

Signs of Sun City's Past



Del Webb was a true American success story. Born in 1899 in Fresno, CA, his father was a contractor and avid baseball fan. Even as a boy, Del was taught carpentry skills – and a love of baseball. At age 13, the gangly, 6'3" tall youngster was the best first baseman in the Fresno area.

When his father's business went bankrupt, Del had to drop out of high school. He supported himself and helped his family by working at construction jobs all along the western coast. His one question was, "Do you have a baseball team?" If they didn't, he went elsewhere.

Webb took correspondence courses to help him learn about all facets of building construction. After a serious bout with typhoid fever in 1927 from which he almost died, he moved to Phoenix to make a new start. The town was booming and Webb went from working for others to having his own business in two short years. He had to give up playing baseball, but never lost his love for the game.

World War II brought the Webb Construction Company over \$100,000,000 in contracts and by the end of the war, it employed 25,000 people. New opportunities arose as people had money to spend and leisure time once again. Webb's firms would build homes, factories, shopping centers, apartment buildings, hospitals, hotels, casinos, and more.

The end of the war rekindled Webb's interest in baseball, and in 1945, he became part owner of the New York Yankees. He and partner Dan Topping would own the team for the next 20 years, during which the team won 15 division titles and 10 World Series!

In the later half of the 1950s, the nation's attention was drawn to a fledgling community for those 65 and older in the desert northwest of Phoenix – "Youngtown." "Experts" who studied the aging advised Webb a community solely for adults was doomed to fail. "You can't separate older people from their families!" they warned.

But older people were moving to Florida for warmer winters – something Arizona had in abundance. Webb decided to build a community for retirees featuring an active lifestyle. A golf course, swimming pool, and community center would all be in place ready for use on opening day – along with 5 model homes, a shopping center, motel and restaurant.

Sun City opened Jan. 1, 1960, and 237 homes were sold that first weekend; 1300 the first year. TIME Magazine honored his accomplishment with a cover story. Webb's vision has paid off in a big way –with more than 60 active adult communities nationwide known as a "Del Webb community."



Ed and Loretta Allen recently moved to Royal Oaks and have been active in the Del Webb Sun Cities Museum for many years.