

## The Liberty Bells of Sun City

The time was 1976 – the year of the nation's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Early on, a group of residents wanted to find a special and appropriate way to commemorate July 4, 1976. They decided on casting a full-size replica of the nation's liberty bell created from scrap metal collected within the community. A one-day collection in January 1976 netted 7,000 pounds of metal of all kinds, big and small, from earrings to bed springs.

Among the metal items donated by residents were:

- Copper tubing given by descendants of John Witherspoon, a signer of the Declaration of Independence
- Purple Hearts, military emblems, gold wedding bands, watches and other jewelry
- Two Order of Eastern Star pins, Masonic pins, and Boy Scout pins
- Small Liberty Bell awarded in 4<sup>th</sup> grade back in 1910
- A 57 mm anti-tank projectile used in WW II
- Horseshoes along with a medal won pitching horseshoes in grade school
- Statues, antique teapots and candlesticks
- Box of metal address plates from the News-Sun

One item was refused – a Chrysler car as it had too many non-metal parts.

John Kinsey peddled a 54-year old Hawthorne bike to the metal heap, tossed it on top, and hopped a ride home on the back of his wife's tandem bicycle while his Cycle Mates Bicycle Club looked on. The bell in the background was an imitation of the one to be cast.

The Del E. Webb Development Co. (DEVCO) underwrote the costs of having the metal sorted and processed. Copper and tin were shipped to Holland to be cast into a full-scale, 2080 pound, replica of the Liberty Bell. Steel and other metals were sent to Pennsylvania to be cast into the supporting A-frame, clapper, and base plate. Schulmerich Carillons did the finishing touches, tuning the bell to an "F" note, and making it ringable.

The bell was unveiled before a crowd of 4,000 residents at the Sun Bowl on July 4, 1976. After a brief ceremony, residents lined up to "ring that bell," beginning a tradition that has been repeated many times since. The bell was moved to its permanent home at the Bell Center. A time capsule with letters, poems, news articles, a film depicting Sun City in the 1970s, and other items were sealed in the base – not to be opened until 2026.

A second Liberty Bell sits in the front yard of a home at 105<sup>th</sup> and Wheatridge. This was the site of the Heritage Series of model homes, which opened in 1976. The bell appears to be quite old, but it remains a "mystery of history" as no record has yet been found as to where it came from.

