



Winter 2008

Volume 17 No. 1

## SUN CITIES AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### C.A.R.S. CLUB CAR SHOW and OPEN HOUSE 9 AM - NOON Sponsored by LIBERTY BUICK

C.A.R.S. Club members will be displaying their Classic, Antique, Reproduction and Sentimental models at the Historical Society the first Saturday in February. Plans are for 25 or more cars spanning 60 years to be on exhibit. Here's your chance to talk to their owners, and to step back in time to the cars that are only memories for most of us.

Two local women, Bebe Lovitt and Ruth Martin, started the C.A.R.S. Club in 1981. Both owned Model Ts, and they had to drive into Phoenix to attend the nearest antique car club. They knew there were other car collectors in the area, and set out to bring them together. Today, the club has more than 200 members in Sun City, Sun City West, and surrounding communities. In an interesting side note, Bebe Lovitt also served on the Historical Society board for a number of years.

The event sponsor, Liberty Buick, will exhibit several new Buicks for comparison. Reshat and Minnie Hassan, owners of the Grand Center at 107<sup>th</sup> and Grand Ave, have graciously offered the use of the parking lot along Oakmont Drive (across the street from the Historical Society) for this event.

The Historical Society will be open for those who wish to check out displays on local history, as well as view a model home as it might have looked in 1960. Refreshments will be served.



Gene Carter's 4-door Ford Model T is one of the cars that will be on display. Gene's grandfather bought this car new in 1926 and passed it on to his grandson. Gene restored it in 1977 from the frame up, matching the original color. It was a labor of love as the project took nearly four-and-one-half years to complete.

10801 Oakmont Dr.—Sun City, AZ—85351

**Open Hours—1:30 to 3:30 p.m. Tuesday—Wednesday—Thursday—Friday**

Phone: (623) 974-2568

E-mail: scahs@frys.com

Web site: [www.scazhistory.org](http://www.scazhistory.org)

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

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**Message from the President**

***Closing an Exciting Year!***

The Society has had such a good year, that I have to share it with you! Those of you who attended the Annual Meeting on Nov. 8 received a "Review of 2007" that reported on our progress.

But at the risk of repeating myself, I want all of you to know what we accomplished so you, too, can take pride in your Historical Society.

You'll recall that we started 2007 with a community open house on a cold, windy January day. Our friends at Windermere West Valley Real Estate provided food and entertainment while attendees waited for a tour of our refurbished house. Despite the gray day, the mood was upbeat and 13 memberships were purchased at the event. With more than 250 visitors, tour length had to be curtailed. Giving people a brief look inside, however, resulted in many returning for repeat visits.

The open house, a new membership brochure, an active Speakers Bureau, and the Membership Committee's efforts to encourage renewals resulted in a 40% gain in membership!

Work continued within the house. The office area was rearranged to be more efficient, and allowed us to clear out the front bedroom. A compact Media Center was installed in this room, and visitors may now watch our collection of historical tapes and films that have been transferred to DVDs. The 1960s promotional tape, "The Beginning" has proven to be a hit with visitors. Soon, we'll have new displays filling the former front bedroom.

The office was given a facelift with new (used) furniture from the Habitat store. Volunteers spent hundreds of hours reorganizing the content of filing cabinets and shelves, greatly reducing the space required. We're still working through the "Where did we put that?" phase, but we're on our way to a more efficient office operation.

Thanks to **Pulte Homes**, the spongy floor in the Marinette Room was rebuilt, and we now have a firm foundation. They have also promised to add extra insulation to the attic to help reduce our heating and air conditioning expense. Volunteers from **Windermere WVRE** helped repaint the room. **Latham Construction** generously stepped in to replace rotting fascia on the rear of the house.

We owe appreciation to so many individuals and businesses! The great progress we've made is due in large amount to their gifts of time, talent, funds, and services. And, a special thanks to our docents, trustees, and other volunteers who keep the organization running smoothly. It's a big team effort, and I'm proud to be a part of it!

Ed Allen,  
President

*PS. If you'd like copy of the complete "Review of 2007" that was distributed at the Annual Meeting, call our office – 974-2568 -- and we'll send you one.*

This month, our search is for the locations of two activities that Sun City and early Sun City West residents enjoyed. The answers will appear in the Spring newsletter.

- 1) *Where was the Annual Grape Festival held?*
- 2) *Where was the trap and skeet shooting facility located?*



Now for the answers to the questions asked in the last newsletter about the earliest businesses in Sun City and Sun City West.

The first question asked how Webb convinced Safeway to open a store in Sun City before it had any residents. The Webb organization felt it important to have the elements of a complete community in place before beginning to sell houses. This meant nine holes of golf, a recreation center with a swimming pool, five model homes, a Hiway House Motor Hotel for visitors, and a grocery store.

Initially, Safeway turned down the opportunity to be the first store in the new town. After all, no one was living there. James Boswell, however, was on the Board of Safeway, and with his help, the Webb people made an attractive offer to build a store and allow Safeway to operate virtually rent-free until an agreed-upon sales volume was reached. As a result, a fully stocked, 14,400 sq.ft. Safeway opened at 107<sup>th</sup> and Grand on Dec. 31, 1959 – the day before the grand opening of Sun City.

The second question asked for the name of the first business to open in Sun City West. No, it wasn't Safeway. The Camino del Sol Shopping Center stood complete and ready for occupancy in April of 1980, but the agreement with the Safeway called for it to open when the community had 5,000 owned and occupied dwellings. Angela's Hair Studio was the first business to open in the empty center in March, 1980. Following the next month were Today's Swim & Patio and the Salad Bar Restaurant. Safeway and Walgreens didn't open until mid-September.

In 1983, merchants voted unanimously to rename the center Sundome Plaza in honor of the new performing arts center located nearby.



A fully-stocked Safeway greeted visitors on opening day.



The completed, but empty, SCW shopping center in April 1979



## Just Where Was “Lizard Acres?”

Back in the 1940s, R. S. Spurlock and J. C. Wetzler of Holbrook, AZ, were looking over a proposed 1,800-acre site for a new ranch one mile east of the intersection of Grand Avenue and Bell Road. Supposedly Spurlock said, “Jumpin’ Jehosophat, this country isn’t fit for raising anything but lizards.” Hence the Circle One Livestock Company operations here became known as “Lizard Acres.”

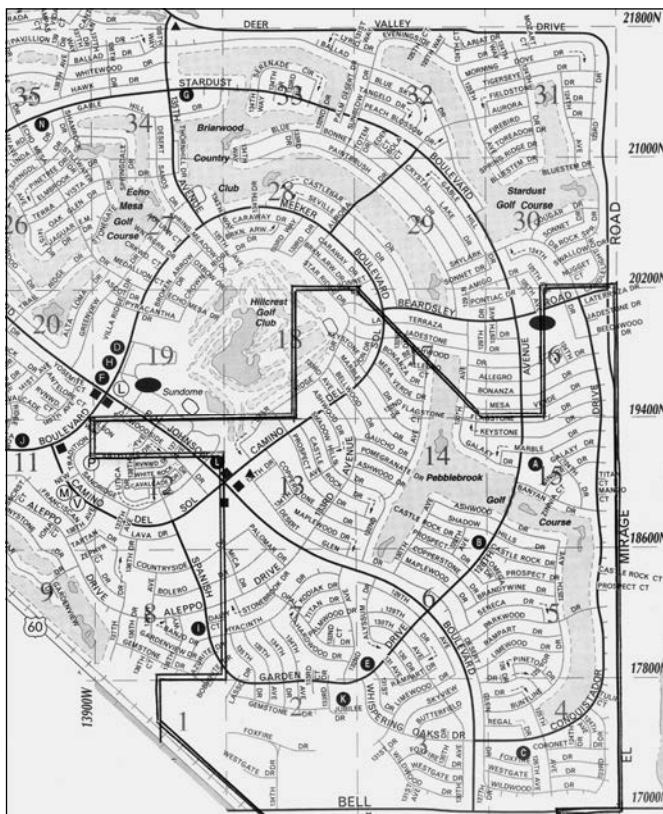
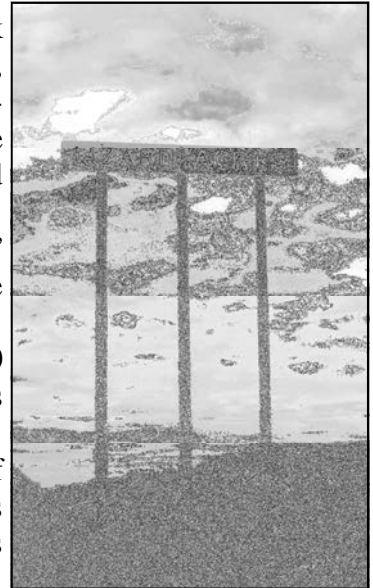
But today’s Sun City West covers slightly more than 7,000 acres. So, where was the 1,800 acres that gave the community its nickname?

A starting point is the “Lizard Acres” sign on the east side of Grand Ave., just opposite the entrance to Surprise Towne Center. This sign marked the location of the cattle loading and unloading pens along the east side of the railroad.

The southern border was actually south of Bell, occupying land where the former Surprise town center was located, along with RISE, Windmill Inn, Crossroads Shopping Center – all the way to Dysart Rd. It also included the triangle of land between Dysart, Grand, and Bell Road. The ranch was bordered on the east by today’s El Mirage Road, and ran as far north as Beardsley Rd. The north and west boundaries were irregular as shown on the map.

At its height, “Lizard Acres” was home to 40,000 cattle. These were kept in rows of pens topped with shade awnings – a first for the cattle industry. Water sprayers were fitted to each pen to help keep the dust down. The pens occupied an 80-acre site in the southern part of the ranch.

R. H. Johnson Blvd. wound through the cattle pens, making early buyers wonder if



this is where they really wanted to locate. One of the most challenging jobs of demolition involved the underground grain storage bins. They were huge, almost like bunkers used in wartime. The bins were V-shaped, solid concrete and had a system of elevators. Workers finally resorted to dynamite and blasted them to pieces.

At the height of construction in 1978, 30 scrapers were moving some 45,000 cubic yards of dirt a day. An older style of life was demolished to make way for a new community. So long, Lizard Acres, Hello Sun City West.

“Lizard Acres” occupied the southeast portion of today’s SCW as shown by the area within the double line.

In the beginning, Webb's original concept was to cater to the "middle of the road" buyers, providing an affordable, basic home design with few frills. Soon, Sun City homes began to take on a "dressed up" look with the addition of courtyards, atriums, and patios without increasing the cost. Homes with individual character began to appear.

How did the company know what to build and learn what potential buyers wanted? One way was to query visitors whenever new model homes opened. They would be given questionnaires to complete as they viewed the houses. Some questions would ask about specific features; others were more general: "What did you like best about this house? Or, "What did you least like?" The answers were carefully studied before DEVCO began planning the next series of model homes. Both Sun City and Sun City West had "experimental" homes.



In 1967, an experimental house opened on Mountain View Road, just east of that year's model homes. This home was planned to sample public reaction to new features, materials, and appliances and to predict their acceptance in future models. To encourage people to participate in a detailed survey, the Sun City Merchants Association offered gift certificates up to \$100 in value. The home was designed around a central garden and fountain. All rooms opened onto the courtyard and had louvered doors. Some of the new features showed how outside maintenance costs could be decreased by using Masonite hardboard siding and a tile roof. The attached two-car garage had an automatic door opener. Other novel features include a water purifying system and a built-in vacuum cleaner.

The kitchen featured a built-in stove with a Corning cook top and a gas barbeque. A built-in food center included lightweight, cordless appliances, including a mixer, blender, knife sharpener, and juicer.

Ceramic tile was used in the entry, dining area and kitchen. Bathrooms were floored with a cushion vinyl Corolon. There was a Swedish steam bath and shower, a therapeutic whirlpool bath with a six-foot tub, and a built-in dressing table with its own basin.

The master bedroom featured a wall of matched grain doors and cabinet space. A double fire-place served the living room and leisure room. One living room wall was covered with a gold-antiqued mirror. A centrally controlled AM/FM music and intercom system completed the new ideas.

Judging from the homes built after that, a number of ideas were offered as options – and some were not offered at all as they were either ahead of their time, or cost prohibitive.

1985 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of Sun City and in commemoration, the new model homes opening in Sun City West were named the "Silver Edition." These were the first homes with vaulted ceilings, stucco exteriors, and tile roofs.



Adjacent to the new models was the House of American Ideas. It was designed by Taliesin Associated Architects (a successor firm to Frank Lloyd Wright), and reflected the Webb organization's interest in the future. The 1,600-sq. ft., six-sided home was designed to bring the outdoors into the home's interior – much like the Sun City experimental home 18 years earlier. This house, however, had a verdigris copper roof, a fired brick exterior and an arboretum complete with aviary and bird-bath in the center of the home.

The Webb organization was never content with doing the same things over and over again. It was always on the lookout for new ideas, leading, and shaping public opinion about houses of tomorrow.

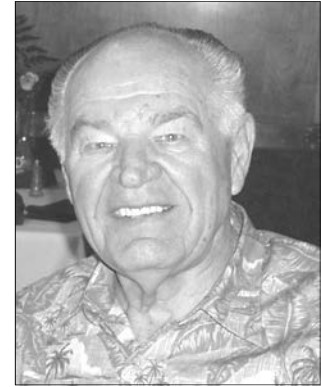
## Get acquainted with volunteer *David Verble*

# VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Meet David Verble who will assume the presidency of the Sun Cities Area Historical Society Board of Trustees for 2008. He is serving a second three-year term on the Board.

David succeeds Edson Allen who leaves the Board after serving a three-year term as president during his six years on the Board.

For the past year, David has served as vice president, lending his computer expertise to improve the society's communications and contributing to the recent renovation of displays and presentations. One goal as president is to computerize the registration of donated artifacts and photographs. He is also looking forward to a full schedule of events and new exhibits that will increase the presence of SCAHS in the community.



A native of Beaumont, Texas, David played attended Texas A&M on a baseball scholarship and graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering. After receiving his Air Force commission as a second lieutenant, he served 24 years in the U.S. Air Force, earning command pilot wings and working as an engineer/manager in ballistic missile and space launch programs, including research and development. David retired in 1980 as a colonel after directing modifications for the Space Shuttle operations at Vandenberg AFB, CA.

As an Air Force engineer, David and his family often lived abroad. After completing pilot training, David was assigned to England where he lived in a 16<sup>th</sup> century cottage, which he describes as "comfortable," despite small rooms and low doorways. He recently contributed an account of life in the cottage now included in a collection of the town's historical records. (Available to read on [www.hilton-village.com](http://www.hilton-village.com)) Subsequently, he transferred to a troop carrier squadron in France flying re-supply missions in Europe.

During the sixties, a combat tour in Vietnam interrupted his engineering career. He served as a C-47 pilot delivering psychological warfare leaflets and broadcasting messages to the Viet Cong.

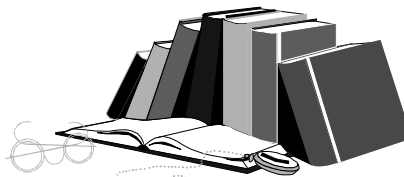
On his return to Vandenberg, he worked at placing satellites into polar earth orbit. Four years in Hawaii as a liaison officer in downrange operations was an intercultural learning experience. He found out what being in a minority is really like. The family also hosted an exchange student from Italy who has now become a professor of law at the University of Bologna. The family is planning to visit her this coming summer.

David moved to Sun City West in 1995 from Irvine, Calif., after a second retirement from the McDonnell Douglas Corp. Now a full-time resident, he has three daughters and seven grandchildren living in California.

In addition to his time spent at the Historical Society, David has devoted many hours to refurbishing old computers for distribution to the Baptist Seminary in Nogales. He also served as chairman of the building committee that oversaw construction of the Stardust Bible Church in Sun City West.

Although his life has touched history at many points, he declares that he never knew history until he joined SCAHS. It has turned his perspective into a more positive vein as to the value of what has been accomplished by those who preceded us.

## ***Help Make History Tasty!***



What's your favorite dish? What did you serve company on special occasions? What recipe did your guests frequently request?

The Sun City 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee is planning a commemorative cookbook to help celebrate our first half-century. Maybe you don't cook as often as you once did, but chances are you held on to your treasured cookbooks. Now's your chance to get them out and relive happy memories of meals gone by – the times that family and friends gathered around your table for a meal that only you could prepare.

Look through those favorite culinary memories, and share the best with your friends in the Sun Cities. If you have a story to tell about the recipe, send it along. Maybe it was the first time you used south-western ingredients in cooking – and offered your guests a really HOT dish. Or, maybe your husband sampled the dish you had waiting in the refrigerator – and it was so good, he ate the whole thing!

Now's your chance to see your name in print! It might be another 50 years before another Sun City cookbook is published! Send your recipe and story, along with your name, address, and phone number, to: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Cookbook, P.O. Box 1270, Sun City, AZ 85372.

### WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS

#### INDIVIDUAL

Isabella Cherry  
Steve Folson  
Thomas Kuhn  
Paul Luetton  
Vye Wieland

#### FAMILY

Barbara & Chester Hively

#### SUPPORTING

Lynn Fischer  
Bette Linwood  
Carole Parnell

#### PATRON

Drew Meyers  
William Pearson

### THANK YOU, DONORS

Theodore Hack  
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and

#### *Special Thanks*

*We extend our sincere appreciation to Windermere Real Estate for their generous support of the Society in underwriting the cost of this newsletter.*

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**Join--Sun Cities Area Historical Society--2008**

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Check Level of Membership:  
\_\_\_ Individual (\$10)      Make Checks Payable to:  
\_\_\_ Family (\$15)                      SCAHS  
\_\_\_ Supporting (\$25)  
\_\_\_ Patron (\$50)                      Total Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ Organization (\$25 +)              Check # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_ Additional Gift

**Mail to: SCAHS 10801 Oakmont Dr. Sun City AZ 85351**  
**Thank You!**

On January 14th, Mr. Don Tuffs, former VP of Public Relations for DEVCO, will be at the house to talk about his experiences booking entertainment for the Sundome, now known as the Maricopa Events Center. We will have cookies and coffee starting at 10:00 AM. Call Ann at 623-486-3201 if you would like to reserve a seat.

**TIME TO RENEW!**

**Your yearly membership expires at the end of 2007. Use this form and the enclosed envelope to mail your 2008 dues now. Your support keeps us going.**

*(A star in front of your name below means you have already renewed.)*

**Mark your calendar...**

Saturday  
February 2, 2008  
CARS Show &  
Open House: 9 to Noon  
10801 Oakmont Dr.



**MEMBERS COFFEES**

**← Mondays—10 a.m.**  
**January 14, 2008**

SUN CITIES AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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Sun City, AZ 85351