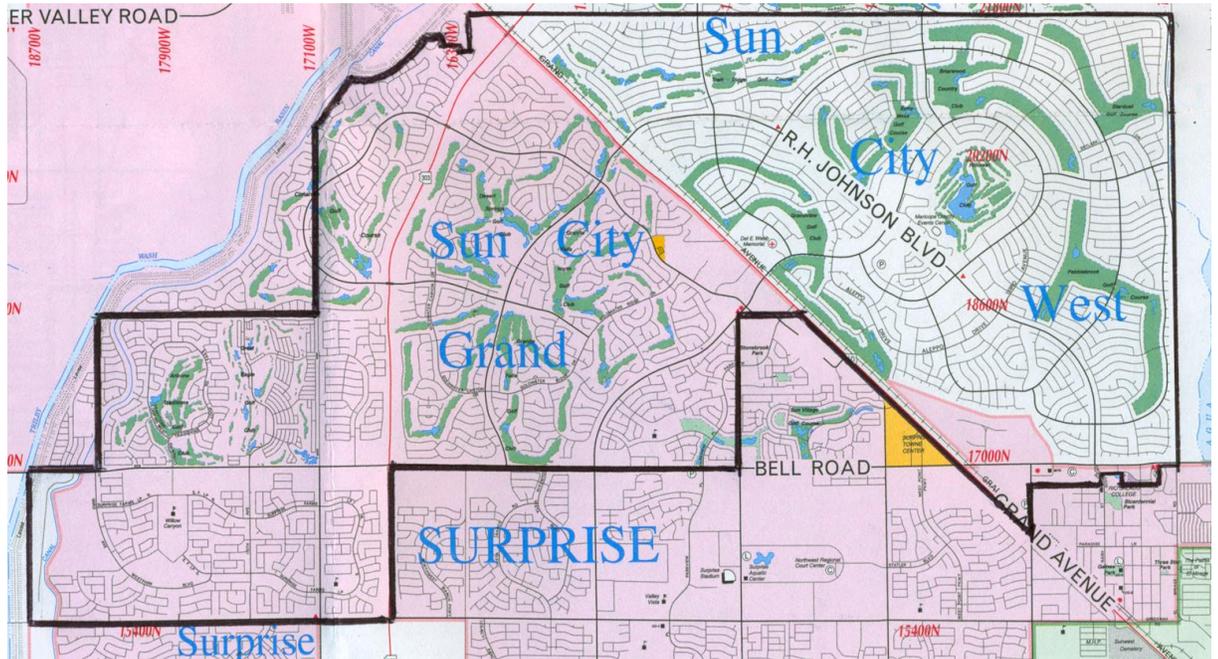


Building on Success – a New City of 70-75,000 – Signs of the Past by Ed Allen

With more than 3,000 houses selling each year in the mid-1970s, Sun City filled up much faster than expected. As a result, the Webb Corp. had begun buying up land to the west for a successor community – Sun City West. By 1975, 13,000 acres had been acquired, and John Meeker, president of DEVCO, announced plans for a new community to be built in two phases – Phase 1 east of Grand Ave., and Phase 2, the land to the west of Grand Ave..

Had the new community been developed as planned, it would have occupied all the area within the outline on this map, including -- SC Grand, Happy Trails, Arizona Traditions, and more.

Perhaps the most colorful land acquisition was Lizard Acres.



All that remains of this feedlot, temporary home to as many as 40,000 head of cattle, is this railroad sign along Grand Ave. It occupied the SE portion of SCW, roughly from Beardsley Rd south to Bell Rd. It got its name when two ranchers were looking the site over in the 1940s. One kicked at the desert scrub and remarked, "Jumpin' Jehosophat, this land ain't fit for raising anything but lizards."

Construction of SCW got underway in 1978. Looking at an early land survey, Meeker poked his finger in the center of the map, and promised to build an emerald valley in it, filled with streams and ponds – soon to be known as Hillcrest Golf Course. It was the most expensive golf development in Arizona at the time, and one of the three most challenging courses in the state. It opened for play in 1979.

Meeker also planned the largest recreation center in the Southwest. Named for the then president of the Webb Corp., the R. H. Johnson Center spread over 48 acres. First to open was the Social Hall in March 1979, and the center was completed when the library opened in October of that year.

Meeker also promised an auditorium that would seat 7,000 in air-conditioned comfort. Why 7,000?

That's the number that would bring their lawn chairs to sit on the terraced lawns of the Sun Bowl in Sun City to hear entertainers like Bob Hope, Rosemary Clooney, and others. The Sundome was the largest single-floor auditorium in the nation, opening in Sept. 1980 with 6,000 coming to hear Lawrence Welk strike up the band!

Meeker also envisioned a major, regional shopping mall to serve the 70,000-plus residents of the new community. His model was MetroCenter – Phoenix's largest mall when it opened in Oct. 1973. It was the first 2-level, 5-anchor mall in the U.S. It featured an ice-skating rink, and a bar in the fuselage of a 747 jetliner.

Also promised were larger, more luxurious homes to attract the well to do who were choosing to live in Scottsdale. Two new models were opened in 1980, one base-priced at \$375,000, the other at \$395,000 – twice the price of the largest model offered to date.

It all came to a head in 1981 when interest rates soared to 20% and more. The Webb Corp. carried a great deal of debt and had to sell off assets to reduce the amount of interest it had to pay. First to go was the land west of Grand Ave. Plans for the mall were dropped, along with plans for more expensive homes when the two deluxe models failed to sell.

Economic conditions brought in a more cost-conscious management, and Meeker retired at the end of 1981. His vision, however, transformed Lizard Acres into the lush oasis that is Sun City West today. Thank you, John Meeker!