



The Official Newsletter of the

# Sun Cities Area Historical Society

Fall 2017 | Volume 26 | Number 2



# Jubilee Gala III

The Del Webb Sun Cities Museum celebrates its third annual gala fundraiser!  
See More, Page 2, 3, 8 & 9



## Inside our fall newsletter ...

### Exhibit Upgrades



The Del Webb exhibit room receives a summer facelift and upgrades.  
See Page 4



**Happy Birthday, SCW!**  
Sun City West prepares to celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2018.  
See Page 10-11

### Thank you volunteers!

The museum loves its volunteers! We ask our two newest docents why they chose to volunteer with the museum.  
See Page 12





At left: Michelle Dionisio, left, recently retired President and CEO of Benevilla, was presented with the "Friend of the Sun Cities Award" during the Del Webb Sun Cities Museum's Gala II fundraiser held in 2016. From left, Ms. Dionisio, 2016 Museum President Edson Allen and Past President Constance McMillin. Above, Paul Herrmann, right, received the award in 2015 from Jim Sinclair.

## Del Webb Sun Cities Museum stages Jubilee Gala III on November 9

**T**he Sun Cities Area Historical Society and Del Webb Sun Cities Museum will hold its third annual Jubilee fundraiser Nov. 9.

This year's "Jubilee Gala III" takes on a Western theme and features an Arizona History Dinner Show featuring the popular OK Chorale Cowboy Trio.

As in the past, the event also pays tribute to a community leader and celebrates that person's contributions to the Sun Cities. This year's recipient of the "Friend of the Sun Cities Award" is Jim Green, a longtime executive at Sun Valley Lodge, a former member of the Historical Society's Board of

Trustees and president of the Sun City Community Fund.

The event begins 5 p.m. at Palmbrook Country Club, 9350 W. Greendway Road, Sun City.

Dress is business attire or western wear.

The Gala is the museum's largest fundraiser of the year. All proceeds support the operation of the museum, located at 10801 W. Oakmont Drive in Sun City. The museum is located in one of the first five model homes that opened in Sun City on Jan. 1, 1960.

Tickets are \$40 for museum members and \$50 for non-members. Tables of eight are available for \$280.

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**Order Your  
Tickets Today!**

See the order form on Page 9 or purchase tickets online at [www.delwebbsuncitiesmuseum.org](http://www.delwebbsuncitiesmuseum.org).

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Sponsorships are available as well.

Tickets may be purchased online at [www.delwebbsuncitiesmuseum.org](http://www.delwebbsuncitiesmuseum.org) or by calling the museum at (623) 974-2568. Credit/debit cards are accepted.

The reservation deadline is Nov. 2.

# Jim Green to receive 'Friend of the Sun Cities' award

The Del Webb Sun Cities will present its most prestigious award at this year's Jubilee Gala III to long-time community leader Jim Green.

Mr. Green, a former member of the Sun Cities Area Historical Society Board of Trustees and president of the Sun City Community Fund, will receive the 2017 "Friend of the Sun Cities Award."

Jim came to the Valley in 1981 and immediately became involved in the business community as Corporate Relations Director at Thunderbird, the Global School of International Management and then as Development Director of Phoenix Urban League.

Jim became active in Sun City in 1996, when he became the Resource Development Director at Sun Valley Lodge.

He served on the Sun City Community Fund Board and spearheaded its union with Valley of the Sun United Way. He



Jim Green

arranged for the Community Fund to become United Way working in Sun City with all monies received and the income from its comfortable endowment remaining in Sun City to serve Sun City residents.

Community boards he has served on include:

- Sun Cities Historical Society
- Sun City Visitors Bureau
- Sun City Community Fund (President, 2001 – present)
- West Valley Art Museum (helped found the Sun Cities Art Museum in 1981)
- Benevilla

■ Northwest Valley Chamber of Commerce (now the Surprise Chamber of Commerce) Chairman of the Board, 2002.

Jim also has been actively involved in Rotary International through his local Rotary Club of Sun City, which has brought attention to our community.

He served as president of the Sun City Rotary Club, president of the Rotary Vocational Fund of Arizona and District 5490 Interact Chair.

He was the District 5490 District Governor in 2010-11.

He is an eight-time Paul Harris Fellow, Rotary International's highest

honor.

"Jim's commitment to our community over the years is incredible," said Bret McKeand, 2017 president of the Del Webb Sun Cities Museum Board of Trustees.

"His contributions have touched many organizations and many lives. Our community is truly better today because of Jim Green."

Past recipients of the Friends of the Sun Cities Award are Paul Herrmann, former executive director of the Sun Cities Visitor Center (2015); and Michelle Dionisio, former CEO of Benevilla (2016).

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We are proud to support organizations like Del Webb Sun Cities Museum that create a brighter future for Arizona.



The OK Chorale Cowboy Trio combines the wonderful sounds of traditional cowboy music with the fascinating history of Arizona in the 1880's to create a unique, entertaining experience. It's a fun show for the whole family!



The official colors of the Webb Corporation were red and black – Webb's favorite colors. They provide a dramatic backdrop for the story of his life and the company he built.

## Fresh Look for an Old Friend

### Del Webb Exhibit Room earns well-deserved facelift & upgrade

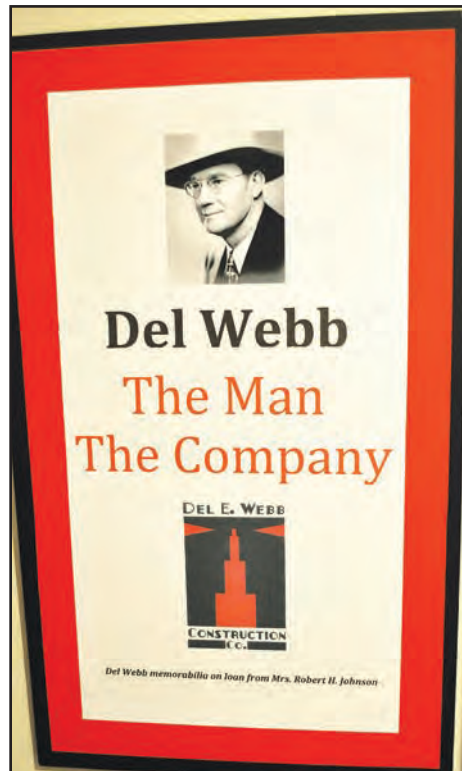
By Edson Allen

The summer months were used to give the Del Webb Room a fresh new look. It was one of the first exhibit areas to be completed before the museum opened in 2009, and was beginning to show its age. We started by asking our docents for suggestions to make the room more attractive and informative.

We hired graphic designer Dan Seabreeze to give a more professional appearance to the exhibit panels, and reorganized elements of the story.

As before, the east wall features the life of Del Webb – his growing up, his early years in Phoenix, the impact of the war years, his ownership of the New York Yankees, and his involvement with Las Vegas.

The south wall displays the variety and scope of the Webb Corporation's work. Twelve broad construction categories reference more than 100 specific projects.



The business Webb built stretched from coast-to-coast, to Hawaii, and Central America.

With those accomplishments

as background, the story moves to what Webb said was the “most satisfying thing he had done: Sun City!”

A new exhibit on the west wall tells that story, and acknowledges the role John Meeker played. To top it off, a large satellite photo of Sun City will enable residents to see how their home looks from space.

The new exhibit panels are mounted over what had been a large, open closet. Since storage is very limited within our small building, we decided to reclaim the space for that purpose.

Volunteer craftsmen Hal Lind and David Verble enclosed the closet with two doors that now hold the panels giving the Sun City story.

*Note: Edson Allen is a former president of the Del Webb Sun Cities Museum Board of Trustees.*

Come see what's new in the Del Webb Room!



The Del Webb Exhibit features new display placards and artifacts detailing the life of Del Webb, founder of the Sun Cities.



### Growing Up

**1899**  
Del Webb was born on February 19, 1899, in the small town of Fort Huachuca, Arizona. He was the son of an English immigrant and an American woman.

**1909**  
Del Webb taught his own carpentry skills to his father, Del Webb Sr., who was a carpenter and a pioneer in the construction industry.

**1912**  
This was the first business Del Webb ever owned. He started a construction company with his father and brother, Del Webb Jr.

**1914**  
Del Webb's business failed, but he learned a lot from the experience. He decided to start a new business, and he founded Del Webb Construction Company.

**1919**  
Del Webb was drafted into the military during World War I. He served in the 10th Cavalry Regiment and was promoted to the rank of sergeant.

**1922**  
Del Webb returned to Arizona after the war and started a new business. He founded Del Webb Construction Company, which became one of the largest construction companies in the United States.

**1927**  
Del Webb was elected to the Arizona State Senate. He served for two terms and was known for his leadership and integrity.



## Welcome to Sunshine Service

People, meeting needs of people is what Sunshine Service is all about. Sunshine Service lends medical and children's equipment to residents of Sun City and we have been doing so for over 52 years. We are a charitable non-profit Arizona corporation and are funded by voluntary contributions and memorial gifts.

Sunshine Service, Inc has received local, state and national recognition. Awards received include the George Washington Honor Medal for services to the sick and handicapped from the Freedoms Foundation of Valley Forge in Pennsylvania.

*"The Cleanest and Most Sanitized Equipment Around"*

While the equipment is available for the use of all residents or visitors staying with residents, the equipment must not be taken out of Sun City on a permanent basis. As a matter of control, equipment is loaned only to Sun City residents.

Records show that as the population of Sun City grew, so did use of our medical equipment. Savings for Sun City residents have been calculated periodically; in 2015, it was estimated that residents saved over two million dollars in cost of equipment for that year alone.



### New York Yankees ~ A HOME RUN!

**Webb's love of baseball** resurfaced after the busy war years when Del Webb bought a ticket to the game and he bought the New York Yankees in 1945 for \$2,000,000. That was the highest price ever paid for a baseball team. Webb was the only person to buy the team for more than \$1,000,000. He was the only person to buy the team for more than \$1,000,000. He was the only person to buy the team for more than \$1,000,000.

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**Some Of The Many Items We Carry:**  
 Arm Exerciser • Bath Bench • Bed Rails • Bedside Commodes • Companion Chair  
 Crutches • Foot Massager • High Chairs • Hospital Beds • Lift Chairs  
 Overbed Tables • Pack-N-Play • Ramp - Aluminum • Rollaway Beds  
 Strollers Trapeze Walkers • Weights • Wheel Chairs Translator Chairs • Knee

Monday-Friday • 9am-4pm  
 9980 W. Santa Fe Dr. • Sun City 85351-3197  
**623-974-2561**



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www.delwebbsuncitiesmuseum.org

The Sun Cities Area Historical Society is certified by the Arizona Historical Society



The Sun Cities Area Historical Society is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to the preservation and presentation of the records and artifacts for Sun City, Arizona, (the world's first Active Adult Retirement Community), and its sister city, Sun City West.

Museum Hours: 1-4 p.m. Monday, Wed., Friday Or by appointment Office Manager: Julie Glass

Board of Trustees

Bret McKeand President

Gail Warmath Vice President

Tim Ericson Treasurer

Edson Allen Past President

A.J. Kovac Toni Ashby Paul Herrmann Heidi Speed Yasmina Snider

Contributors:

Edson Allen, Katy O'Grady, Bret McKeand Layout and composition courtesy of the Sun City Independent



Message from the President

Plan a visit to your museum ... without ever leaving home!

The Del Webb Sun Cities Museum is a favorite destination place for visitors from every corner of the globe.

It may be hard to believe, but each year more and more people visit our little museum. Even during the summer when the museum is locked up and shut down completely for three months -- we still serve those who want to learn about the history of our communities.

How can that be, you ask?

Well, thanks to the worldwide web, anyone with a computer anywhere on earth can, with the simple click of a mouse and a few key strokes, access our museum -- our news, our archives and the history of Sun City and Sun City West.

Summer was a busy time for us in terms of upgrading our website and social media.

If you haven't visited us online lately, give us another look at www.delwebbsuncitiesmuseum.org.

Thanks to Board Trustee Paul Herrmann, the website has been vastly improved to provide greater information about the history of the Sun



Bret McKeand

2017 President, Sun Cities Area Historical Society

Cities, easier access to our archives and, best of all, the ability to purchase memberships and museum merchandise online.

A quick look at what you'll find on the website:

Information on our upcoming gala -- dates, times, ticket prices and more. And new for this year, you can now purchase your tickets directly online at the site.

Learn more about the history of Sun City and Sun City by searching online our vast collection of photographs. Of all the items in our collection, our historic photographs are without a doubt, our pride and joy.

Read the latest news and stories about the museum and its exhibits. Of special interest are two interviews: One with

the late Jane Freeman, founder of the Sun Cities Historical Society, and one with former DEVCO President John Meeker.

Review our unique collection of Webb Spinners, the Del Webb Corporation's employee newsletter. Our collection includes newsletters from 1946 through 1983.

You'll find more than just photos and stories at our web site. Be sure to check out several videos -- including "The Beginning," one of the earliest films created by the Del Webb Corporation and used to promote Sun City.

And for the first time, you can now shop online at our web site -- and purchase several books detailing the history of the Sun Cities. Remember, your purchases all benefit the museum! (Hint: A great place for your Christmas shopping!)

Trustee Steve Held has also been busy updating our museum's Facebook page.

Be sure to visit us at facebook to keep abreast of all the great activities at the museum. Be sure to like -- and share with your friends!

So if you're unable to make it to museum in person, visit us on your computer or smart phone!



# Unlock the \_\_\_\_\_ Mystery \_\_\_\_\_ of History

The past comes to life at the only museum in the nation devoted to the world's very first active adult retirement communities! Located in the first of five model homes built in Sun City, the museum offers a living tribute to the history of Sun City and Sun City West, and to the enduring spirit of those who pioneered an exciting new lifestyle!

## Become a Member!

Show your support for the museum and its efforts to preserve our community's unique heritage!

- Gold Circle \$100
- Silver Circle \$50
- Turquoise Circle \$25
- Copper Circle \$15
- Clubs/Organizations \$25
- Businesses \$100

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

email: \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to Sun Cities Area Historical Society, and mail to 10801 Oakmont Drive, Sun City, AZ 85351. SCAHS is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization.

## Special offer

Join at the Gold Level (\$100) and receive a FREE copy of "Images of America: Sun City"  
(Limited offer; while supplies last.)



Exhibits, Historical Artifacts and More!



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Call or Stop By Today!

10801 Oakmont Drive, Sun City, Arizona  
(623) 974-2568 \* delwebbsuncitiesmuseum.org  
Museum Hours: 1-4 p.m. Monday/Wednesday/Friday



**DEL WEBB SUN CITIES MUSEUM**

*Presents*

**THE OK CHORALE**

*At The*

**JUBILEE GALA III**

**DINNER SHOW**

**THURSDAY NOVEMBER 9TH - 5 PM**  
**PALMBROOK COUNTRY CLUB**

A fundraiser supporting the Del Webb Cities Museum  
Tickets at [scahsm@gmail.com](mailto:scahsm@gmail.com) or 623 974 2568 9am- Noon  
Credit Cards Accepted

DWSCM is a Non-Profit 501(c)3 and portions of Sponsorships are tax deductible



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FOR OUR  
2017**



**WESTERN THEMED**

**JUBILEE GALA III**

**ARIZONA HISTORY DINNER SHOW**

**FUNDRAISING EVENT**

*Featuring*

**OK CHORALE COWBOY TRIO**

*And*

*Recognizing this year's award recipient*

**"Friend of the Sun Cities"**

**MR. JAMES GREEN**

*5 p.m. Thursday, November 9th, 2017*

*Palmbrook Country Club, 9350 W. Greenway Road, Sun City*

*Business attire or come in your western wear*

<b>Tickets:</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Total \$</b>
Museum Member \$40	_____	_____
Member table of 8 \$280	_____	_____
Non-Member \$50	_____	_____
Non-Member table of 8 \$350	_____	_____
Phone # _____	Total \$ : _____	
Name: _____		
Email: _____		
Meal choices: <u>Prime Rib</u> <u>Glazed Salmon</u>		
# of each: _____		

**ORDER FORM**

Mail or bring this form to the museum  
10801 W. Oakmont Drive, Sun City, AZ 85351  
Weekday mornings, or 1-4 p.m. Mon., Wed., Fri.

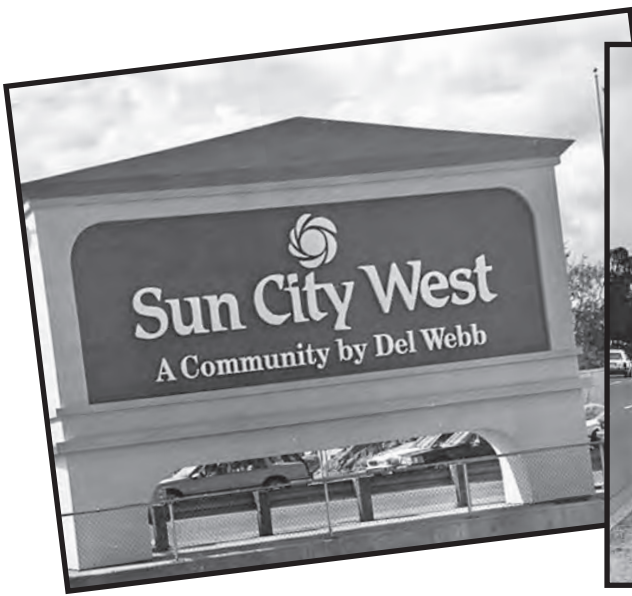
Online registration available at:  
<http://delwebbsuncitiesmuseum.org/>

**Credit/Debit Cards Accepted**

**Reservation Deadline: Nov. 2, 2017**

**Call (623) 974-2568**

*A fundraiser to benefit the Sun Cities Area Historical Society*



Photos from the files of the Sun City West Independent

# Sun City West prepares to celebrate 40th anniversary in 2018

By Katy O'Grady

Some 40 years after Del Webb Corp. broke ground on what was to become the company's second major active-adult community in Arizona, Sun City West continues to shine, preparing now to celebrate its Ruby Anniversary!

Sun City West's first shovels of dirt were turned on Feb. 15, 1978. In the succeeding years, the dry Sonoran Desert gave way to that lush oasis Del Webb envisioned, with nine golf courses and five swimming pools.

Countless other amenities poured in as well to create an enviable lifestyle for those lucky enough to live here.

A private library, bowling center, metal club and woodshop, tennis courts, and four giant recreation centers housing all manner of clubs sprang up in the community as build out continued over the years. Eager, involved residents jumped right in and established dozens of chartered clubs.

Progress marched forward, and Sun City West quickly gained a reputation as one of the nation's best retirement communi-

ties. Top-name entertainment performed in the community: Lawrence Welk, Dolly Parton, Bob Dylan, Willie Nelson, Reba McEntire, Johnny Cash and others. The LPGA Golf Tournament was played in Sun City West in 1981.

Also during the community's formative years, several support organizations were formed to keep the community running smoothly in the absence of a centralized municipal government. The Sun City West PRIDES, Posse, PORAs, Sun City West Foundation, Community Fund and sev-

eral service organizations continue to serve to this day. A variety of houses of worship also exist.

Although the developer is long gone, Sun City West continues to grow and change with its vibrant population of fun-loving active adults.

Four decades is a long time. Much can – and has – changed. The Recreation Centers of Sun City West, the Association charged with operating the four recreation centers and seven of the nine golf courses, as well as most of the other recreational amenities, tracks and adjusts to the changing

# SCW 40th Anniversary Celebration Agenda

(Details to be announced. Check scwaz.com closer to the anniversary celebration week.)

■ Thursday, Feb. 15  
Anniversary Dinner with Keynote Speakers  
Ed Allen and Don Middleton

■ Friday, Feb. 16  
40th Year Anniversary Lecture. Lisa Schnebly-Hedinger will speak on history of Arizona and SCW.

■ Saturday, Feb. 17  
· 5K run at Stardust Golf Course  
· SCW Golf Shotgun Tournament  
· Concert in Beardsley Park—Southwest Surfers (Beach Boys Tribute)

■ Sunday, February 18th  
Concert in RH Johnson Plaza

■ Monday, February 19th  
· SCW 40th Anniversary Parade  
· Concert at Palm Ridge —Tommy Dorsey Orchestra with The Flyboys

## A Jewel Once More!



The original R.H. Johnson Pool can be seen in early Del Webb promotional brochures for Sun City West, above. The Sun City West Silver Celebration book by Edson Allen, states, "Designed in Spanish Colonial Style, the R.H. Johnson Recreation Center set the architectural standard for the first public buildings. According to Webb brochures, it was the largest private complex for recreational sports, physical conditioning, and arts and crafts in the Southwest."

— Photo credit:  
"Sun City West Silver Celebration: The First Twenty-Five Years"



demographics. The Association works to serve and entertain some 29,000 residents whose ages span 50 years.

From the Bob Hopes of yesteryear to the Rolling Stones tribute bands of today, the Association has brought in a wide array of entertainment that continues to meet the tastes of the present generation. Some clubs have changed as well, and Sun City West now boasts more than 100 chartered clubs from which residents can choose. Who would have even envisioned clubs such as Zymurgy (the art of brewing), Boomers and Auto Restoration four decades ago?

The core support organizations have stayed the

same, but they, too, have made adjustments to stay current – from the way they work with volunteers, to variations in the services they provide.

Much else about Sun City West has changed as well. The Association is in the process of updating its recreation centers. The R.H. Johnson Recreation Center just went through a major exterior upgrade, from paint schemes and landscaping to walkways and signage. The old R.H. Johnson Pool was completely redone, replaced by a \$4.1 million resort-style pool, complete with a nearby outdoor great lawn, stage and barbecue area.

With all the investments in upgrades, and

regular funding that goes toward annual maintenance, it's no wonder Sun City West continues to be such a popular choice for new retirees. The one advantage this "senior" community has over all the new youngsters cropping up and hoping to compete for prospective residents, is the vast number of amenities it boasts. Newer models in active adult development call for smaller communities with fewer amenities.

Continual maintenance of these amenities, and upgrades when necessary – coupled with the rich fabric of clubs, activities, entertainment and other social outlets – are what make Sun City West such a top-tier community.

In 2016, Sun City West beat out all other Arizona active-adult retirement communities and was named third in the nation on 55places.com's list of "55 Best 55+ Communities for 2016." Likewise, it was named No. 1 in Arizona and No. 2 in the nation on 55places.com's list of "Best Value Active Adult Communities for 2016."

Not one to rest on its laurels, Sun City West will continue striving to be one of the nation's best retirement communities.

The Association's mission is "Sun City West: The ultimate adult community. An exciting place to live, work and play!"

# Welcome to our newest docents!

The Del Webb Museum simply could not exist without its dedicated volunteers. Whether it's a board trustee, a docent or those who pitch in to provide upkeep and repairs to the building, our volunteers are truly the lifeblood of the operation and the organization couldn't exist without them.

This year the museum welcomed two new docents: Betty Myers and Katherine DuBois. Board President Bret McKeand recently sat down with the pair and ask them their thoughts about the community and why they chose to volunteer at the museum.

## **Your background:**

**Betty:** Born and raised in North Dakota, she also lived in Minnesota and Flagstaff before moving to Sun City 10 years ago.

**Katherine:** Originally from the Midwest, she lived in Albuquerque, N.M. for 26 years before moving to Sun City two years ago.

## **Prior occupation:**

**Betty:** Hospital management, medical records and finance.

**Katherine:** Clinical pharmacy technician.

## **Why did you move to Sun City?**

**Betty:** Lots of golf courses! My husband



Betty Myers

loves to golf! I like everything! So many things to do, and we're so close to everything.

**Katherine:** I had no idea about Sun City, and I had been coming to Peoria for years to visit my daughter. When she finally had a baby, I finally discovered Sun City. It's perfect, and I'm only four miles from my grandchild.

## **What attracted you to the Del Webb Sun Cities Museum?**

**Betty:** I love history. When I travel the world I always want to stop at the museums. I had read everything about Sun City before I moved here, and I just wanted to meet all these people.

I kept reading they needed volunteers, so I kept poking myself to stop by some day. I finally did, but I still wasn't sure I wanted to be a volunteer. I wanted to make sure it was a good organization and that the

people were good. (At this point, President Bret asks, well, did we pass this test -- to which Betty responds with a definite "yes!").

**Katherine:** I like to travel and see historical sites. Once, when my girlfriends were in town for a visit, we decided to visit the museum. I didn't even realize that I was explaining things to my girlfriends and really talking up the community. One of the docents working that day said, "you know

so much, you should be a volunteer here." I signed up that day!

## **What is the best thing about volunteering at the Del Webb Sun Cities Museum?**

**Betty:** Meeting people, for sure. Sharing the history. People who stop by always come back -- and bring their friends.

**Katherine:** I just like meeting new people. It's so fun to meet people and hear their stories -- and to learn from them. It's funny, but wherever they may be from, the museum always brings back fond memories. It seems everyone can relate to the kitchen -- and the pink bathroom!

*The museum is always looking for volunteer docents and guides. Call (623) 974-2568 or stop by the museum for information.*



Katherine DuBois



A map of Sun City West as its boundaries appear today. Highlighted in red are the original boundaries of what was once considered Lizard Acres.



## A look back at Lizard Acres

A look back at life in Lizard Acres – a ranching community that once existed where Sun City West now exists – was the subject of a special program hosted April 17 by the Del Webb Sun Cities Museum. An overflow crowd packed the R.H. Johnson Lecture Hall to hear Retired Judge John Gemmill, above right, share his stories about growing up in the community. Mr. Gemmill and his family lived on the prosperous Circle One cattle ranch during the 1950s and '60s. The ranch was sold to the Del Webb Corporation in the 1970s and eventually torn down to make way for Sun City West. In attendance for the talk were two other original Lizard Acres residents who grew up with Mr. Gemmill and surprised him with their appearance. Jed Keith, left, and Alan Keith, center, renew acquaintances with Judge Gemmill.



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Toll Free 1-844-4 SUN CITY or visit [suncityaz.org](http://suncityaz.org)



# William Beardsley's canals brought life to the Arizona desert

By Edson Allen

*Beardsley Road. Beardsley Canal. Beardsley Park Rec Center. Town of Beardsley.*

Who was Beardsley?

Hohokam Indians were the first people to settle in the Salt River Valley. They dug hundreds of miles of canals by hand to bring water to a thirsty, but fertile desert. For reasons unknown, they disappeared by 1450, and wind gradually filled in the canals.

In the 1860s, the earliest settlers saw these straight furrows in the desert and guessed they represented ancient canals. They began clearing them out and soon water was once again flowing to desert fields.

Canal companies were formed on both sides of the Salt River and the longest canal to be built was the Arizona Canal. It started far to the east near the confluence of the Verde and Salt Rivers, and snaked nearly 40 miles across the northern part of the Valley to end near today's Bell Road and 75th Avenue.

The success of the early canal companies caused a group of investors to plan a major project in the West Valley. Their plan was to dam the Aqua Fria and build a canal to bring water to the area of today's Surprise and Good-year. Engineer George Beardsley was visiting Phoenix, learned of the project and became so excited about it he called for his brother William to join him. They organized the Agua Fria Construction Company.

George died shortly afterward, and it would be William who would guide the project for the next 33 years over and around one obstacle after another.

Work got underway in 1892 with the building of a diversion dam and a canal that would extend south then west along the front of the White Tank Mountains. The gradual slope of the land would permit gravity to transfer water via smaller canals to 160,000 acres of desert.

Heavy rains in 1895 washed out the diversion dam, and the company was bankrupt. William Beardsley contacted friends in the east, raised new funds, and became president of the new Aqua Fria Water & Land Company.



William Beardsley and his son, Robert.

While Beardsley's project was privately funded, the canal companies and farmers in the East Valley were lobbying the government to build a dam on the Salt River to impound water and assure irrigation flow throughout the year.

The government responded in 1902 with the National Reclamation Act and the promise to build that dam. To avoid land speculation, the government withdrew all the land it would serve from sale, including the land in the Aqua Fria watershed, which was in no way involved.

So Beardsley had his company ready to build, but no land to irrigate. Years went by before he was able to convince the government that his project involved land that would not be served by canals from the Salt River, and more importantly, his dam was to be privately funded.

Full of optimism, Beardsley laid out a small town along Grand Avenue that would serve as a farming center for the area. It was located about where today's Meeker Boulevard intersects Grand Avenue. Look closely along the railroad, and there's a sign for "West Beardsley," which marks where a railroad spur served cattle and sheep loading pens.

Finally the way was clear for him

to proceed, and in 1920 he hired a young engineer, Carl Pleasant, to design a major dam to impound water from the Aqua Fria. By this time, the huge Roosevelt Dam on the Salt River was completed, and its immense cost known.

Pleasant designed a thinner dam that used buttresses to hold back the weight of the water. It would use a quarter of the material required to build Roosevelt Dam and be much less expensive. Twenty-eight buttresses would span its 1,800-foot width. At 174-feet tall, it would be the largest dam of its type in the world.

Beardsley had arranged additional financing from eastern bankers, and one of them, Donald Waddell, decided to move to Arizona to keep tabs on the project. He would be actively involved with the project until his death in 1963. At that time the existing dam was named in his honor, and the dam that eventually replaced it became the "New Waddell Dam" – the dam we see today.

At last the project seemed underway. Neither floods, nor government edicts, nor limited financing would keep William Beardsley from achieving his life's goal. But he would never see the results as he died in 1925, two years before the dam was completed. He had devoted 33 years to the project with its many ups and downs.

Fortunately, he had brought his engineer son, Robert, in to the business years before, and Robert would carry the project forward.

Other challenges awaited but eventually all would be conquered. Finally in 1935, water began to flow to farmlands in today's Surprise and parts of Goodyear. Fifty years later, the Central Arizona Project forced the creation of Lake Pleasant and a larger dam to store water from the Colorado.



The story of William Beardsley's quest to dam the Aqua Fria is the subject of one of the talks available from the museum's Speakers Bureau. Other talks explain how our Sun Cities came to be, and describe the roles played by Del Webb and John Meeker. Call 623-974-2568, to make arrangements. There is no charge for the talks, but donations are welcome.

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by  
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## WEST VALLEY ART MUSEUM

### Exhibits

Sept. 18 - November 2, 2017

**Creatures of the Night: Dracula, Vampires and Bats**  
A private collection of decorative art and memorabilia

November 6 - January 4, 2018

**Colored Pencil Society — Coloring Outside the Lines**  
Members works on view. Dec. 7 Program and Reception.

January 8 - February 22

**Creative Works by Black Artists**

February 26 - April 12

**Celebration of Artists 2018**

Juried show of two dimensional photography, paintings,  
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April 16 - May 31

**Arizona Watercolor Association**

Members works on view.

Established 1980 in the Active Adult  
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