

“A Sun City Christmas Tradition”

We know from local newspaper stories published between 1960-1962 that many of Sun City's earliest residents brought their Christmas decorations along with them when moving to the Valley of the Sun. Others purchased anew at the local Variety Store. As early as 1962 the Sun City Merchants Association crowded with pleasure the growing number of entries each year for their Annual Christmas Tree Lighting Contest. Resident interest in Christmas lighting likely was sparked by neighborhood darkness, as there were no streetlights from Grand all the way to Peoria Avenue to light the way for the first 4,000 plus homes built in Sun City during those first seven years.

Each year contest entrants eagerly awaited the week before Christmas when the judging took place and the papers announced winners and their prizes. All was good until contest results from 1964 were announced. Secular characters like “Frosty” and “Rudolph” became the decorating rage and were awarded many of the prizes. Religious themed contestants regaled the contest sponsors with claims of unfairness. In 1965 a major rules change was announced. There would be two categories with prizes awarded for both secular and religious themes separately. That quieted the uproar but only for three years.

Contest rules had to be changed once more in 1968. Judging was to continue as usual seven to ten days before Christmas. Judges would then spot check winning entries as late as the week after New Years to make sure the displays had not been altered after mid-December. Some winners in 1967 in the religious category added their own “Rudolph” or “Grinch” etc. after the initial judging for reasons we can only guess. Those transgressors precipitated the second change in rules. After that, the contest continued annually for an undetermined time.

To commemorate those early Christmas displays, the Del Webb Sun Cities Museum has obtained a 1960 vintage silver tree. It is displayed in the museum's front window at 10801 Oakmont Drive. At night the tree is spot-lighted and changes colors regularly because of a focused 1960 vintage electric color wheel. Stop by and enjoy the tree. Come back in the daytime. The museum is a great destination to take your out of town guests over the holidays. Become a museum member and learn about other popular but long-forgotten contests. The museum has the answers to your history questions. We know how Sun City got those missing streetlights. We would love to share that interesting answer and many others historical tidbits with you.