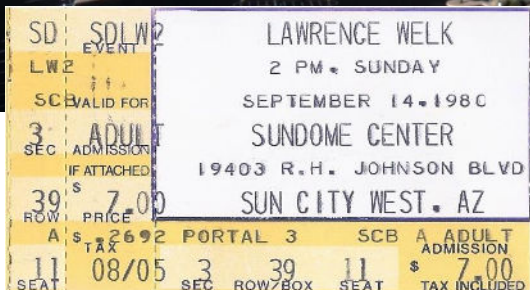


From Sun Bowl to Sundome – *Signs of our Sun Cities Past by Ed Allen*

John Meeker brought a new business philosophy with him when he became president of the Del E. Webb Development Co (DEVCO) in 1965. He saw the developer's job as more than building houses, as they were really selling a new lifestyle for retirees – and they needed help in adjusting to it. He actively looked for ways to get residents involved with one another to build a sense of community.

An article in TIME Magazine gave him the idea for the Sun Bowl where well-known entertainers would bring residents together. The Sun Bowl opened in 1967, and was soon featuring Pat Boone (right), Rosemary Clooney, Bob Hope, and others – FREE! Not only did it get residents mixing with one another, it added to the story they told family and friends back home about the exciting new lives they were leading in Sun City! As many as 7,000 residents attended these popular shows.

As Sun City filled up, Meeker's attention focused on a new community three miles to the west. He had many grandiose plans for it, including an auditorium that would seat 7,000 indoors in air-conditioned comfort! Some on his staff tried to persuade him to build two auditoriums – one large (5,000?), the other small (1,500?). But Meeker was not to be dissuaded. His mind was set on having the largest, single-floor auditorium in the nation!



The Sundome was a massive construction project., built into a hill created by earth moved in building ponds for the Hillcrest Golf Course. Huge beams – 225' long, 19' thick at the center – support the roof. The floor sloped 17' from rear to stage and the interior was the size of two football fields side-by-side.

Lawrence Welk opened the Sundome in September 1980. The first year would offer 110 events. A lecture series with Paul Harvey sold 7,000 season tickets. The Sun City Symphony was reluctant to leave the 1,800-seat Sundial Rec Center fearing they could never fill the Sundome seats. But soon after the move they were selling 5,600 season tickets – a record for any symphony in the nation!

The Sundome would go on to host a 3-ring circus, televangelists, first Barret-Jackson car auctions, the hugely popular annual Variety Show, and became a favorite for high school and college graduation ceremonies. But, its size was its undoing as audience tastes changed, the stage area proved too small for Broadway-style shows, dressing rooms were too few and operating costs staggering. The Sundome was eventually razed in 2013.

It lives on, however, in the Sundome Jr. Theater of the Del Webb Sun Cities Museum.