
Signs of Sun City's Past by Ed Allen

Spring training in Sun City

The month of March means major league spring training, and there are plenty of signs of it around us in Peoria and Surprise – but no longer any in Sun City. The ballpark that once was the spring home of icons like Hammerin' Hank Aaron and star pitcher Rollie Fingers has disappeared and been replaced by the Fountains of Sun City Apartments at 111th and Grand Avenue.

Softball became a popular sport beginning in the early 1960s, and the addition of the women's fast-pitch softball team, the Saints, in 1966 added to the attraction of the sport in Sun City. As Arizona became a more popular spring training destination for major league teams, it seemed a natural extension to invite one to locate in Sun City.

Del Webb first tried to interest Kansas City in a new field he proposed for an area east of 99th, and south of Grand – where part of Quail Run is located today. But KC decided on Florida instead.

The purchase of the ball field at 108th and Grand for the Suntowner Restaurant (now an RV dealer) resulted in need for a new field. It was decided to build one that could be used by a major league team, as well as by the Saints and local softball teams. "Build it and they will come." The new stadium opened to a full house on July 10, 1971, and when Del Webb asked the crowd how they liked the new field, the roar was deafening.

Some attending the opening event received an unwelcome surprise – as they leaned against the seat backs, many collapsed, as they hadn't been properly secured! But the game went on with Webb throwing out the first ball, and announcing an inning of the Saint's first game in their new home. One unusual aspect of the new park was an area where people could watch the game from their golf cars.

The San Francisco Giants played five exhibition games there in 1972, and the Milwaukee Brewers agreed to make this their spring training site in 1973. All went smoothly until the 1980s and the advent of record high interest rates. The Webb Corp. needed to sell assets to reduce debt. Running a ballpark was not a key to the company's business, and the stadium was sold in 1983 with a proviso that it would remain a ballpark at least through 1987. The next year, the new owner informed the Saints that the annual rent would increase from the \$1/year they had been paying to \$6,000/month – ending the era of women's fast pitch softball in Sun City. Chandler moved quickly and offered the Brewers an attractive deal to move there. 1985 marked the last year for the Brewers in Sun City. The stadium was torn down in 1992 and replaced by the Fountains of Sun City.

Left – the ballpark as it looked on opening day. Right – the same view today at the apartment complex.

