purchased by Phoenix Internet in 2016. Its height meant the site could be used to transmit and receive microwave communications that deliver high-speed Internet. The tower is also used to relay service to other tower locations that Phoenix Internet operates in the Valley.

In the color photo, two men can be seen working on the lower antenna, which delivers Internet to Wittman to the west. And if you look very closely, another technician is working on an antenna at the 280-ft level, which delivers signals even further across the Valley to the east. Verizon also leases space on the tower for cell phone service. But it's no longer a source for golden oldie, light rock music programs or the latest sewer and water news.

