
Signs of Sun City's Past by Ed Allen

The oldest building in Sun City

Back in 1959 when construction started on Sun City, a small 10' x 10' building was erected alongside Grand Ave. to serve a dual role: construction office and first sales office. At that time, Highway 60 (Grand Ave.) was the main route between Phoenix and Los Angeles. Many passing by were curious about what was going on, and Owen Childress – later VP of Sales -- was stationed in the small building to answer their questions. By the time Sun City officially opened, he had some 400 sales leads.

Once Sun City opened, a larger sales office opened in the Hiway House where Fry's is located today. The small building went on to be used in many different ways.

Next use was as the "Halfway House" -- a refreshment stand in the model home area. As soon as residents began moving in, they looked for opportunities to volunteer. Serving lemonade to prospects was one way. (Others created their own forms of service, stationing themselves in the model homes to talk with prospects, helping "sell Sun City." They soon became a nuisance, and were kindly asked to stay away.)

When the Saints women's fast-pitch softball team arrived to play in Sun City, the building was moved to the new ballpark at 108th and Grand Ave, and served as a dressing room for the players. Twelve women seeking to change into and out of uniforms in a 10' x 10' space must have made for some bruised elbows!

Once a new, larger ballpark was built at 111th and Grand, the building was relegated to being a storage shed, and by the end of the 1980s, there was really no more use for it. The Webb Corp. offered it to the Sun Cities Historical Society, which had acquired one of the first model homes as its headquarters – and today's Del Webb Sun Cities Museum. The offer included moving it to the new site and connecting it to the existing home.

It first served as the Marinette Room with photos of the cotton plantation that preceded Sun City, along with the stories of several families who had lived there, and now live in Sun City. Today, it serves as the "Sundome Jr. Theater – Arizona's smallest theater" seating six on chairs removed from the Sundome before it was razed.



Museum visitors can choose from two videos shown in the theater. "The Beginning" was produced in the 1960s and distributed to movie theaters nationwide. It tells the story of a retiree who enjoys his new freedom until winter comes and ends his golf and gardening. His wife suggests they visit friends who moved to a new community in Arizona just for retirees, and they check it out. A second video was shown in the Sun City West Visitors Center when it opened. There's quite a contrast in the two stories!