

## Signs of Sun City's Past by Ed Allen

### "Live Here and Be Forever Young"

No it wasn't an advertising slogan for Sun City, but related to the marketing of Youngtown – our next-door neighbor.

The story of Youngtown begins with a visit of Realtor "Big Ben" Schleifer to a friend in a retirement home. Ben was appalled by the restrictions placed on those living there, and had a vision for a more active, retirement community for low-income retirees.

The site of today's Youngtown was a 320-acre cattle ranch owned by Frances Greer. When her husband passed away in 1949, she hired Elmer Jones to help manage the operations. Big Ben was a friend of both and the three of them worked on his vision for an active retirement community. In 1955, 125 homes were built and by 1959 had a population of 1,400. Homes were 750 sq. ft. in size and sold for less than \$8000.

Here's how Phase 1 looked in the late 1950s. On the left is 111<sup>th</sup> Ave. and Alabama Ave. is at the bottom.

Frances Greer's home became the community clubhouse and the site of many activities – cards, dancing, shuffleboard, and more. A ravine was filled with water and became Maricopa Lake for swimming and fishing.

Youngtown achieved national attention in 1957, when David Garroway featured this unusual community on "Wide, Wide World." The interest it generated came to the attention of Del Webb and set him to researching the viability of a community just for retirees.

The launch of Sun City in 1960 brought economic development to Youngtown as it led to a post office, bank, Bayless Grocery store, gas station and a pharmacy – all in the lower left quadrant of the aerial view. The community would eventually expand both north and south. In selling the Marinette ranch to Webb in 1959, Jim Boswell held back the land between Alabama and Grand west of 111<sup>th</sup>, saying "Youngtown will need it for expansion, and we want to be good neighbors."

The low cost of houses attracted young families and in 1986 the senior overlay was challenged. The case moved slowly through the courts, but the overlay was overturned by the AZ Attorney General in 1998 – and our neighbor became a multi-generational community.

