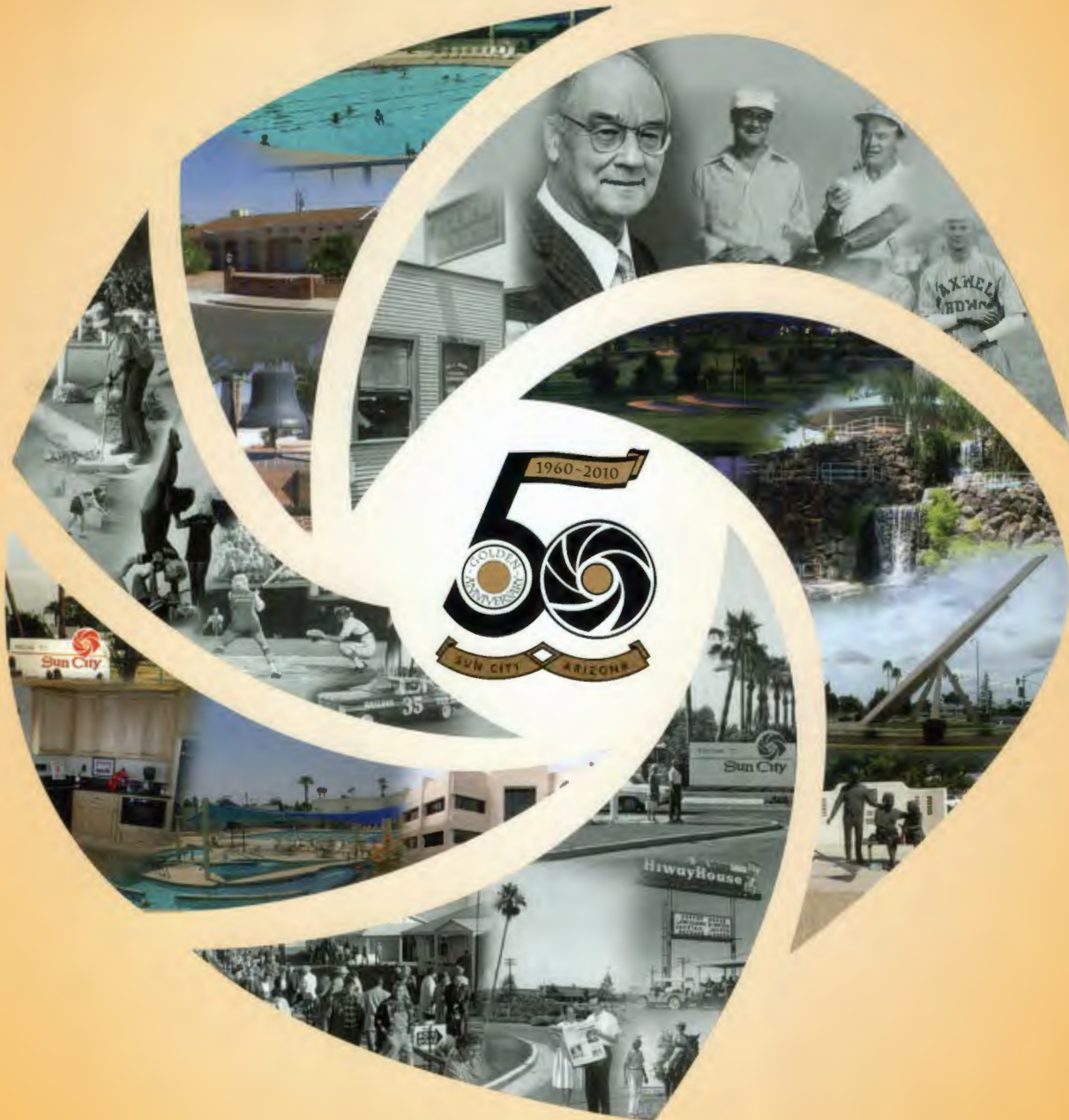


# RESHAPING RETIREMENT IN AMERICA

## SUN CITY, ARIZONA



**1960-2010**

How the nation's first active adult community pioneered a lifestyle  
that created a model for generations of retirees to come

# Dedication

This journal is dedicated to all those who helped Del Webb make Sun City a success. While many were involved, several warrant mention here for recognizing potential opportunity where experts saw only failure. Joe Ashton and Tom Breen investigated the feasibility of an adult community, and recognized what it would take to make it successful. The first step was to convince their boss, Jake Jacobson – who ran the company day-to-day – and he quickly became an enthusiastic supporter.

They had done the research and had a successful concept in hand – when in walked Jim Boswell with the tracts of land that would be needed. Boswell, too, saw opportunity, and invested in the new community. With that, they had everything they needed to get a green light from Del Webb.

One more man was to have a great impact on the new community – John Meeker. The community was four years old, sales were lagging, and people weren't yet a community. Meeker was given the responsibility to fix things – and he did! He took the dollars being poured into national advertising, and spent them on the residents. Community events and dinners soon created the friendly environment that drew residents together. As he anticipated, they soon became the advertisers, telling friends and relatives back home about their exciting and active lives under the warm, clear Arizona skies.

There were many more Webb men and women who helped make Sun City an attractive destination for those post-career years. But it would be the residents who gave shape to the community we enjoy today, setting aside time to help run the community, as well as provide services that make this a neat, safe, and caring place in which to live.

Del Webb expressed it well when he said, "Concrete, steel, and lumber make the buildings, but people make the community. Together, we can realize a way of life unprecedented in America."

Finally, a special "Thank You!" to Jane Freeman, Glenn Sanberg, Rita Wright, and the others who had the foresight to begin collecting and preserving the history of Sun City some 25 years ago. The Sun Cities Area Historical Society that they founded is still going strong, and served as the primary source for the content of this journal.

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# RESHAPING RETIREMENT IN AMERICA

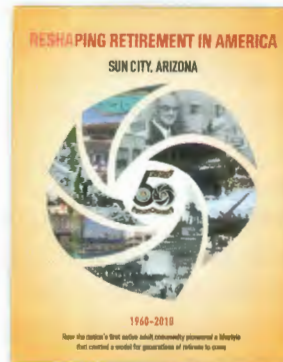
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# Prologue



*"The region is altogether valueless ... after entering it, there is nothing to do but leave. Ours has been the first, and will doubtless be the last, party of whites to visit this profitless locality."*

– Federal surveyor Joseph C. Ives, reporting to Congress in 1858 after returning from Arizona.

**I**t was once called "the Vulture Road." On today's maps of Greater Phoenix, it appears as a grand diagonal jutting northwest from downtown, known appropriately along most of its length as Grand Avenue. It's a relatively short segment of what most people today simply call U.S. Route 60, the 4,300-mile highway that meanders from Brenda Junction to Virginia Beach.

The route that spawned Sun City, Ariz., was originally a wagon route brought into being by German immigrant Heinrich Heitzel, who later changed his name to Henry Wickenburg when he joined the California Gold Rush. In 1862, Wickenburg was traveling with a party along the Hassayampa River, northwest of the Salt River Valley, where the city of Phoenix would soon rise from the ruins left behind by the Hohokam people who abandoned it some time in the 14th century.

What is known today is that Wickenburg discovered a rich gold mine that he named "Vulture Mine." The true circumstances of its discovery, however, are shrouded in myth. One version of the story is that Wickenburg picked up a rock

– to throw at his stubborn burro, Arizona Nightingale – and noticed that it had gold veins in it. Another tale has Wickenburg shooting a vulture in order to use its wing as a broom to sweep out his tent; the vulture, legend has it, dropped right onto a mound riddled with gold. The least flashy – and most probable – explanation is that during his travels, Wickenburg noticed a large outcropping of white quartz, which he knew to be a frequent vehicle for gold deposits; he named the mine for the birds he saw circling a nearby peak.

Restless, Wickenburg sold the mine after a few years, and the Vulture went on to become the most productive gold mine in the history of Arizona. Near the mine, the first town in Maricopa County mushroomed on the west bank of the Hassayampa River and was named Wickenburg. By 1866, it was one of the largest cities in Arizona and missed being chosen as the capital by only two votes.

The ore was crushed using mule power, and mules required forage. One of the miners, Jack Swilling, was aware of the canals dug by the ancient Hohokam people to support agriculture in the Salt River Valley, and persuaded Wickenburg miners to invest in the Swilling Irrigation Canal Company. Within a year, wagons loaded with supplies and produce were rolling between the canals and Wickenburg over the 54-mile Vulture Road.

In the latter half of the 19th century, this canal system matured and expanded, successfully irrigating thousands of acres of desert land. The Arizona Canal Company was formed to carry water to the arid plains west of town. As farms and ranches sprang up along the old Vulture Road, investors promoted the land to Easterners and Midwesterners. They succeeded in luring a wealthy lumber mill owner and a mill engineer from Marinette, Wis., who purchased adjacent 640-acre land grants in 1892. The Santa Fe, Prescott, and Phoenix Railroad agreed to build a watering station on the land that bore the name “Marinette.” By 1912, the town was large enough to have its own post office, though the surrounding acres still had not been developed.

In 1920, the Marinette holdings – 20,000 acres of farmland, an area roughly circumscribed by present-day Burns Drive to the north, Peoria Avenue to the south, the Agua Fria River west, and east to the New River – were purchased by the Southwest Cotton Company, a subsidiary of the Goodyear Tire Company. The submarine warfare of World War I had cut off the supply of long-staple cotton from Egypt, and a young executive at Goodyear, Paul Litchfield, had ventured from the company’s Akron, Ohio headquarters and judged the West Valley to be an area of prime potential for the high-grade cotton needed in Goodyear tires.

A short-lived Marinette renaissance followed the Goodyear purchase, and included tent cities of migrant



Marinette’s General Store once stood near the present-day intersection of 105th Avenue and West Thunderbird Boulevard.

workers clustered around wells, along with the requisite boomtown saloon and brothel, which was rumored to stand near the present-day intersection of 112th and Grand avenues. In 1927, Goodyear invited the J.G. Boswell Company, an established family firm from Georgia, to operate a cottonseed mill at nearby Litchfield Park.

Goodyear later determined to refocus on its core business of making tires, and leased part of its holdings to the Boswell Company. After the lease was up, Litchfield – by then president of Goodyear – asked the company if it wanted to purchase the Marinette property. According to Jim Boswell (nephew of Walter, the Boswell brother assigned to oversee the Arizona operations), the Marinette Ranch was purchased in 1943.

The Korean War sent the demand for cotton through the roof, and despite the Boswell Company's ability to turn a profit through the use of big, sophisticated machinery, it became obvious that the water table was dropping at a rate that would soon make cotton growing unprofitable.

"We were concerned," said Jim Boswell, "about the viability of our Arizona operation." Earlier, he had spoken casually with a Webb executive, Robert H. "Bob" Johnson, about the prospect of selling off the land, and in 1959, while visiting the Marinette holdings, Boswell read in the local paper that the Del E. Webb Corporation had just purchased the nearby Arrowhead Ranch. The developer – known to many as the owner of baseball's New York Yankees – was looking for large parcels in the area. On his way to visit a cotton farm in nearby Chandler, Boswell stopped in at the Phoenix headquarters of Webb's company, where he was introduced to L.C. Jacobson, Webb's partner.

"I see in the paper," said Boswell, "that you would like to buy a piece of property."

Years later, Boswell recalled Jacobson's response: "He said, 'I would, but I want a large piece, and you probably couldn't qualify for that.' And I said, 'You're probably right. It's only 10,000 acres.'"

Intrigued, Jacobson (better known as "Jake" to his associates) gathered a pair of colleagues and drove with Boswell to see the land. "Jake, with his great imagination, started saying he was interested in retirement, and that we could move this mountain and do this and do that," recalled Boswell. "He was still talking, with his arms moving all over, when we were coming back on Grand Avenue, and I said, 'By the way, there's another 10,000 acres over here if you're interested.'"

"And with that he said, 'Let's go to my office and make a deal.' At 3 a.m. that night, we had reduced our contract on a yellow legal pad to a simple letter of agreement, which he signed. I never did make it to Chandler." In Jacobson's office, events had begun that would bring Sun City into existence.



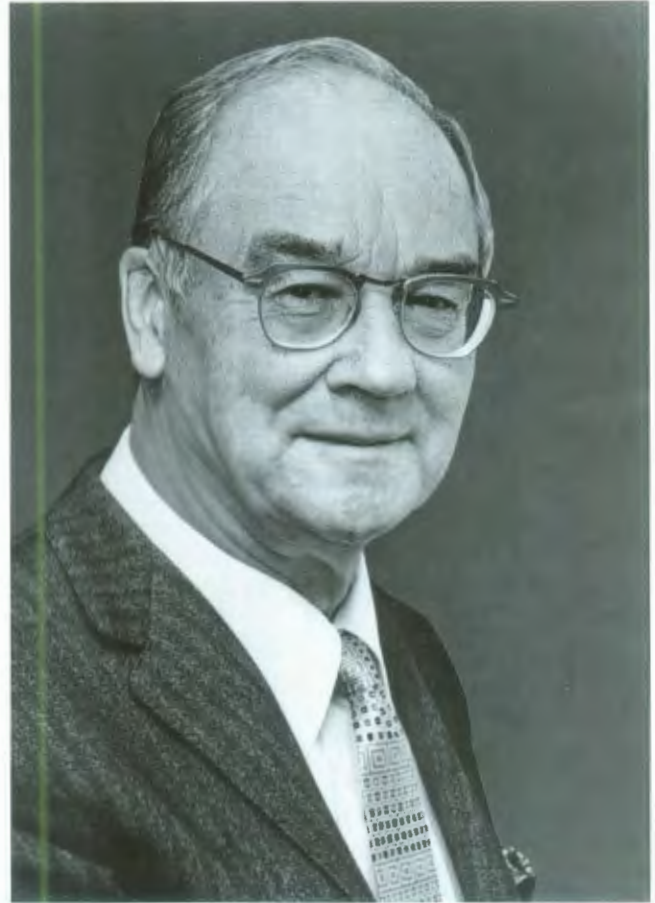
L.C. "Jake" Jacobson (left), the unemployed carpenter who knocked on Del Webb's door in 1938, would later become Webb's partner and president of the Del E. Webb Corporation. In 1959, he arranged for the Webb Company's purchase of nearly 20,000 acres of cotton farm, for the development of an active retirement community.

# Man and Myth

## Del Webb's Vision and Pioneering Spirit Made Sun City Possible

*When a man is half owner of the New York Yankees, hobnobs with the top people in both Washington and Hollywood, controls one of the nation's biggest construction companies, heads or sits on the board of 43 corporations, has a partnership or major interest in 31 companies, belongs to 14 clubs, and has so much money that he almost never has to touch the dreary stuff, it puts one's teeth slightly on edge to call him unknown. Yet it's an abashing fact that an overwhelming number of people still have never heard of Del E. Webb or, if they have, find his name only vaguely familiar and disembodied.*

– introductory paragraph to "The Webb of Mystery," a profile of Del Webb published in the Feb. 29, 1960 edition of *Sports Illustrated* magazine.



**T**oday, the excerpt above provides a record of what 50 years can do to one's image. By now a great many Americans have heard of Del E. Webb, and when they think of him, they rarely remember him as the owner of the Yankees, or as the builder of Madison Square Garden and Bugsy Siegel's Flamingo Hotel. To most Americans, he's simply the man who invented active senior living and whose name is affixed to communities from Cape Cod Bay to the Mojave Desert.

Like many self-made icons of the American West, Webb's biography is a tangle of history and myth, a yarn spun by himself and his marketing people. But those who knew him personally described him as warm, sincere, and genuine. "He was a terribly honest, good old country boy," said Jim Boswell, the cotton magnate with whom Webb partnered in 1959 to build Sun City. "He had very high ideals. In my opinion, he was not a business man, but he was smart enough to surround himself with business people."

L.C. Jacobson, the down-on-his-luck carpenter who came to work for Webb in 1938 and later became president of the Del Webb Corporation, said of his friend and former boss: "A newspaper writer once wrote that he reminded you of someone from your own hometown, and that was the best description I ever heard. [Del was] a very personable guy, a great storyteller in a Will Rogers kind of way. He was an avid sportsman ... a baseball player and golfer. He had a way with people that I have never seen the equal of in my life."



### **Fastballer and Journeyman**

Delbert “Del” Eugene Webb was born May 17, 1889, in Fresno, Calif. His father, Ernest, was a farmer who owned his own sand and gravel business; he was also an avid baseballer who passed his love of the game along to Webb, who by the age of 13 already stood 6 feet 3 inches tall and earned as much as \$2.50 a game playing first base for semipro teams around Fresno.

When his father’s business failed in 1914, Webb quit school and became an itinerant carpenter, roaming California and signing on with any construction company that had its own baseball team. He worked at the Oakland shipyards during World War I and married his childhood sweetheart, Hazel Church; their marriage would last 34 years until it ended quietly in 1953. His baseball career effectively ended much earlier, in 1927, when a nasty case of typhoid fever nearly killed him, stripping more than half his body weight (he went from 204 pounds to 99), and preventing him from working for an entire year.

After he recovered, Webb’s doctor advised him to move to a warm, dry climate; Webb and Hazel lit out for Phoenix with a borrowed \$100 to their names. Webb’s first job was hanging doors at the Westward Ho Hotel, which was being built downtown. Six months later, working as a foreman on the construction of a new store for the A.J. Bayless grocery chain, Webb caught a break when the lead contractor ran off with the payroll. Bayless, who had taken a liking to Webb, asked him to oversee the store’s completion. Webb agreed, and the Del E. Webb Construction Company was born.

Webb’s first office was located at 218 North 9th Street in Phoenix, a tiny building not much bigger than a kiosk. He began with home additions and small offices, along with new stores for Bayless. The business started slowly.



A young Del Webb (top right) in uniform for the Maxwell Hardware Company baseball team.

### **Laying the Foundation**

The rise of Webb’s contracting business in Phoenix was due in part to his uncanny ability to judge the quality of a person. He hired with his gut, rather than according to credentials, and he was rarely mistaken. The first to join the Webb Construction Company included young men of no particular distinction, other than their first impression on Webb: Robert H.

“Bob” Johnson, a secretary whose shorthand – and attitude – had impressed Webb during a visit to the offices of the Association of General Contractors; Jacobson; and John Meeker, the teenager who caddied for Webb at the Phoenix Country Club and began working for him several years later, after serving in the military during World War II. Each of these men went on to become influential leaders in the company and prominent Arizona citizens.

Webb grew his company by taking on public-sector jobs, such as schools and an addition to the Arizona capitol building. George W.P. Hunt, Arizona's colorful first governor, commissioned Webb to build his pyramid-shaped tomb on a hill overlooking Papago Park. By 1937, Webb felt confident enough to open a California branch office, which he left in the charge of Johnson.

By the beginning of World War II, Webb had established himself as one of the nation's largest contractors, and he won dozens of government jobs during wartime, including several major military bases. After the war had ended, he vowed to diversify, and to win new clients he bought a share in the New York Yankees. Tickets to Yankees games were highly coveted, and made great gifts to potential clients. His ownership of the Yankees introduced Webb to the companionship of influential celebrities and power brokers: He was often seen golfing with the likes of Bob Hope, Howard Hughes, and Bing Crosby.

The 1950s were a decade of explosive growth for the Webb Construction Company, a time when it entered a new and emerging market: the planned community. To help house the growing military population of Cochise County, outside Tucson, the company built the area's first large-scale housing project: Pueblo Gardens, which consisted of 500 frame houses and 100 duplexes. In 1953, the Webb Construction Company built an entire town, San Manuel, a few miles from Oracle Junction, in Arizona's southeastern corner. Designed as a company town for the Magma Copper Company, San Manuel consisted not only of dwellings but infrastructure: streets, commercial buildings, schools, and parks. The project – the biggest challenge yet for Webb's company – taught valuable lessons about building a town from scratch in the middle of the desert.

The construction company grew so rapidly during this time that it was often a struggle to find the capital to keep fueling it. In 1959, when the company took on one of its largest projects to date – Sun City, Ariz., a 50-and-older housing community built on cotton fields west of Phoenix – it was clear that an infusion of cash would be needed to fulfill the community's promise.

On Dec. 8, 1960, the Webb Construction Company incorporated and went public in an offering worth \$12 million. "When Del went public," said Boswell, "I think that was the culmination of his ambition ... I would say that in the latter part of his career he was a totally complacent, happy, satisfied man." He was also well on his way to transforming – in ways even he was not yet fully aware – the way Americans would live their later years.



The first office of Del Webb's construction business, which opened in 1928 at 1633 West Jefferson Street in Phoenix.

# The Face of Sun City

The folklore surrounding Sun City's origins has always been a combination of truth and legend, and within a few decades of its opening, it was already difficult to tell the two apart, even for his closest associates. On the community's 25th anniversary, prominent Del Webb executives were interviewed about the early days of Sun City. One told a vividly detailed story about how, on opening day, Del Webb was rushed to the ceremony in a car forced off-road by stalled traffic, rambling over the cotton fields until Webb arrived to greet eager visitors. Another firmly stated that Webb wasn't there at all – and today no photograph exists of Del Webb in Sun City on opening day. Recently discovered personal diaries from Webb indicate that he was in Las Vegas and Los Angeles from Jan. 1-8.

This persistence of legend illustrates the hold Del Webb has on people's imaginations. To many, Del Webb *was* Sun City – and remains so, more than 30 years after his death.

The indelible link between Sun City and the face of Del Webb is a tribute to the campaign launched by colleagues in his company's Phoenix headquarters. As people began to move into the community, many were under the impression that Webb had personally built their homes. New residents were told by neighbors that if anything went wrong, "Del will fix it."

While Webb fully supported the philosophy behind Sun City, even he didn't fully realize its success until some time had passed, according to L.C. Jacobson. "A year later," said Jacobson, "he was still asking us: 'Are you sure you know what you're doing?'"

When he visited Sun City, Webb became aware that his image had merged with that of the new community. "When he did come out here," said John Meeker, president of the Del E. Webb Development Company, or DEVCO, the company that oversaw Sun City's development, "they really idolized him. At first it really bothered him that these people would come out and go gaga over him. He asked me on several occasions: 'What have you gotten me into here?'"

Webb's discomfort wore off, however, when he saw the effect his work was having on the lives of seniors. "I think he was thrilled," Jim Boswell said, "that he would be invited out here and people would say: 'Thank you, Mr. Webb, for what you've done.' You could see his chest puff out."



Webb at a Ladies Club Reception at the Town Hall Recreation Center, early 1960s. Recalled Owen Childress: "The residents out there actually thought [Del Webb] was involved in building the houses. They thought he was out there pounding nails. I can remember him visiting, and people would just want to come up and touch him. It was like magic."

In February of 1974 – just months before his death – Webb appeared on a 90-minute television broadcast titled "The Millionaires," hosted by Merv Griffin and airing in Los Angeles and Phoenix. "The most satisfying thing that I ever accomplished in my life was the development of these Sun Cities," he told Griffin. "It's just fantastic ... I go out there, and some lady will come up to me and put her arms around me and tell me, 'Oh, Mr. Webb, you've saved my life – mine and my husband's.' Another lady came up to me and said, 'You know what this means to me? We lived in Chicago and never had a country club life, and now we're just living here like kings!' And they go on and on like that – and it really gets embarrassing."

Webb's affection for Sun City was reflected in the Del E. Webb Foundation, established in 1961 to administer his estate after his death. Over the years it has assisted with generous donations to several Sun Cities projects, including the Walter O. Boswell and Del E. Webb Memorial Hospitals. In spite of the variety of projects he undertook over the course of his life, Webb never lost enthusiasm for Sun City, the one that became most intimately linked with his name.

# Defying the Doomsayers

To most experts – both inside and outside the Del Webb Company – Tom Breen’s idea of an active retirement community went over like a lead balloon.



When word got out that the Del E. Webb Construction Company had bought a pair of 10,000-acre parcels in the northwest Valley along Grand Avenue, most people suspected something big was coming. At the time, however, nobody at the Webb Company – not even L.C. Jacobson, who ran the company’s day-to-day operations – had much of an idea yet what to do with all that land. “At that particular time,” said Jacobson, “Del and I were very bullish in land.”

Tom Breen, a former Marine and actor whose father, Joseph, had once been the enforcer of the controversial “Hays Code” governing motion pictures, was an up-and-coming junior executive at the Webb company, director of its housing division. He had a vision for the cotton fields – but he knew that getting people to share it wouldn’t be easy.

Five years earlier, on 300 acres of land that happened to adjoin the Marinette Ranch, a developer named Ben Schleifer and his builder, Elmer Johns, had begun work on something that had never existed before: a community restricted to residents at least 60 years of age. By 1959, Johns had already built and sold 100 houses, and the idea of a retirement community had piqued the interest of the national media.

Jacobson remembered it this way: “One day Joe [Ashton, vice president of housing and development] and Tom came in and they said, ‘Do you have some time? We want to show you something.’ So ... they took me out to Youngtown. They said: ‘Look at this.’ We looked at it, and we marveled. It was way out in the middle of nowhere, right alongside a ditch, and some guy had sold a few lots looking across that canyon there. They were enthusiastic that this might be the idea.”

Jacobson – known to his closest associates as “Jake” – was skeptical, and reminded Breen that a community restricted to older people was, by definition, turning its back on 80 percent of the potential market. But Breen had already met his share of skeptics. “I had been feeling around with this idea for about two years,” he said. “But the problem was that everybody I communicated with were gerontologists who would not deal with what you do with your life between the time you retire and the time you die.” The opinion Breen respected most – offered by Dr. Robert J. Havighurst, a renowned sociologist at Northwestern University – was not conclusive. “He said that basically I was talking about separating [older people] from a social structure designed for the elderly,” Breen recalled, “which he was not an

authority on, and he didn't know anybody who was. Nothing happened with the idea, and I just kept thinking about it until Jake made this deal with Boswell."

Breen had seen Youngtown – basically, he thought, a cluster of inexpensive houses, surrounding a former farm pond – and he wasn't impressed. He thought the Webb Company could do much more with the retirement concept, and he pushed the idea to his boss, Ashton.

"Ashton told me: 'You've got all these wild-assed ideas. Why don't you put the thing down in black and white?'" Breen said. "So I wrote him a memo. The community would be based on three things: activity, economy, individuality." The company would have to provide the facilities needed for residents to be active; the facilities would have to be owned by the residents in common; and the residents would be in charge of their own use of those facilities. Webb would build the community, turn it over to their residents, and get out of the way.

Ashton called Breen on a Saturday, after reading the memo. "He said, 'You've got to go see a psychiatrist,'" said Breen. "And we did." The two paid a visit to a local clinician, Robert L. Beal – not to have Breen's head examined, but to get a professional opinion on Breen's memo. According to Breen, Beal told them: "I think you're right, but I don't think you know how right you are."

Ashton and Breen were encouraged. "Then we went to work," Breen said. "We got Jake and Del Webb to commit, which was not easy." They began to examine how such a community might be developed.

One of the first studies they ordered, conducted by a local consulting firm, cost the company \$10,000, and consisted of a pile of government pamphlets. "You or I could have made the same study without paying for it," said Breen. He wanted a more personal study of how real-life retirees wanted to live,



**OPPOSITE:** A sign along the tracks of the Santa Fe Railroad, north of Grand Avenue, designating Webb as the land's new owner. After some coaxing by his executives in Phoenix – especially Tom Breen, Joe Ashton, and eventually Webb's partner, L.C. Jacobson – Webb decided to back the idea of an active retirement community. **ABOVE:** An aerial photograph from June 1959, after Del Webb and Jim Boswell concluded the purchase of the 10,000-acre Marinette Ranch north and south of Grand Avenue. At left are the remains of the town of Marinette, adjoining Grand Avenue and surrounded by cotton fields. At right, southwest of Marinette, is the new development of Youngtown – reportedly the world's first housing community restricted to older residents.

and he turned to a friend named Lou Silverstein, who was headed to Florida – an emerging warm-weather retirement haven – to launch a radio station with his brother. "We paid him gas money and expenses if he would go to Florida and just talk to people," Breen said. "He went down there and did an excellent job, beating on doors. The thing he heard most often was, 'I love children and my grandchildren, but I don't want to raise someone else's children.' And we thought, well, there has got to be something to our basic idea."

After the Webb Company had committed the funds for the master planning, it paid six experts from the Urban Land Institute, a nonprofit consortium of the nation's foremost realtors and developers, to weigh in on the idea. After three days of discussion, the experts gave their verdict: such a community wouldn't work. Older people, they said, didn't want to be

with each other; they wanted to be with young people. And as a profit-making venture, the community would fail because its residents would die off faster than new ones moved in to take their places. "It was a very negative report," said Jacobson. "And they recommended that we not go ahead with it."

But by this time Jacobson was a believer, and he wasn't ready to take no for an answer from experts who had not consulted a single retiree. Thanks to Lou Silverstein, the Del Webb Construction Company knew what older Americans wanted. "We gave [the Urban Land Institute] one of our good ideas, and they gave us their report," said Jacobson. "So we sort of bristled up and decided, right then: Well, we're going to give it a whirl. There was a risk there, but we went out and we committed to a hell of a development."

# From Cotton to Community



By the summer of 1959, everything was in place for the Del E. Webb Construction Company to begin work on its active retirement community. A deal had been worked out that would benefit both Webb and the original owner of the cotton fields west of Phoenix, the J.G. Boswell Company: The two parties formed a joint venture, the Del E. Webb Development Company (commonly referred to as DEVCO), a subsidiary of the Del E. Webb Construction Company, which would build the retirement community that was, for the time being, referred to simply as the “Marinette Retirement Community.” Boswell took a 49 percent share in the partnership, and Webb 51 percent.

The men Del Webb had installed to run things in Phoenix had followed faithfully in the footsteps of their boss, disregarding “expert” advice when it ran counter to their instincts. Instead of listening to the Urban Land Institute’s dire predictions about their proposed active retirement

community, they had doubled down on Lou Silverstein, the radio advertising salesman who had traveled door-to-door in Florida and learned a few things from retirees. His work had confirmed that the bare-bones accommodations of neighboring Youngtown were not what most seniors were looking for.

“[Youngtown] catered to a different lifestyle from what we offered,” said John Meeker, who took charge of DEVCO in the mid-1960s. “We were offering golf, a more active lifestyle, and they truly were the ones who built people a house with a rocking chair – and they were going to sit there and wait to die.”

Silverstein had learned other things that would guide the Webb Company’s planning. In Florida – then famous for shady land deals in which people were promised Shangri-La and sold a parcel of naked swampland – many people he’d talked to were disillusioned by developers’ broken promises. Recreation centers and other facilities had been pledged, but never built.

“We couldn’t stand that for our own image,” said L.C. Jacobson. “We didn’t want to be known as a schlock lot seller-operator.” On their own, Webb executives had already determined that to sell houses before the facilities were built would be pointless. “Our feeling was, say you’ve got a man who is 70 years old, and wants to live there,” Jacobson said. “What the hell does he care if you’ve got a sign that says, ‘Future Shopping Center’? That isn’t going to do much for him.”

The decision to build the community’s centerpieces – a golf course, a shopping center, and a recreation center – before launching a sales program was another risk in which Boswell and Webb each staked about \$650,000, but by the summer of 1959 the project had taken on a life of its own. The first earth for the new championship golf course was moved in August. “I spent decades working to flatten that land,” cracked Jim Boswell, “and Del Webb went in and started building hills on it.” Within five months the first nine holes were in, along with five furnished model homes and the first section of a shopping center anchored by a Safeway supermarket and a Hiway House – a new

addition to the Webb Company's chain of motor hotels. The Community Center – today known as the Oakmont Recreation Center – boasted a swimming pool, a crafts building, and courts for lawn bowling, shuffleboard, horseshoes, and croquet.

The layout illustrated the Webb Company's daring new template for a master-planned community: On the land where the cotton pickers of Marinette had once clustered around wells that provided their sustenance, the people of Sun City would live in village-style settlements surrounding their own lifeblood: the active-living facilities that would warm and enrich their lives.

The most important question still remained, however: Would people move in? As soon as the idea had been hatched, the Webb Company saturated the nation's media markets – especially those in colder northern climates – with advertisements touting “An Active Way of Life.” Full-page ads were run in newspapers around the country – as well as in nationwide periodicals such as *Time* and *Life*. Radio listeners were treated to the jingle that began: “Wake up and live in Sun City!” Glossy brochures pictured smiling residents playing golf and horseshoes under the brilliant Arizona sun. One of the first model home brochures read: “In Sun City, you will enjoy complete individuality, privacy, and happy, satisfying living, and most important: the right to do what you want ... when you want ... to do exactly as you wish.” One successful marketing tool was the nationwide contest to name the new development; proposed names

### *The Checkered Past of Quail Run*

The Marinette Ranch included land between 99th Avenue and the New River. It wasn't included in the planning for Phase 1, but as activity increased, the area north of Grand served as a construction yard.

The first proposal for the parcel south of Grand and east of 99th was for a 160-acre mobile home court. Residents were strongly opposed to mixing mobile homes with Sun City homes, and the idea was dropped.

In 1968, Webb negotiated with the Kansas City Royals, offering to build a major baseball complex on the site. It was to consist of a stadium, four practice fields, and a clubhouse. The Royals, however, picked Florida, bringing plans for the new complex to a halt.

Further planning was suspended due to the development of Phase 2. As construction moved northward, the land east of 99th seemed overlooked.

An offer from a former Webb Corp. employee to buy the parcel for a mobile home park brought renewed attention to the site. The board turned down his offer, and DEVCO laid plans for a nine-hole golf subdivision. Named Quail Run, it opened about the same time Sun City West opened in 1978, and was the last area to be developed in Sun City.

### *Sun City: “Plan B”*

What if they planned an adult community, and nobody came? Based on their research, the Webb people believed they had a good idea – but, just in case, prudent business practice called for an alternate plan – a “Plan B.”

The Webb people filed such a plan with Maricopa County. It envisioned the area south of Grand Avenue being a “retirement community” for those over 50 years of age. It would be designed for an active lifestyle, complete with community centers, golf courses, shopping centers, churches, single-family homes, and apartments. This area would cover 4,280 acres, and have about 16,455 dwelling units with an estimated population of 32,000.

The area north of Grand Avenue would be a “working community” for families. The total land area would be comparable to that south of Grand, but would have facilities not found in the senior community – namely schools and park sites. According to the plan, the area would accommodate 14,344 dwelling units with an estimated population of 48,000. The plan called for six combined elemen-

tary school and neighborhood park sites, one senior high school, a central town park, and one regulation length, 18-hole golf course.

There were two other significant provisions in Plan B. First, a regional shopping center would be located at the southeast corner of Bell Road and 99th Avenue. It was intended as the focus for not only Sun City, but for adjoining communities within a radius of 5 to 8 miles.

Secondly, a 400-acre industrial park would be located east of 99th Avenue between Grand Avenue and an east-west line 3,400 feet north of Thunderbird Road (approximately today's W. Newport Drive). Light, clean industries would occupy the area and provide job opportunities for the working community, as well as a “sound economic base for Sun City.”

Once the people started coming on Jan. 1, 1960, it became clear that a Plan B might not be needed. When 1,300 houses were sold in the first year – the three-year goal was 1,700 – plans for a working community, schools, and industrial park were shelved for good.

poured in from all over the country as people vied for the first prize: a new home in the development.

During the 1959 Christmas season, Webb employees gathered for the holiday party at the new Hiway House at 107th and Grand avenues, and on Dec. 27 – four days before Sun City’s official opening day – they were invited to preview the model homes, the recreation center, the shopping center, and the new golf course. By all accounts, everyone was extremely impressed and proud.

But the men whose reputations and careers were on the line knew the holiday crowd – Webb employees who had

just received their Christmas bonuses – were probably a little biased. Tom Breen, for one, had been reassuring Del Webb every time his boss called to say: “I hope you know what you’re doing out there.”

Breen did know what he was doing – at least, he was pretty sure. As the moment of truth approached, he began to have his doubts.

John Meeker, however, had faith in his group’s marketing plan: “We sold Arizona, then the valley. And the last thing we sold was a house – that was just a side deal. We were really selling a way of life. We were pioneers.”

## How Sun City Got Its Name

As late as a month before Sun City’s grand opening, the development still did not have a name – but that was by design. The Webb Company, to ramp up publicity, had sponsored a nationwide contest to name the community. The Reuben Donnelly Company, an expert in running nationwide contests, was hired to conduct the contest.

The lead up to the contest generated much excitement and national publicity, and was exactly what the Webb Company was hoping for. The way the contest played out, to say the least, was not:

On Dec. 8, representatives of Reuben Donnelly and DEVCO executives were reviewing some of the entries when Del Webb walked in. “Webb thumbed through some of the names and said, ‘I like Sun City,’” recalled Jim Boswell. “He went on out the door, and Jake or Joe, one of the two, said, ‘Well, that’s it.’ The contest people said, ‘You can’t do that. You hired us to conduct this contest.’ And one of the Webb men said: ‘I’ll tell you, when Mr. Webb says that’s what he wants, that is the way it’s going to be.’” After refusing to certify the results for fear of a lawsuit, the Reuben Donnelly representatives were paid \$20,000 for their work, thanked for their services, and bidden good day.

Webb’s choice of the Sun City name posed another problem: not one but four entries bore that name, and a drawing was held to select the winner. The E.A. Brittons of Eugene, Ore., were the winners, but weren’t at home; they were reportedly traveling in a trailer and staying in Palm Springs, Calif. “So Joe called the Palm Springs police force,” said Boswell, “and said: ‘If you will locate this woman in a trailer park, we will contribute a thousand dollars to your benevolent society.’” The next day, the Brittons were found, and



arrangements were made for them to come to Sun City for a ceremony giving them the deed to their property.

Second prize, a fairway lot, went to Sally Benson of neighboring Youngtown – the first of many Youngtown settlers to flock to next-door Sun City, where the grass was apparently greener.

The Brittons moved into their new house in October, but decided they preferred to spend winters in their trailer. They put the house up for sale the following March.



# A Truly Grand Opening



**I**t was about 8 p.m. on New Year's Eve, 1959 – about 12 hours before the official opening of Sun City, Ariz. – when four members of the Webb Company team overseeing the community's development met at Manuel's Place, a restaurant and cantina in Peoria, Ariz., a few miles from the construction site. Gathered together were Tom Breen, director of housing and development; Owen Childress, executive vice president of the Del E. Webb Development Company (DEVCO) and project manager of Sun City; John Meeker, operations manager; and Jack Ford, chief of operations under Breen.

"We stopped off at Manuel's and ordered a drink and everybody was very quiet," recalled Breen. "Nobody was talk-

ing. Somebody started laughing and said: 'What are all you guys thinking about?' And Owen Childress said, 'I'm thinking about how the hell I'm going to get a 30-year mortgage for a guy 60 years old.' I think Owen asked me what my major concern was, and I said: 'Real simple. If nobody comes.' He said, 'My God, you can't be serious.'"

In less than seven months, DEVCO had converted an arid expanse of cotton fields 12 miles northwest of Phoenix into the nucleus of the nation's first active retirement community: a golf course, recreation center and swimming pool, shopping center, and five attractive model homes. During the construction phase, a small, makeshift office, the size of a tool shed, was erected on the site; from September 1959 to



**OPPOSITE:** More than 100,000 people came to see Sun City during its three-day opening weekend. **ABOVE:** The fountain at the entrance to Sun City, at 107th and Grand avenues, froze solid on New Year's Eve, 1959. The following day, Sun City's official opening-day ceremonies had to be delayed until the water began flowing again.

opening day, 400 prospective buyers had put down \$500 deposits on a new home in Sun City. About \$2 million had been invested so far in the community, and the nation had been saturated by an all-out media blitz touting the new way of life available in Sun City. The men who had planned the community and built its first installment had done their homework and stuck to the plan. All signs pointed to success, and the men expected to see 10,000 visitors or so that weekend. But their efforts still lacked the validation that would come with public attention.

Friday, New Year's Day, dawned cold in the Sonoran Desert; the opening ceremonies held at the welcome sign and fountain at 107th and Grand avenues were delayed a bit because the fountain had frozen over in the middle of the night. The desert sun soon rose and took care of things, thawing the fountain, and the model homes were opened at 8 a.m.

Members of the Webb group who had been fretting a night earlier soon discovered they had been worrying about the wrong things. An entirely unexpected problem confronted them on New Year's morning: a line of cars, waiting at the entrance to Sun City, trailing about 2 miles eastward, to the

city of Peoria. The visitors – 25,000 on that first day alone – swamped the facilities and model homes, spilling over the lawns and out into the streets.

Childress, who was in charge of arranging sales contracts with new buyers, was shocked when he saw the line of cars – automobiles were stretching westward, also, where he knew most must have driven from California; there was almost no development between Sun City and the California state line. While most visitors simply took in the sights, enjoying the entertainment offered by a strolling mariachi band or by a barbershop singing group at the recreation center's outdoor pavilion, there were many – more than Childress had dared imagine – who wanted to put down their \$500 deposit and buy a home in Sun City. Many of the new buyers completed their purchase within an hour of arriving.

The crowd for opening day included Arizona Gov. Paul Fannin, the mayors of nearly every neighboring community including Phoenix Mayor Sam Mardin, and representatives from many regional and national news media. Oddly, *The Arizona Republic* – the state's largest newspaper – declined to send a reporter to the event. Within a day or two, it was obvious that the paper had missed an historic event.

While brisk that first day, activity reached an almost frantic pace over the ensuing weekend; several Webb executives recalled that the traffic on these days stretched nearly to Glendale, about 7 miles away. Childress was overwhelmed by the long line of people who were spending hours waiting outside his little sales shed; within short order he had run out of printed formal contracts, and rushed to the supermarket, where he hoped to find some printed receipts. "I called secretaries as best as I could in the Webb Company," he said, "and also executives. And I got receipt books from Safeway, and I passed them out to the executives and secretaries, and I said, 'Just get a lot number, and \$500, and the people's name and address, and we'll call them later.' So that's how we did it."

According to Webb Construction Company records, more than 100,000 people toured the new model homes during the grand opening's first three days – 10 times more than the Webb Company's own predictions. Incredibly, in that span of three days, 237 homes – \$2.5 million worth of real estate – were sold by Childress and his cobbled-together team of secretaries and executives.

Overnight, the doubts of Webb executives had vanished, and around the nation, everyone was compelled to take notice of what was going on northwest of Phoenix. A media circus ensued, drawing reporters from all over the country – even a few international correspondents – and culminating with Del Webb's face on the cover of the Aug. 3, 1962, issue of *Time* magazine, under the headline: "The Retirement City: A New Way of Life for the Old."

Within a mere two months of its grand opening, Sun City – "Arizona's Fastest-Growing City" – had opened its second tract of 675 homes around the newly designed back nine holes of the golf course. It sold 43 houses in two days – a rate that, without New Year's Day, 1960, would have seemed phenomenal. The community's growth potential, it seemed, was unlimited. But like anything that expands so much, so fast, Sun City would soon experience its first growing pains.



**TOP:** On opening day, a line of cars from the Phoenix area stretched more than 2 miles, to the city of Peoria, along Grand Avenue. **ABOVE:** Financing and Sales Administration Manager Owen Childress at the first sales office from which more than 400 sales were made.

# The Early Years

It's no exaggeration to say there are few enterprises in American history that began with as much excitement and promise as Sun City, Ariz. Delivery of the many hundreds of homes already purchased began on April 10, 1960, when, according to Webb Company records, W. Wendell and Emilie Fraser became Sun City's first residents in their home at 12201 Augusta Drive West. Lester Parry, Sun City's celebrated "key man," led the first key ceremony, in which he conducted the Frasers in a thorough tour of their new house.

Sun City's earliest residents became affectionately known as "the Pioneers." It was an apt designation – they had left behind all that had been familiar to them in search of something new and different, often over the objections of family members. The Pioneers came from many different states in the Union, and a few came from overseas. They included attorneys, doctors, dentists, farmers, factory workers, government clerks, plumbers, and salespeople.

What made it so easy for hundreds of people from different backgrounds to come together, explained Les Merydith, an early Sun City resident who led a campaign to have Sun City incorporated as a self-governing town, was that everything was new – there were none of the usual concerns about carving out relationships in an entrenched social circle.

"Everything you could possibly want was taken care of by Del Webb," Merydith said. "They had entertainment, they had stores, and they had recreation facilities that were out of this world. Everybody was new, so it was very easy to get acquainted. You didn't have to break into an established society. That's a factor that I think is more important than any other for people of retirement age who move from someplace else – because if you move to another community sometimes it takes years to build a group of friends, whereas here everybody was on their own and they were looking for friends, so it was just a magical thing."

The magic continued well into Sun City's first year, as the Pioneers created their own community from scratch and logged several milestones: A post office opened in the Grand Shopping Center, which soon became responsible for door-to-door delivery of mail. *The Youngtown News*, a weekly tabloid, was sold, moved to the Grand Shopping Center, and renamed the *News-Sun*, in order to denote its service to both communities. A medical building was constructed near the Grand Shopping Center, and Dr. Robert Stump, a general practitioner from Phoenix, was lured to open an office there.



The Rural/Metro Fire Company built a station at 111th and Grand avenues to serve the community, and a pumper truck was manned 24 hours a day.

By July, as construction began on homes surrounding the second nine holes of the golf course, plans were in place for an additional section of housing, built from seven new models, surrounding a new community center. Key elements of the community continued to fall into place. The Grand Shopping Center doubled in size, to 60,000 square feet, adding furniture and hardware stores and 13 other businesses. Residents elected a Sun City Civic Board – forerunner to today's Home Owners Association – to form rules and regulations for the community.

Del E. Webb Development Company (DEVCO) and its parent company, the Del E. Webb Corporation, took several steps to foster the social, civic, and spiritual life of Sun City. It often made generous land grants to groups – the fledgling Sun City Agricultural Club, for example – in order to ensure their success. The company bought and operated a free shuttle, the Shop-Lifter, to help residents reach shops and services. The most generous DEVCO land grants in Sun City's earliest years were given to churches, to help religious communities take root. "We never made a dime off any church," said Jim Boswell. "We gave them oversized lots, and we built them at cost."

## Sun City's First Doctor

As John Meeker remembered it, one fall morning, a year or two after Sun City's first residents moved in, a school bus arrived in Sun City and picked up three children to be taken to school. In the words of Meeker: "All hell broke loose."

The rules of buying a house in Sun City were clear, though they had not been formally codified: Homes would be sold only to families where one member was at least 50 years old, and no children under college age were welcome as permanent residents.

When it was discovered that three young children were living in Sun City, many residents reacted vociferously against violations of Sun City's "seniors

only" policy. Two of the children belonged to an air conditioning serviceman who had moved to help install units in Sun City; he promptly moved out rather than draw the ire of Sun Citians. The other child, however, was the grandson of Dr. Robert Stump, a general practitioner who had been lured to Sun City to become the community's first physician. Stump's grandson had nowhere else to go, and the community needed Stump. The standoff seemed deadlocked until the wife of one of the "anti-children crusaders" had a heart attack, and was saved by Stump. Stump stayed and set up his office in Sun City's first medical building at 10820 Oakmont Drive.

DEVCO also assigned its own activities director, Tom Austin, to encourage civic activity; one of his most popular sponsored activities, Chow Night, attracted hundreds of Sun Citians to the community center. Various clubs were beginning to form – the Lawn Bowling Club attracted 32 to its first meeting in October, and in December, when the back nine holes of the golf course – known as the North Golf Course – were finished, the Men's and Ladies' Golf Clubs began full activities.

At year's end, Sun City's residents voted overwhelmingly to accept a birthday gift from DEVCO: the Community Center (now Oakmont Recreation Center). In January 1961, the Sun City Civic Association became the sole owner of the 2.45-acre site, including the buildings, pool, play courts, and furnishings, collectively valued at \$250,000. All was well in Sun City – for now.

### Cracks in the Mortar

At the beginning of Sun City's second year, when Austin presented a birthday cake with a single candle to Ralph Hawley, president of the Sun City Civic Association, the future of Sun City looked as bright as it had a year before. The community already had a population of 5,000 people, living in some 1,300 new homes. When a second set of models, surrounding the new Town Hall Recreation Center, attracted 40,000 visitors on Jan. 29, 1961, it seemed that the houses – 1,975 in this second section, along with 400 apartment units – would be snapped up, people would move in, and all would be well.

To Webb Company leaders, it was clear from opening day that they had greatly underestimated the appeal of their active retirement community. "It was as if Webb had unlocked the door to the mint," DEVCO President John Meeker wrote years later, "because management immediately began thinking of taking the concept nationwide before



The Webb Company donated a plot of land and supplied water (free of charge) for the Sun City Agricultural Club's gardening center.

other developers could pick up on it. The search for land in California and Florida began immediately for comparable large land parcels."

The rush to create additional Sun Cities, Meeker later recalled, led to circumstances that would hurt the original:

It stretched the company's resources from coast to coast, and it muddied the waters enough that it took several years for the men who were marketing Sun City to discover two major misconceptions. First, the "individuality" cornerstone of Tom Breen's guiding philosophy – the idea that once the house was delivered, the paths of buyer and developer would never cross again – was not borne out by Sun City's early history. The residents faced challenges unlike those of any community before them: for example, how to manage the use of the newer Town Hall recreational facilities and the original Oakmont Center. The exclusive arrangement devised by newer residents created a situation known as "the Berlin Wall," in which the Pioneers were barred from using the new facilities, and a festering negativism threatened the fabric of the community. Though dozens of recreational clubs had been organized at the centers, participation was declining steadily.

Another misperception, held by Webb executive Joe Ashton to the end, was that older Americans were a thrifty bunch that wanted a bare-bones home in the style of Levittown, N.Y., the nation's first mass-produced suburb.

Sun City's first homes – single-level, two- or three-bedroom ranch-style homes, built of sturdy masonry block, selling for \$8,500 to \$11,750 – included what the Webb Company touted as the first only under-\$10,000 home in the United States to border a regulation golf course. At first, these houses sold much faster than DEVCO could build them – and yet, the company sold 400 fewer houses in 1961 than in Sun City's first year, and fewer thereafter, until achieving a low point in 1965, when only 395 homes were sold.

During this time, the community ran into other troubles as well: nuisances caused by construction dust; bugs and "woolly worms" (a type of caterpillar) from the surrounding cotton fields; overflights by aircraft from nearby Luke Air Force Base; and, as the construction marched southward toward Olive Avenue, the stench of a neighboring feedlot operation. Each of these challenges discouraged prospective buyers, and had to be dealt with in turn by DEVCO.

The Webb Company could not abide the decline of its most celebrated project, and its leaders made the difficult decision to let go of several of the men who deserved most of the credit for its existence. Their vision had brought Sun City international fame and a place in American history, but it was clear that the continued success of Sun City would require the vision of another. As always, Del Webb went with his gut, and turned to the man who had once been his favorite caddy at the Phoenix Country Club: John Meeker.

### The Meeker Renaissance

Meeker, who had overseen the building of the first Sun City homes, knew instinctively what was wrong in 1965. The company was an experienced builder, with a crack market-

## Invasion of the Woolly Worms

On land bordering cotton fields farmed by the Boswell company, Sun City's first residents contended with dust, black cotton bugs, and, most notoriously of all, an army of "woolly worms" – a kind of caterpillar – that emerged during irrigation season, marched eastward across 111th Avenue, and created havoc. In a 40th anniversary story in the *News-Sun*, Will Langdon, a Sun City resident, claimed his car would often slide on 111th Avenue, hydroplaning over the squashed remains of the woolly worms. To slow progress of the worms, the farmers laid a barrier of tin foil along the length of the 111th Avenue irrigation ditch. The results were limited – but as the cotton fields gradually became Sun City homes, the cotton bugs and woolly worms disappeared.



Del Webb's Hiway House became a popular hangout for Sun City residents for coffee and conversation. The free Shop-Lifter shuttle carried residents to shops and services.

ing team, but it had no experience in achieving the kind of volume sales required by a master-planned community.

Meeker felt the company had lost its way. People weren't moving in as fast as they had been, and the existing residents were squabbling over recreational facilities. "John," recalled Jim Boswell afterward, "had one of those unique abilities to visualize. He was one of the most sincere, quality people I'd met, and he is the one who constantly reiterated to us, in our board meetings: 'We've got to care. We have an obligation to these people.'"

At the time, Sun City's marketing and advertising team was focused outward, directing their efforts toward persuading prospects. Meeker felt this was a mistake, and he

made several bold and swift changes: first, he threw out the old “economy” saw, and recognized that most retirees wanted – even demanded – nicer homes. In subsequent sections, he built new and different models, often turning to more avant-garde or experimental forms. Some of these models, while not hot-selling at first, have become the most popular in Sun City. One section of Sun City, Rancho Estates, opened in 1966 and featured fenced 1-acre lots for horses.

Upon taking the reins in 1965, Meeker canned most of the marketing team, shrinking it from 50 people to three, and turned its focus back onto Sun City itself. The Vacation Special program put up prospective buyers at the Hiway House, treated them to breakfast, dinner, two rounds of golf, a show, a tour of Greater Phoenix, and then sent them home with a box of cactus jellies. The program proved to be the most effective in the development’s history. For tour guides, Sun City

## Sun City’s “Berlin Wall” Uniting the Recreation Centers

The grand opening of Sun City’s second recreation center, Town Hall (now Fairway), in January 1961, was a joyous occasion – over the weekend, 30,000 people showed up at the center, at 107th and Peoria avenues, to take it all in: the 800-seat auditorium, outdoor Greek theater, pool with cabana areas, library, and areas for lawn bowling, shuffleboard, and arts and crafts. Designed to service 1,500 residents, Town Hall was bigger, more modern, and more stylish than its predecessor, the Community Center.

This, unfortunately, proved to be a problem, compounded later that year when residents overwhelmingly voted to accept possession of the Community Center from DEVCO. The community association, to cover the cost of necessary renovations, increased the voluntary member dues from \$12 to \$40 annually. In the geographic area served by Town Hall, homes were subject to mandatory contributions that DEVCO had written into the property deeds. About half the residents of the Community Center area, outraged, refused to pay the increase.

“Immediately,” John Meeker, DEVCO president, recalled years later, “there were conflicts between the two as to cross-use. They [Town Hall residents] wouldn’t permit it. People would want to have other people over to play bridge with their groups, and they couldn’t go to the other rec center. It became a very sticky wicket. That led to a downturn in sales.”

The conflict, known among residents as “the Berlin Wall” of Sun City, divided residents for several years, until Meeker turned to the man who had helped get Sun City off the ground – Webb Corporation executive Owen Childress. “He had worked with me in housing on the local projects,” Meeker said. “Corporate management agreed to let him come out to be project manager at Sun City, and his first responsibility was to unite the rec facilities.”

In addition to his formidable negotiating skills, Childress’ task was aided considerably by the construction of a third, even bigger and more modern center, Town Hall



Owen Childress, Del Webb, and John Meeker.

South, at Mountain View Road and 107th Avenue. After the ribbon-cutting ceremony, officiated in July of 1967 by Meeker, Robert H. Johnson, and Del Webb himself, the concept of cross-use was, not surprisingly, more attractive to Town Hall residents.

In 1968, the work of Childress and a dedicated group of recreation center leaders was finally concluded with the union of all the recreation centers. Deeds in the original area surrounding the Community Center were rewritten to require mandatory membership, and DEVCO agreed to make some improvements to the Community Center. The agreement paved the way for all residents of Sun City, by virtue of their annual dues, to be permitted to use any and all of the community’s recreation facilities. Sun City’s Berlin Wall was no more.

In 1972, the names of these three centers were changed: the original Community Center became known as Oakmont Recreation Center; Town Hall became Fairway; and Town Hall South was renamed Mountain View.

turned to its own residents, including the now-legendary Garnet Burnham, who once put in a 54-hour week showing off Phoenix and Sun City.

Similarly, Meeker threw the company's resources behind the residents of Sun City. Of all the things he achieved as president of DEVCO, this would be the initiative for which he would be most widely – and fondly – remembered. “At that time we had the standard philosophy that most developers have – that we would build the house and try to stay uninvolved with the residents after they moved in,” he said. “But Sun City was going to be there for a long time, and that was

easier said than done. ... We became involved with the people. We were going to work on [getting] referrals from people who were happy and were bringing in their friends. And we decided that rather than spend millions of dollars on advertising, we would commence spending it on the residents.”

One of the first moves made by Meeker was to put Owen Childress in charge of resolving the standoff regarding the recreational facilities. Childress brokered a deal that opened all Sun City recreation centers to everyone in Sun City, regardless of their address.

John Meeker



### *Spur v. Webb: Dismantling the Great Wall of Manure*

In 1967, when DEVCO was selling about 1,800 houses annually in Sun City, the company at last confronted a meaningful obstacle to its vigorous growth rate: on its southern boundary, its neighbor, Spur Industries, a cattle feedlot operator, had piled a 58,000-ton wall of manure – described by DEVCO President John Meeker as “50-feet-high and a half-mile along Olive Avenue.”

Spur's motive in erecting this atrocity was simple: revenge. DEVCO had just filed an injunction to keep the feedlot operator from adding more cattle to the land. The 20,000 to 30,000 existing animals on the Spur lots south of Olive were producing an estimated million pounds of manure daily, and the resulting odor and flies were literally choking Sun City to death; as the development grew south and west, toward Olive, the lots – by 1967, about 1,300 of them – were proving difficult, if not impossible, to sell.

The odor had not been a problem when Sun City began along Grand Avenue, to the north, but in the years since, the two neighbors had been on a collision course. “We tried to buy the land, and they wouldn't sell it,”

said Meeker. “We offered to move them, and they didn't want that. They wanted a big premium.”

The case dragged on for several years before it was settled in March of 1972 by the Arizona State Supreme Court, a decision both sides interpreted as a victory: the court granted a permanent injunction against Spur Industries, but ruled also that DEVCO would have to compensate Spur for either shutting down or moving its feedlots away from the periphery of Sun City. DEVCO disagreed with the decision – a lower court had already ruled that the feedlots were a “public nuisance” – but decided to abide by it. “It would have ended up costing a lot of money,” said Meeker. “More money to appeal it than to settle it, so we settled it and got it out of the way.” The decision also protected the value of what the Sun City Home Owners Association estimated to be \$100 million in private property.

The case is now a landmark in nuisance law, one of the most studied cases in U.S. law schools – a simple Internet search for *Spur v. Webb* will yield hundreds of thousands of results.

### *A \$2-for-\$1 Landscaping Offer*

The Webb organization knew that churches would be an integral part of the life of the new community. Initially, church sites were sold in Phase I on an as-needed basis. The first sites were moderately priced to encourage as many different denominations as possible.

The first churches built in Phase I were very plain on the outside, as they never had enough money left in the building fund to do landscaping. To overcome this, DEVCO made a \$2-for-\$1 landscaping offer. This meant a church could receive up to a maximum of \$30,000 from DEVCO if they spent \$15,000 of their own funds on landscaping.

Every church sold thereafter took advantage of this option. DEVCO simply added \$30,000 to the price of the land, and the end result was beautifully landscaped church properties at no additional expense to DEVCO. It was a win-win-win for DEVCO, the churches, and the community as the attractive landscaping added to the appeal of Sun City.



Meeker also shrewdly rejuvenated the declining recreation center clubs by sponsoring giveaways of large-screen television sets and other expensive door prizes at club functions. "The next month's meeting," Meeker later wrote, "drew a very large crowd looking for that big prize, but instead they found friendship and companionship."

Mostly, Meeker let the Webb Company do what it did best: build. The projects for which Meeker and DEVCO are best known today include the 4,000-seat Sun City Stadium, a ballpark that hosted the Milwaukee Brewers' spring training, and the Sun Bowl, an outdoor amphitheater with the capacity to seat 7,500 people. In addition to hosting free concerts for visitors, the Sun Bowl hosted

## *Boswell Medical Center: 40 Years of Care*

In Sun City's first five years, residents who needed hospital care were forced to go to Glendale, more than 7 miles away. The idea for a community hospital in Sun City began modestly, as an attempt to address this simple problem: In 1965, residents and DEVCO's then-vice president, John Meeker, began to talk over plans for a small hospital that would serve the five-year-old retirement community. These discussions quickly gathered steam, and, within a year, the residents had produced, at DEVCO's expense, the preliminary site and floor plan for a one-story, 61-bed hospital.

At this point, J.G. Boswell, the original owner of the land on which Sun City was built and a 49 percent partner in DEVCO, stepped in, pulling Meeker – who had recently become DEVCO president – aside. Meeker later recalled: "[Boswell] said, 'You are not looking far enough ahead.' He said he would give us a matching grant of \$1.2 million if we would build a facility to serve all of the northwest area."

The philanthropic arm of Boswell's family business, the J.G. Boswell Foundation, fronted this money on three conditions: first, the hospital must serve not only Sun City, but the entire Northwest Valley; second, it must be named after the man Jim Boswell called "The Arizona Boswell," his uncle Walter, who left a distinguished military career to take over the family's Arizona operations in 1931; and lastly, the hospital must have the finest medical facilities available.

According to Boswell, the gift took the form of a matching grant – an amount to be donated when an equal amount was raised by residents – because he wanted Sun Citians to think of the hospital as their own.



James Boswell II and Walter O. Boswell.

"My philosophy," he explained, "is that the more people you can get to put one dollar in, the more involved they are, and the more it's theirs."

Boswell's proposal attracted the attention of Del Webb himself – Webb had been visiting the renowned Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., for his annual physicals, and he hired the clinic's designers, Ellerbe Architects, to perform the basic design. The hospital's four nursing towers were devised to meet strictly functional concerns, explained Meeker: "We ... built a facility that would serve people in those radial nursing units, where there were nurses' stations in the center and the patients could literally see the nurse's station, so they would feel more secure."

Meeker also recalled, with some confoundment, that the idea of a medical center in the Sun City area met with some resistance from the local medical establishment, in the form of a regional health planning council. "They said we would never get doctors and we would never get nurses," said Meeker. "They said, 'You will never get an administrator to come out there to that Podunk place.'"

Fortunately, the vision of Jim Boswell proved much keener than this. Forty years after the Walter O. Boswell Memorial Hospital was dedicated, it is still keeping – and expanding upon – its promises to Boswell under its current name, Banner Boswell Medical Center. A 501-bed acute care hospital, its full range of services – including cardiac care, cancer care, orthopedics, neurology, surgery, rehabilitation services, emergency care, stroke care, intensive care, pulmonary, urology, wound management, and sleep disorders – receives national recognition for care and expertise.

Fortunately, the vision of Jim Boswell proved much keener than this. Forty years after the Walter O. Boswell Memorial Hospital was dedicated, it is still keeping – and expanding upon – its promises to Boswell under its current name, Banner Boswell Medical Center. A 501-bed acute care hospital, its full range of services – including cardiac care, cancer care, orthopedics, neurology, surgery, rehabilitation services, emergency care, stroke care, intensive care, pulmonary, urology, wound management, and sleep disorders – receives national recognition for care and expertise.

many events that encouraged cohesion and camaraderie, such as the annual Easter Sunrise Service.

Another major milestone of the Meeker Renaissance was the 355-bed Walter O. Boswell Hospital, which opened its doors in 1971 and was built mostly through the generosity of Boswell and his family's nonprofit Boswell Foundation. The Boswell Hospital brought state-of-the-art medical and nursing care to Sun City residents, and remains on the cutting edge of health care today.

The Lakeview Recreation Center, opened in 1970, was a perfect example of what distinguished Sun City during the Meeker Renaissance. Whereas the facilities built before it had been utilitarian, almost institutional, Lakeview looked like a resort. The main two-story building encircled an outdoor pool and cabana area, and contained a clubroom, meeting rooms, and arts and crafts facilities. It also offered mini-golf; tennis; boating and fishing from a pier that jutted into 33-acre Viewpoint Lake; a raised park with walkways leading to a trellised gazebo and waterfall; and manicured areas for barbecuing.

Meeker's largesse, in fact, often got him into hot water with his boss, Webb Corporation President R.H. Johnson, who reportedly fired him (and later rescinded the firing on Del Webb's own order) after he found out how much Meeker had spent to build the Lakes Club, a dinner and social club overlooking Viewpoint Lake.

"The type of thing that would drive Johnson up the wall," said Boswell, "was the quality that Johnny Meeker insisted go into everything. You look at the Lakes Club: that whole front was copper, and copper was like gold. Johnny insisted, for instance, that there be genuine marble in all the bathrooms. If you look at what went into La Ronde

## Where Did All Those Golf Street Names Come From?

How did great golf courses like Pebble Beach, Pinehurst, and Cherry Hills come to be street names in Sun City? Why are other streets named for golfing greats like Hogan, Palmer, and Snead?

It was all one man's doing – a man who had a great passion for golf. He learned the game as a youngster and by age 14 was one of the most efficient and popular caddies at the Phoenix Country Club. It's there that he met Del Webb, and became Webb's regular caddy.

His golfing ability won him a spot on his high school golf team. When he graduated in 1944, he joined the Air Force. Del Webb told him, "Look me up when you get out – I'll have a job for you."

Released from the military in 1946, he debated going on to school or getting a job. He decided to call on Webb, and was persuaded to join the Webb organization. He started at the bottom as an errand boy, and rapidly progressed up the ladder –

becoming president of DEVCO just 20 years later.

The man was John Meeker, and he never lost his love of golf, playing as often as business would allow. He put his stamp on Sun City in many ways, but few know that his love of golf led to his naming city streets for great golf courses and golfing greats.



Shopping Center, at that façade there, and look at the brick that goes up the back of those buildings – everything was top quality. I always supported this, because that was the image that Sun City was projecting. And it was successful."

How successful? The numbers from the Meeker era tell the story: After seeing the Lakeview Center, out-of-town visitors bought homes in record numbers. Of the 1,916 Sun City homes sold, more than 600 were purchased by Vacation Special visitors. In fact, except for a brief mid-1970s downturn, the number of homes sold roughly doubled every five years, until at last, at the end of

1978, the selling of the last new home in Sun City – one of a record 3,450 homes for that year – closed the book on new home sales for Sun City's 10,000-acre master plan. The Webb Company began to sell futures on its new development, Sun City West.

Of course, as the intervening years have shown, the sale of the last new home didn't mark the end of Sun City, but a new beginning, as the citizens of the Pioneer community continued to shape and refine their way of life together, mindful of Del Webb's often-repeated words of encouragement: "Concrete, steel, and lumber make the buildings – but people make the community."

# Sun City Through the Years



Marinette, a farming community founded in the late 19th century and future Sun City site, boasted its own U.S. Post Office by 1912.

## 1892

A wealthy mill owner and a mill engineer in Marinette, Wis., acquire adjacent land patents of 640 acres each northwest of Phoenix. The new Santa Fe, Prescott and Phoenix Railway acquires a right of way across their land, and builds a water stop named “Marinette.”

## 1912

The tiny farming town of Marinette, 12 miles northwest of Phoenix, receives official recognition and its first U.S. Post Office. A new developer acquires the land and plats the Orchard Town of Marinette, covering the area from today’s Burns Drive south to Peoria Avenue, between 99th and 111th avenues. The developer’s lots don’t sell.

## 1920

The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company purchases the Marinette Ranch – future site of Sun City – to grow cotton for its tires. The town of Marinette takes on new life as home to field workers, shop owners, and others.



In 1920, Marinette became part of a vast cotton plantation owned by the Southwest Cotton Company, a subsidiary of Goodyear Tire, in the valley west of Phoenix. In the photo above, a worker stands in front of a bale of harvested cotton.

## 1943

Marinette Ranch is sold to the J.G. Boswell Company, which continues to grow cotton on the land. Mechanization, however, does away with the need for field hands, and the town of Marinette shrinks in size.

## 1954

Real estate broker Ben Schleifer forms Youngtown Land and Investment Company and purchases a 320-acre dairy farm, the future site of Youngtown, from Francis Greer.

## 1958

Jan. 1: Youngtown, the first master-planned community devoted exclusively to retirees, is incorporated and becomes the first city occupied solely by senior citizens.

Thomas E. Breen, director of housing and development in the Del E. Webb Construction Company’s Phoenix headquarters, has begun researching the feasibility of adding retirement communities to the company’s construction portfolio.

## 1959

The Del E. Webb Construction Company purchases three parcels from the J.G. Boswell Company, totaling 20,000 acres, including the former Marinette Ranch, and forms a 51/49 percent joint venture with Boswell.

Planner Ken Mitchell presents the first master-plan concept for review. With all the water well sites, he proposes a series of Venice, Italy-type canals. Del E. Webb Development Company (DEVCO) passes and begins its own plan featuring golf courses flowing like ribbons throughout the community.

DEVCO divides the Marinette Ranch into three phases for planning purposes, and begins construction on a new active retirement community near 107th and Grand avenues, near the remains of the old Marinette settlement. The new community includes a shopping center, golf course, recreation center, five model homes, and guest apartments.

After the city of Phoenix declines to provide water and sewer service to the new community, DEVCO forms its own Sunburst Water Company and Marinette Sanitation Company.

## Sun City's Firefighters

In the beginning, fire protection in Sun City was by subscription; when the Rural/Metro Fire Company built its pumper-truck station at 111th and Grand avenues, it charged an annual fee of \$12 per resident.

As homes were added to the development, the community stepped up its fire protection measures; in 1965, fire hydrants were installed throughout the community, and the following year, the Sun City Volunteer Fire District was voted into existence.

According to Fire Chief Jim Sebert, who served in the Sun City Department for 35 years before retiring in May 2009, the "volunteer" designation was a legal formality: "Sun City," he said, "was never served by volunteer firefighters." Arizona laws allowed for remote communities to establish taxation mechanisms that could fund volunteer departments. Sebert explained, "the new district immediately contracted with Rural/Metro, and basically instead of each individual homeowner writing out a check to Rural/Metro, the fire district collected taxes from everybody and then wrote one check a month [to] cover the operating expenses Rural/Metro incurred with their full-time staff." The district's first fire chief was a local community leader, George Meade.

The dramatic Lakes Club fire of 1972 prompted some changes in Sun City's fire protection services that began with the construction of a new station, George Meade Fire Station No. 1, at 99th Avenue and Bell Road, and culminated in the Sun City Fire District canceling its contract with Rural/Metro. On Jan. 1, 1989, Sun City firefighters reported to duty for the first time as direct employees of the Sun City Fire District.

Today the district – now with a third station at 111th Avenue and Windsor Drive and an administrative build-



Top: The Lakes Club, the community's largest private country club, is destroyed by fire one month before opening, but reopens seven months later. Above: Sun City's first fire station, at 111th and Grand avenues, was equipped with a single pumper truck.

ing at 111th Avenue and Union Hills Drive – serves not only Sun City, but also Youngtown and the subdivision of Citrus Point in neighboring Surprise. It is one of the busiest of Arizona's 150 fire districts.



October: The first residential lot in the retirement community – tentatively known as the Marinette Retirement Community – is sold to Mr. and Mrs. J.W. Sullivan of Oklahoma City.

Mature palm trees are imported from Indio, Calif., for landscaping the main entrance and golf course.

Dec. 8: Del Webb chooses “Sun City” as the winning entry to name the new community. The E.A. Brittons of Eugene, Ore., are named contest winners.

**1960**

Jan. 1: The Sun City grand opening is held as scheduled, showcasing the following:

- Del Webb’s Hiway House Motor Hotel with coffee shop, bar, 12 hotel rooms, and 18 one-bedroom apartments.
- The 30,000-square-foot Grand Shopping Center, anchored by a Safeway grocery. Greenway Drug and a variety of stores opened in April. Within the year, the shopping center will double in size to 60,000 square feet.
- The first nine holes of the North Golf Course open, ready for play.
- The Community Center (now Oakmont Recreation Center), consisting of a 250-seat auditorium; outdoor pavilion; swimming pool with cabana; sewing room; arts, crafts, and ceramics room; lapidary shop; shuffleboard courts; and a lawn bowling green.

• Five fully landscaped, single-family, furnished model homes from 947 to 1,600 square feet.

April: The first homes are delivered to Sun City’s new residents.

The Rural/Metro Fire Company builds a pumper-truck station at 111th and Grand avenues, to serve the community for an annual fee of \$12 per resident.

August: Burt and Ursula Freirich purchase the *Youngtown News* and establish the *Sun City News-Sun*.

October: Sun City’s first medical center opens on Oakmont Drive.

Sun City Community Church (now United Church of Sun City) opens its doors to all Protestants in Sun City.

November: The Sun City Golf Association is formed to develop regulations designed to accommodate all levels of players, as well as visitors, prospective buyers, and residents.

December: Sun City’s first bank, First National Bank, opens in the Grand Shopping Center.

The Sun City Civic Association is formed – the forerunner of today’s Recreation Centers of Sun City.

The Del E. Webb Construction Company goes public and becomes the Del E. Webb Corporation.

**1961**

The first Sun City telephone directory, published by the Sun City Civic Association, goes on sale for \$1.



January: A second recreation center, Town Hall (later the Fairway Recreation Center), opens at 107th and Peoria avenues. In April, Sun City's first Easter Sunrise Service is held at the new recreation center.

The Sun City Library begins with a loan of 2,500 books from the Maricopa County Library and a volunteer retired librarian. The small room in Town Hall Recreation Center is open three days a week.

The second set of model homes and apartments opens for viewing at 105th and Peoria avenues, and attracts 40,000 visitors. Thousands of 33-1/3 rpm records featuring the song "Wake Up and Live in Sun City" are given to visitors.

Sun City's lifestyle is profiled in feature stories in *Life* and *Look* magazines.

Ray Goetze becomes the first Sun Citian to be elected to the Arizona State Legislature.

Sun City residents vote 1,051 to 54 in favor of accepting the Community Center (now Oakmont), which serves 1,200 residences.

Sun City's second golf course, the South Golf Course, opens for play.

### 1962

Del E. Webb is featured on the cover of *Time* magazine, along with an in-depth profile of life in Sun City. Several other feature stories follow, in both national and regional publications.



The iconic "tiki head," carved from the trunk of a dead palm, at the entrance to the new Town Hall Recreation Center.

## Playing Through: Golf and Sun City

**B**efore there was Sun City, there was a golf course – nine holes, to be exact – at 107th and Grand avenues. Today, it is literally impossible to ignore the game in Sun City, where living on the fairway is the point.

For many Sun City residents, the possibility of playing year-round was the most important factor in choosing active retirement in Arizona. Today, the community has eight courses for residents and their guests – five championship golf courses and three executive courses – for which there are modest greens fees. In addition, the community has three private country clubs (Palmbrook, Union Hills, and Sun City) – though Sun City has recently opened to the public.

Like many things about Sun City, golf's predominance in the community was heavily influenced by Del Webb, who didn't take up the game until he was 34 years old. He quickly found that golf relieved the pressures of his demanding 12- to 14-hour workdays. One of the founders of the Phoenix (now FBR) Open, Webb once shot a 67 in one Phoenix Open Pro-Am round, leading everyone in the field – including golfing greats Ben Hogan and Byron Nelson. Over time, Webb acquired 52 pairs of golf shoes, and memberships in 14 country clubs across the country. At 70 years old, he was a 7 handicapper.

Given Webb's love of the game, it was only natural that he would allow John Meeker – his former caddy

and a golf lover himself – carte blanche to create a golfing paradise for the residents of Sun City.

How much have Sun Citians loved their golf? In 1978, workers removing dead fronds from palm trees on Sun City's courses discovered a total of 5,982 balls in the trees.



Bob Hope was a favorite invitee to Sun City golf tournaments, and Del Webb, in turn, was his favorite straight man. During one tournament, when Webb severely hooked a tee shot, Hope quipped: "I think you go through a living room that way, don't you?"

Arizona Sen. Barry Goldwater, recognizing the growing political clout of Sun City, addresses the new community at Town Hall.

A proposed long-term care facility, the Sun Valley Lodge Nursing Home, is incorporated.

DEVCO builds a softball diamond at the west end of the land allotted to the Grand Shopping Center in order to accommodate men's weekend leagues.

A volunteer "Sunshine Committee" is formed by the Sun City Civic Association to lend assistance to residents in need – primarily those who cannot pay their \$40 annual recreation center dues. With only one taker, the organization's efforts are redirected toward medical equipment. Retired minister Duane Thistlewaite leads the organization's growth. In April, the organization lends its first bed, mattress, and wheelchair.

A permanent post office structure opens at 103rd and Coggins avenues.

South Golf Course opens with public play on weekends to help offset operating costs.

A radio station leases space in the Grand Shopping Center – but lasts only six months. The tower remains, but isn't put back into service until 1975, when radio station KWAQ-FM gives it a try.

1963

The Hiway House Motor Hotel's name is changed to the King's Inn, and the hotel is expanded to a total of 97 rooms.

In February, Del Webb and Bob Hope play an informal match on the Sun City North Golf Course, an event witnessed by large Sun City crowds.

The Sun City Home Owners Association is spun off from the Civic Association to oversee the community's civic needs. Its first effort is to offer a health insurance plan through Continental Casualty Company exclusively for Sun City residents.

A film crew visits from Germany and spends several weeks documenting the Sun City way of life.

Sunland Memorial Park opens.

## The Sun City Special: Third at the Brickyard

As being part-owner of the New York Yankees demonstrated, Del Webb, an avid sportsman, loved to use sports as a way to promote his business ventures. In Sun City's early years, Webb sponsored racing cars to compete while bearing the Sun City name. NASCAR driver Mel Larson, the first racer sponsored by Webb, drove his 333-horsepower Pontiac Ventura to a 36th-place finish at the Daytona 500 in 1960.

The pinnacle of Webb's racing sponsorship was achieved by Roger Ward, the 1959 winner of the Indianapolis 500 and runner-up in 1960. In 1961, Ward's team took to the Brickyard in car No. 2, the Sun City Special.

Bret McKeand, who would later become a reporter, editor, and eventually vice president of Sun City's weekly newspaper, *The Independent*, had heard of the Sun City Special long before he moved to the area in the early 1980s. "I grew up in the Midwest," McKeand said, "and my dad always took me to the Indy 500." McKeand would later recount the race in detail in a special silver anniversary issue of *The Independent*, published in 1985 to honor Sun City's 25th year: "It was a thrilling back-and-forth battle for the lead between Ward, A.J. Foyt, and Eddie Sachs. The Sun City Special, in fact, set a new Indianapolis Motor Speedway record for the 400-mile mark, averaging nearly 139 miles per hour, before a pit stop knocked Ward down to third place, where he stayed, finishing behind Foyt and Sachs."

Ward did some additional driving for Sun City, but – while he did win the following year's Indy 500 in the same car, under a different sponsor – never matched his third-place Indy 500 finish for Webb.

McKeand got another look at the Sun City Special recently in 2005, when he and his 12-year-old son met McKeand's father at the Speedway to watch the Indianapolis 500 together. "The day before the race," McKeand said, "they had a big exhibit hosted by the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame Museum, and that car was sitting there. A private collector had restored it. With the new leather and everything, it looks identical to that black-and-white picture taken back in 1961."



A year after Mel Larson's run, car No. 2, the Sun City Special, driven by Roger Ward, finished third in the Indianapolis 500.

**1964**

Six new 30 Series model homes are introduced, the largest of which features golf cart storage and a double carport. Duplex units are added for the first time.

Construction begins on Sun Valley Lodge.

Town Hall Recreation Center (later Fairway), is turned over to Sun City residents after an almost 2-to-1 vote in favor of the acquisition.

The Sunshine Committee becomes Sunshine Service, Inc.

December: The first and only vote in the community's history regarding the issue of incorporation is held. Voters reject self-government 2,558 to 1,036.



**1965**

Del Webb personally attends Sun City's fifth anniversary celebration Jan. 1.

The Webb Corp. gives Sunshine Service a building at 10307 Coggins Drive.

The first resident moves into Sun Valley Lodge Nursing Home Sept. 1.

The Sun City Country Club, the community's first private club, is formed.

The Phoenix Ramblers, a women's fast-pitch softball team, disbands and players search for a new home. Since they had many Sun City fans, local merchants and DEVCO agree to sponsor a new team, the Saints, and build a field for them at 108th and Grand avenues.

Amid declining sales, John Meeker is named corporate vice president of community development and given responsibility for all Sun City projects. He announces the Sun Bowl and Rancho Estates concepts in a speech to residents.

The first fire hydrant is installed at 107th Avenue and Sun City Boulevard when residents learn they can reduce their home insurance if they live within 1,000 feet of a hydrant and raise the \$675 cost for the water company to install it. Within a year, hydrants are installed throughout the community.



**1966**

A new model home complex opens at 105th and Peoria avenues with six single-family homes, three duplexes, a garden apartment, and introduces five new Mediterranean villas with optional second stories.

A 60-day special warranty is put into effect. Homeowners listed all defects, including damage done while moving in or by carpet layers. DEVCO then made all the repairs at one time, regardless of who did the damage.

A new 18-seat mini-bus makes the rounds of Sun City every hour from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., six days a week. Monthly tickets are \$2.



Rancho Estates opens with fenced 1-acre lots primarily for horses.



The Sun City Volunteer Fire District is established June 6, 1966, after a 1,375 to 80 vote. Two weeks later the district is formally organized, with an election of officers, including Fire Chief George Meade.

The Sun City Community Fund, an organization for collecting and managing local donations to charity, is established.

At DEVCO's expense, architects prepare preliminary site and floor plans for a 61-bed Sun City Community Hospital, and the formation of a hospital district is explored.

John Meeker is named president of DEVCO.

DEVCO introduces States Days events, providing entertainment and refreshments.



## Rancho Estates

In 1965, when DEVCO President John Meeker's secretary, Lucy Krug, complained about the necessity to rent a stall for her horse at a stable, an idea was born. Surely, Meeker thought, there were other retired farmers and ranchers who would enjoy having a place for their favorite mounts on spacious lots with bridle paths.

Once the concept of Rancho Estates was born, land on the west side of 111th Avenue, just south of Peoria Avenue, was added to the Sun City map. The new homes – any of the current Sun City models, at the buyer's selection – would sit on 1-acre or larger lots.

Krug and her husband, Richard Shields, moved into Rancho Estates in 1970 and built a modest ranch home and a small half-story building for her horse and feed storage. Other new Rancho Estates residents were horse lovers, but there were many who just enjoyed the spacious side and back yards.

The horses were soon housed in small, low buildings, and riders enjoyed leisurely rides on the trails along the back boundary lines. Handsome fences consisted of short block pylons painted white or tan with three horizontal rails.

In 1977, Aletha Burke and her family moved into the estates and built a swimming pool behind the home. She had been raised on a Nebraska farm and liked wide-open spaces and horses, but didn't want to take care of them. One of Burke's neighbors collected John Deere tractors, and invited his friends twice a year to "circle their wagons" (travel trailers) in his backyard.

In the 1980s, a master carpenter built a small barn with a hip roof for his horses brought from his Iowa

farm. Soon, other barns and sheds of all sizes and styles were built, and neighbors used to gather daily for coffee klatches in one of the barns.

Today, most of the bridle trails are gone, and recently the last horse owner in Rancho Estates died. On a Saturday morning in May 2009, not a horse or rider was in sight.

Who could have guessed in 1965 that people would choose Rancho Estates not only as a place to live graciously and enjoy the sunsets, but also for restoring and housing their antique wagons, tractors, and car collections?



By setting aside 1-acre lots in Sun City, Webb attracted equestrians to the new development.

## 1967

The 7,500-seat Sun Bowl officially opens, with Liberace playing to a standing-room-only crowd.

DEVCO files for an injunction to prevent the Spur feedlot, across Olive Avenue to the south, from feeding additional cattle. Spur counters by piling more than 58,000 tons of manure along much of the length of Olive Avenue.

A new set of model homes opens in February next to the Town Hall South (now Mountain View) Recreation Center. Last year's Mediterranean villas are replaced by Spanish villas with tile mansard roofs.

In July, the Mountain View Recreation Center facilities are officially dedicated and immediately deeded to Sun City residents.

The Sun City Country Club officially opens.

Rancho Estates begins selling 1-acre lots with horse privileges and special fencing.

The Vacation Special program debuts. In addition to a week at King's Inn for \$199, participants receive two rounds of free golf, breakfast, Western-style dinner with entertainment provided by residents, and a bus tour of the Phoenix area. Over the next 10 years, 50 percent of Sun City buyers will have participated in this program.

## 1968

Liberace returns to give a sellout performance at the Sun Bowl.

The "Berlin Wall" impasse is broken, allowing all residents use of all the recreation centers, current or future, as the centers unite under a single Sun City Community Association that charges annual dues of \$20 per resident.

The general plan for Sun City's Phase II is approved by Maricopa County. It includes Arizona's first subdivision around a man-made lake. Once completed, Viewpoint Lake is stocked with fish. Excavation from the lake is used to build an elevated park in the new Lakeview Center, and to provide a pad for the hospital.

Lakes West Golf Course is completed and ready for play.

The 65-piece Sun City Orchestra is formed and holds its first concert at the Mountain View Recreation Center.

## 1969

On Jan. 9, construction begins on the 99-bed Walter O. Boswell Memorial Hospital in a groundbreaking ceremony officiated by Del Webb and Jim Boswell. The Boswell Hospital Auxiliary is formed to provide volunteer assistance to the hospital's operation.

A new series of 18 models in the "Exposition for Living" 60 Series opens for viewing overlooking Viewpoint Lake. The grand opening features a water skiing show.

The Sun City Taxpayers Association is formed amid concerns about rising water and utility rates.



Town Hall South Recreation Center and pool.



Walter O. Boswell Memorial Hospital under construction.



Aerial view of Viewpoint Lake, the Lakeview Recreation Center (lower left), and the new Boswell Memorial Hospital (lower right), looking south over Grand Avenue.



The Lakeview Recreation Center swimming pool.



Walter O. Boswell Memorial Hospital dedication.



The Sun City Saints cultivated an impressive following in their new hometown.

A larger Bluebird bus replaces the mini-bus and begins making the rounds of Sun City.

107th Avenue north of Grand Avenue is renamed Del Webb Boulevard.

Cotton has given way to winter sheep grazing in the area north of Bell Road.

**1970**

Sun City becomes the 12th largest city in the state and celebrates its 10th anniversary.

Construction begins on Phase II of Sun City, north of Grand Avenue.

The Lakeview Recreation Center, Sun City's first resort-style center, opens at 10626 Thunderbird Boulevard.

The Lakes East and Riverview Golf Courses open for play.

The season-long Sun Bowl Celebrity Series is introduced. Sun City's 10,000th home is sold.

Sun City homes switch to wood frame construction after a lengthy masons' strike. DEVCO switches to frame construction during the strike, and after the strike, only one of 1,100 buyers opt for masonry over frame construction.

Arizona Public Service forecasts a shortage of natural gas in the future, and DEVCO switches to all-electric homes.

In November, the Walter O. Boswell Memorial Hospital is dedicated in ceremonies attended by 5,000 residents.

**1971**

The 70 Series of 17 model homes opens in January. Flat roofs are offered as an option for the first time on single-family homes. Nearly a quarter-million people visit the models during the year.

The 107,600-square-foot La Ronde Shopping Center opens at Thunderbird and Del Webb boulevards. It includes a movie theater in response to residents' requests.

*The Sun City Citizen*, a free weekly, is delivered to every household. The paper will later become the *Sun City Independent*.

On July 4, Sun City Stadium, a professional baseball stadium with an electronic scoreboard, opens at 111th and Grand avenues. It becomes the home field of the Sun City Saints and opens the following week in front of crowds as large as 2,000. Del Webb throws out the first pitch at the inaugural game.

A 16-lane bowling alley opens at Lakeview Recreation Center with the first electronic scoring system in Arizona.

The *Spur v. Webb* case is settled, with DEVCO agreeing to shoulder the costs of the feedlot operator's move to a new location. Residents breathe easier in the southern part of Phase I.

## Playing Ball Sun City's Rich History on the Diamond

Given its founder's background as a semipro first baseman, pitcher, and part-owner of the New York Yankees, it should come as no surprise that Sun City's legacy has involved a lot of baseball. In fact, Del Webb credited his success in business to applying the principles it took to excel in baseball: Be bold, be calm in crisis, have a sense of showmanship, and build a strong team.

Sun City's first field was scratched out in 1962 on a parcel adjoining the Grand Shopping Center, home to some of Sun City's first softball games. It was later moved farther west along Grand Avenue, with a backstop fashioned from two-by-fours and poultry netting. It was a weedy, gravelly diamond that eventually drove away some participants, mostly the women.

A tougher breed of softball player, however, was about to storm into the West Valley; in the aftermath of the breakup of a women's semiprofessional softball team, the Phoenix Ramblers, some of its former players organized a team that attracted several fans from Sun City. In response to the team's strong following, DEVCO built a real ball field, with a fence, backstop, concession stand, and drinking fountains. The scoreboard was provided by Coors brewery, though no beer was allowed at the field, and the bleachers, though rented, still managed to seat as many as 1,000 spectators when the new team – the Sun City Saints – launched the golden era of fast-pitch softball in Sun City in 1966. The Saints joined one of the premiere leagues in the nation, the Pacific Coast Women's Softball League, and soon had enough fans to become financially independent and travel around the world. In 1979, the Saints reached the pinnacle of amateur softball: the American Softball Association National Championship.

The Saints' loyal following led DEVCO executives to think the community might be able to attract a major league team, and the company built a new stadium on more than 12 acres near 111th and Grand avenues. The new Sun City Stadium – with carpeted dugouts, floodlights, an electronic scoreboard, and aluminum bleachers with backrests that seated nearly 3,500 fans – was state-of-the-art, far beyond what anyone would have expected from a community as small as Sun City. It promptly attracted the attention of the San Francisco Giants, who began playing some spring games there the following year.

The Milwaukee Brewers made Sun City their permanent spring training site in 1973, bringing major league



From 1973 to 1985, Sun City Stadium hosted spring training home games for the Milwaukee Brewers.

legends such as Hank Aaron, Rollie Fingers, and others to play before standing-room-only crowds. A decade later, amid an economic slump, the Webb organization sold off all but its core assets – which did not include the ballpark. The new owners raised the rent on the Saints to \$6,000 a month, compared to \$1 a year they had paid to DEVCO. The Saints – soon followed by the Brewers – fled to more hospitable locations.

Another brief flirtation between Sun City and major leaguers occurred in 1990, when the Sun City Rays joined the Senior Professional Baseball Association. Like many other teams in the association, the Rays had many famous players, including future Hall of Famers Rollie Fingers and Ferguson Jenkins. The league lasted little more than a year, however. Various attempts were made to field other teams, but it soon became apparent that the land would be worth more for residential development. Sun City Stadium soon gave way to today's The Fountains at Sun City, a luxury apartment complex.

Today, Sun City's baseball tradition is carried on by several organizations, including the Sun Cities Softball League, consisting of 27 teams and 350 players; a more informal "co-ed" league that plays on Tuesdays and Thursdays; and a group of residents who play "vintage" baseball games, played according to 1860s rules. As it has been from almost the very beginning, baseball is alive and thriving in the Sun Cities.

**1972**



The first three recreation centers are renamed. The Community Center becomes Oakmont; Town Hall is briefly named Pioneer before becoming Fairway; and Town Hall South becomes Mountain View.

The San Francisco Giants begin playing some of their spring training games at Sun City Stadium.

May: 2,000 residents pack Sun City Stadium to watch the Saints take on a team from the University of Tokyo, Japan.

Meals On Wheels makes its first deliveries to shut-ins in May, and more than 4,000 meals are delivered in the next seven months.

The Palmbrook Country Club becomes a private club.

The Sun City Community Association becomes Recreation Centers of Sun City, Inc.

**1973**

The Sundial Recreation Center opens at 103rd Avenue and Boswell Boulevard. The center features the world's largest working sundial and Sun City's first indoor pool.

The Milwaukee Brewers move their spring training games from Tempe, Ariz., to Sun City Stadium, agreeing to a 10-year contract.

In October, the Sheriff's Posse of Sun City is organized.

Willowbrook and Willowcreek golf courses open.

DEVCO builds and donates a new building to Sunshine Service.

DEVCO builds a new firehouse, the George Meade Fire Station No. 1, for the Fire District at 99th Avenue and Bell Road.

Recreation center fees are raised to \$24 per year per person.

**1974**

Phase III of Sun City, north of Bell Road, opens in January featuring "Galleria 74," 22 new housing choices, including one unit featuring an indoor swimming pool. Electric golf cars are made available in the model complex for use by visitors.

The Sun Bowl Celebrity Series features Lawrence Welk, Roger Williams, Roberta Peters, and the Mills Brothers. All 5,000 advance package tickets are sold out in four hours.

On July 4, Sun City founder Del E. Webb dies in the Mayo Clinic Methodist Hospital, Rochester, Minn., of cancer.

The Sun City/Youngtown Information and Referral Service is formed.

Voters in both the Peoria School District and Sun City approve dropping Sun City from the school district. At the time, Sun City has a total of 105 students attending Peoria schools, and their costs are borne by Sun City residents.



1975

Webb Corp. Chairman R.H. Johnson, Arizona Sen. Paul Fannin, and DEVCO President John Meeker kick off the 15th anniversary festivities at the Sun Bowl.

More than 10,000 couples visit Sun City to take part in the Vacation Special program.

A spontaneous metal drive by residents produces 7,000 pounds of personal mementos, jewelry, and family treasures that are processed and cast into a Liberty Bell replica as Sun City prepares to celebrate the nation's bicentennial.

In March, *Boswell Hospital Proceedings*, the first medical journal produced by an Arizona hospital, begins semiannual publication.

*The National Observer* reports that Sun City is the "Number One Haven for Retirees."

The radio station KWAQ-FM commences broadcasting from the Grand Shopping Center.



KWAQ-FM.

1976

The campus-style Bell Recreation Center opens at 99th Avenue and Bell Road, featuring a 10,250-square-foot library with room for 50,000 volumes.

## Sun City's Shrine to Liberty

When Sun City's Bicentennial Committee cast about for ways to celebrate the nation's bicentennial 34 years ago, they decided to go all out: They would do nothing less than recast the Liberty Bell and display it in a prominent place for all to see and touch.

The Del E. Webb Corporation, still an integral part of the Sun City community, agreed to pay for the cost of making a replica of the bell, and the committee soon discovered residents wanted a role, as well. The committee decided to ask Sun City residents to supply the metal, and on Jan. 15, 1976, about 1,500 Sun Citians gathered at Sun City Stadium, at 111th and Grand avenues, to throw their donated scrap metal – a conglomeration of family treasures, including old jewelry and silver – into a pile. Altogether, they contributed a total of 7,000 pounds of metal, which was sent first to a Philadelphia foundry, and then to the Netherlands, where the replica was eventually cast in the same mold used in London, in 1752, for the original Liberty Bell.

Sun City's Liberty Bell came home July 5, 1976, and was officially dedicated Nov. 11, 1976, outside the Bell Recreation Center. The bell became an instant treasure to the Sun City community, famous for being a replica meant to be touched – and rung – by the public, especially at Sun City's annual "Ring that Bell" ceremony.

A time capsule, sealed into the base that supports the Liberty Bell replica, was scheduled for opening in the year 2026, and included a letter that began "From 50 years ago ... hello!" The letter included several speculations about what the community would look like 50 years later, envisioning "an endless flow of fresh water piped from desalinating plants on the Pacific Coasts and the Gulfs of Mexico and California" and "electrical energy ... broadcast into your homes and industries from solar and nuclear installations throughout the state."

Not yet, perhaps – but as of Sun City's own 50th anniversary, there is still time for these predictions to come true.





Golfers wait on the tee of the Sun City Country Club.

A satellite of the Phoenix Art Museum opens at 9744 Bell Road.  
California Gov. Ronald Reagan speaks to a large Sun Bowl crowd.

The Heritage Series – the last series of model homes in Sun City – opens for viewing with 21 new floor plans. Solar-powered heating and air conditioning is offered for the first time, but have no takers due to their high initial cost.

Sun City's Liberty Bell replica is dedicated Nov. 11 outside the Bell Recreation Center. A time capsule is placed in the bell's base to be opened in 2026.

In July, a jackhammer-wielding John Meeker breaks through the asphalt to officially launch construction of the Boswell Hospital's third nursing tower.

The Sun City Post Office is relocated to a major new facility on Bell Road and 98th Avenue.

### 1977

Headliners for the Sun Bowl Celebrity Series include Count Basie, Al Hirt, Rosemary Clooney, and Andy Russell.

Ownership of all Sun City public golf courses – a package worth well over \$12 million – is transferred to the Recreation Centers of Sun City for \$10 and a cup of coffee.

The Walter O. Boswell Memorial Hospital is expanded to 170 beds.

The *Sun City News-Sun* is published daily.

Union Hills Country Club becomes private in September, and is the only private club to offer swimming and tennis in addition to golf.

The last portion of Sun City, Quail Run, opens at 99th and Grand avenues, and includes a nine-hole golf course.

### 1978

The Walter O. Boswell Memorial Hospital opens a third nursing tower.

Sun City West opens on land north of Bell Road and Grand Avenue, west of North El Mirage Road. Prospective buyers choose from the Heritage models in Sun City. In October, residents begin moving in; 535 homes are purchased by year's end – many of them purchased by Sun City residents.

An agreement is made with Sun City Recreation Centers for limited use of facilities by Sun City West residents until the R.H. Johnson Recreation Center becomes available the following year.

### 1979

A letter from league officials in Sacramento, Calif., asking whether Sun City has a senior softball team they could compete with leads to the formation of a senior softball league; 110 prospects turn out for tryouts.

Boswell Memorial Hospital completes a remodel of its second tower and adds ancillary space, bringing the total bed capacity to 219.

The Sun City Poms make their debut, stepping onto the field between a Saturday night Saints double-header. The leader, Foofie Harlan, becomes something of an international celebrity, interviewed and profiled by news agencies from Japan to France.

The Sun Cities Area Community Council organizes and elects officers.

The Saints win the American Softball Association National Championship in Springfield, Mo. They went through the week without a single defeat – five straight shutouts and one perfect game!



Sun City PRIDES.



The Sun City Pioneer Club and local Lions Clubs raised money to honor Del Webb, and Scottsdale sculptor James O. Farley created the statue.

**1980**

The last of Sun City’s multipurpose centers – Marinette Recreation Center, 9860 W. Union Hills Drive – is completed and turned over to residents for operation.

The Phoenix Art Museum Satellite evolves into a more autonomous Sun Cities Art Museum, and DEVCO offers land for a new museum building.

DEVCO turns the responsibility for maintaining Sun City streets over to Maricopa County, including 210 miles of streets with more than 3,200 trees and plantings in the medians alone.

The Sun City PRIDES (Proud Residents Independently Donating Essential Services) begins as a group of three volunteers who work to keep the community clean – and eventually take responsibility for the street medians.

Boswell Hospital receives an additional 84 beds.

**1981**

Sun City Area Interfaith Services incorporates to serve the needs of the frail elderly in the area.

A memorial statue of Del Webb as “planner, builder, and man of vision” is unveiled at the Del E. Webb Memorial Garden at the Bell Recreation Center.

The Recreation Centers of Sun City, Inc., take over the lease of the Sun Bowl, accepting the responsibility for scheduling entertainment and programs.

Sun Health Corporation, the health care organization that will administer both Boswell Memorial Hospital and Sun City West’s Del E. Webb Hospital, is formed and elects its first board of directors.

**1982**

The PRIDES incorporate and begin to sweep, rake, and gather litter along the Sun City streets and medians.

The Sun City Volunteer Bureau is incorporated.

The DEVCO-sponsored bus service ceases, as there aren’t enough riders to make it profitable. The transportation vacuum is filled by the Sun City Area Transit (SCAT), offering door-to-door ride service.

Construction of Boswell Memorial Hospital’s fourth and final nursing tower is completed.

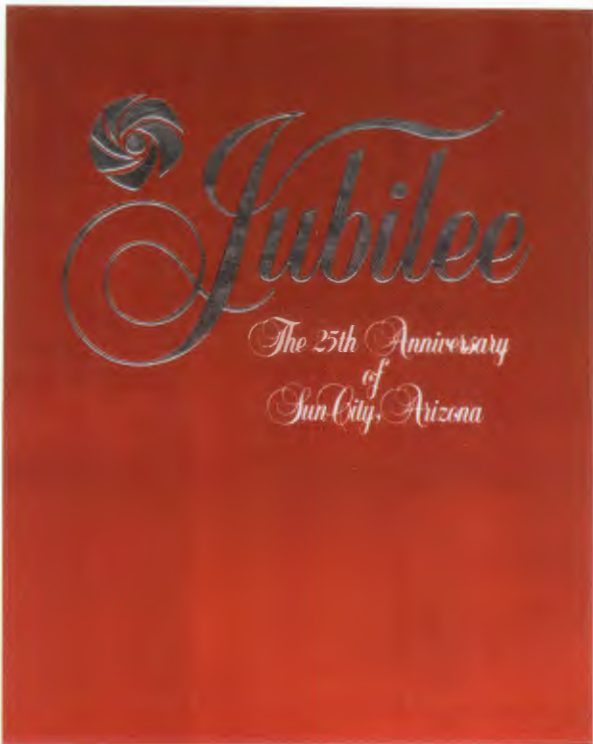
**1983**

High interest rates cause the Webb Corp. to focus on its core businesses – and running a baseball stadium isn’t one of them. The stadium is sold with the proviso it remain a baseball field until at least 1987.

An ASU “campus” of three classrooms and an office opens in the Bell Plaza Professional Building. DEVCO donates 40 acres to ASU on Bell Road west of Sun City, but the hoped-for senior campus is never built.

On May 6, President Ronald Reagan visits Sun City to praise the efforts of the Sun City Posse – and becomes an honorary member.





*Jubilee: The 25th Anniversary of Sun City, Arizona*, written by Jane Freeman and Glenn Sanberg in 1984, was the first in-depth history ever written of Sun City.



The Webb Corp. donates 3 acres north of Bell Road and east of the Agua Fria River to the Sun Cities Art Museum.

The Royal Oaks Retirement Center opens at 10015 W. Royal Oak Road, offering lifetime care to Sun City residents.

Residents vote on a petition to ban smoking inside all Sun City recreation facilities; it passes.

**1984**

Expansion of the Marinette Recreation Center is completed, making additional activities available to those living nearby.

A groundbreaking ceremony is held for the Boswell Eye Institute on the campus of the Boswell Memorial Hospital.

*Jubilee: The 25th Anniversary of Sun City, Arizona*, a book written by Jane Freeman and Glenn Sanberg commemorating the 25-year-history of Sun City, goes on sale.

The new owners of Sun City Stadium notify the Saints that their rent will be \$6,000 per month, rather than the \$1 per year they had paid DEVCO. This ends the era of women's softball in Sun City.

**1985**

A monthlong 25th anniversary celebration begins. Kicked off by a Jan. 6 Sun Bowl concert, it includes a *Jubilee* presentation at the Sundial Center, anniversary cake and coffee at the Bell Center, a Pioneers birthday party, and a parade on Jan. 30. The U.S. Post Office issues a special commemorative postmark, and *Good Morning America* sends a crew to film live from Sun City.

President Ronald Reagan honors the Sun City PRIDES as winners of the 1985 President's Volunteer Action Award.

The Milwaukee Brewers complete their final spring training game at Sun City Stadium and announce plans to move to a new facility in Chandler, Ariz.

The new Sun Cities Art Museum opens at 17425 N. 115th Avenue, between Sun City and Sun City West.

Les Merydith forms Citizens for Self-Government and starts up a petition drive to seek a vote on incorporation – an attempt that ultimately fails.

The Sun City Poms perform in New York City, at the National Fitness Foundation Award Dinner. First lady Nancy Reagan is in attendance.

**1986**

The Walter O. Boswell Memorial Hospital announces its plans to begin performing open heart surgeries.

The Sun Cities Area Historical Society (SCAHS) is incorporated and holds its first meeting in November.

Weaknesses in the roof over the Sundial pool force its closure, along with several craft rooms. To meet the \$1.3 million cost of repair, Recreation Centers are forced to increase yearly dues.



In the 1990s, the Memorial Gardens were renovated and covered seating areas were constructed behind the Del E. Webb statue.



Residents in attendance at the 25th anniversary celebration parade.

### 1987

The Memorial Gardens surrounding the Liberty Bell and the Del E. Webb statue are updated and completed outside Bell Recreation Center and feature new landscaping, park benches, and gazebos.

The Sun Cities Area Historical Society receives tax-exempt status.

As SCAT experiments with an alternative-fuel fleet of vans, Sun City becomes the first community in the United States to use public transit vehicles powered by natural gas.

In May, the leaders of Sun City's pro- and anti-incorporation factions agree to a panel discussion of the issue, to be held at a local church.

### 1988

The Sun City Fire District cancels its contract with Rural/Metro Corporation, a private fire and ambulance company, and establishes its own district.

The Arizona State Legislature imposes a school tax on Sun City, and the residents launch a yearlong legal battle.

Amendments to the Fair Housing Act create concern for Sun City residents by prohibiting adults-only and seniors-only housing. The law provides for exceptions, however, and local officials begin work on preserving Sun City's retirement status.

### 1989

The first model home ever built in Sun City, at 10801 Oakmont Drive, is purchased by the Sun Cities Area Historical Society and converted for use as a headquarters and museum.

The Recreation Centers of Sun City, Inc., vote to temporarily open Sun City's golf courses to the public.

The Sun City school tax is ruled unconstitutional by an Arizona tax court judge, and state lawmakers are compelled to draft a tax that is fair to all citizens. The judge eventually orders a refund to Sun City taxpayers, and a lower tax is imposed.

The Maricopa County Board of Supervisors increased the minimum age for Sun City residency from 50 to 55 on Aug. 10.

The Sheriff's Posse of Sun City moves into its new 12,000-square-foot headquarters at 10861 Sunland Drive.

On Nov. 5, the Sun City Ambassadors officially open a Sun City Visitors Center at the Promenade Shopping Center, at 99th Avenue and Bell Road. The center receives support from the Webb Corporation.

King's Inn, originally built as the Hiway House Motor Hotel in 1960, is torn down to make room for a new shopping center.

**1990**



The Sun Cities Area Historical Society, as part of Sun City's 30th anniversary celebration, opens its doors in the restored residence at 10801 Oakmont Drive.

The Sun City Rays, a team comprised of 35-and-older baseball players that includes future Hall of Famers Rollie Fingers and Ferguson Jenkins, join the Senior Professional Baseball Association in 1990, but it disbands shortly afterward.

Maricopa County officials assure Sun City that it has met all federal requirements under the new Federal Housing Act, and will legally remain a seniors-only community.

Sun Health Corporation announces plans to build a three-story research facility, the Sun Health Research Institute, in Sun City that will seek a cure to neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

In October, the Sun City Pioneers, a club comprised of residents who moved to Sun City in 1960, holds its final meeting and officially disbands.

**1991**

A group of Sun City residents form the Sun Cities' Children's Foundation, which raises donations for children's agencies.

A new drive to incorporate Sun City is launched by Les Merydith and his organization, Citizens for Self-Government.

**1992**

Merydith submits 3,260 signatures to Maricopa County officials in July, falling well short of the 10 percent needed to bring the issue of incorporation to a vote.

Professional baseball returns to Sun City Stadium when the Sun Cities Solar Sox, of the Arizona Fall League, play home games in Sun City and capture the league's first title. Shortly afterward, the Solar Sox move to Mesa.

**1993**

The Sun Health Auxiliary celebrates its 25th anniversary by donating more than \$257,000 to Sun Health Corporation during the auxiliary's annual meeting.

Sun City Home Owners Association board member George Hartman launches a campaign to encourage Sun City to adopt the slogan, "City of Volunteers," to promote the importance of volunteerism in Sun City and recognize its local volunteers. By June, signs are installed at all community entrances denoting Sun City as the City of Volunteers.



Sun Citians celebrate the city's 30th anniversary.



Sun City became known as the City of Volunteers with the efforts of residents to keep the city clean and beautiful.

**1994**

The Sun Cities Art Museum begins a \$1.2 million expansion that will triple the size of the museum.

Work begins on renovations to the Sun Bowl, which will include a rose garden, walking track, and ball field.

**1995**

After failing to attract another major league team for spring training, the owners of Sun City Stadium order the ballpark demolished, in order to make way for The Fountains at Sun City, a modern apartment complex. The stadium is torn down in January.

The Walter O. Boswell Memorial Hospital celebrates its 25th anniversary. A nationwide study published in the July 31 issue of *Modern Healthcare* magazine ranks Boswell No. 1, and Sun City West's Del E. Webb Memorial Hospital No. 6, in cost containment among community hospitals.

The Webb Corp. breaks ground on its third Sun City development in the West Valley, Sun City Grand.

A \$100,000 donation from an anonymous donor allows the Sun City Library in the Bell Recreation Center to expand. The Recreation Centers of Sun City, Inc., pitches in an additional \$125,000.

**1996**

In August, tornado-like winds in excess of 120 miles per hour ravage the West Valley, ripping shingles from roofs, uprooting trees, and wrecking vehicles and houses. In Sun City West alone, 280 trees were destroyed on the development's golf courses.

President Bill Clinton brings his reelection campaign to Sun City, delivering a speech to a crowd of about 3,000 gathered at Sundial Recreation Center. He becomes the second sitting president to visit Sun City.

**1997**

The Bell Library expands and opens another wing, with a new computerized reference center.

Sun Health Corporation, to meet the needs of a growing West Valley, launches a \$24 million renovation and expansion of the Boswell Hospital Campus.

The Lakes Club, Sun City's oldest private country club, celebrates its 25th anniversary.

**1998**

Citizens for Self-Government launches its third petition campaign to incorporate Sun City.

In July, Youngtown, Ariz., officially loses its federal "age overlay" status, and is no longer a seniors-only community. The Sun City Home Owners Association steps up its efforts to monitor compliance with age overlay requirements.



The stadium gave way to The Fountains at Sun City, an apartment complex.



President Bill Clinton delivers a speech to Sun Citizens in 1996.



**1999**

Sun City's own Violet Engel is honored as the 1-millionth SCAT rider.

Interfaith Services announces its plans to renovate an old bank building into a new facility, the Mary Bovard Center (later Mary's Place), at 14601 Del Webb Boulevard.

**2000**

John Meeker, the "Father of Sun City," passes away on Feb. 5, at age 73.

Former first lady Barbara Bush visits Sun City in January to promote literacy and campaign on behalf of her son, Texas governor and presidential hopeful, George W. Bush.

After a yearlong campaign, the Youngtown Fire District is annexed into the Sun City Fire District.

Sun City celebrates its 40th anniversary.

**2001**

A bronze statue honoring 40 years of service by Sun City volunteers, created by Scottsdale sculptor Snell Johnson, is unveiled outside the Lakeview Recreation Center. The

statue is entitled "Sun City Volunteers: A Lifetime of Giving."

**2002**

Volunteer Placement Services, formerly the Volunteer Bureau of Sun City, closes its doors after 20 years of service.

A new Web site is created by the Sun City Visitors Center, [www.suncityaz.org](http://www.suncityaz.org).

**2003**

SCAT offers connections to Valley Metro buses.

The Sun City Visitors Center moves to a new spot in the Bell Recreation Center.

**2004**

The Sun City Poms celebrate their 25th anniversary.

For the first time ever, Sun City bowling alleys are opened to nonresidents.

On Sept. 30 the Sun City Visitors Center hosts its first ever Health and Safety Expo, in conjunction with the Sun City Fire Department.

The Recreation Centers announce a \$3.5 million plan to renovate Bell Recreation Center.





The Sun City Poms perform during a baseball game.



By an overwhelming majority, the Sun City Home Owners Association approves of converting Sun City's Phase I medians from grass to desert landscaping.

**2005**

The Bell Recreation Center pool, exercise room, and locker rooms close to undergo their yearlong renovation.

**2006**

The Sun Health Research Institute breaks ground on a \$5 million, 36,000-square-foot expansion, doubling the size and capabilities of its neurodegenerative disease research facility. The institute's full-body tissue repository soon evolves from the institute's brain bank, which is used to study Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases.

The roof of the Sundial Recreation Center collapses, causing major damage to the pool area and indoor facilities.

**2007**

The Sun City Fire District unveils renovations to its station at 99th Avenue and Bell Road, as well as a new administrative building at 99th Avenue and Union Hills Drive.

In October, Sun Health Corporation and Banner Health, Arizona's largest nonprofit health system, as part of a proposed merger, combine the administration of Boswell Memorial Hospital and Del E. Webb Memorial Hospital for sustainability.

**2008**

Robert H. Johnson, who headed the Webb Corp. and chaired the Del E. Webb Foundation after his retirement, passes away July 22 in Wickenburg at 92.

On Sept. 2, Sun Health Corporation is acquired by Banner Health. The names of its flagship facilities are changed to Banner Boswell Medical Center and Banner Del E. Webb Medical Center.

**2009**

James Boswell II, a long-time business associate of Del Webb, John Meeker, and others behind the success of Sun City, passes away April 3 in California at 86.

In the fall, preliminary events are hosted at the Sun Cities Area Historical Society, 10801 Oakmont Drive, commemorating the 50th anniversary of Sun City, Ariz.

**2010**

Sun City celebrates its golden anniversary.

# A New Hope for American Seniors

Sun Citians and the Sun Health Research Institute join forces against age-related diseases and disorders.

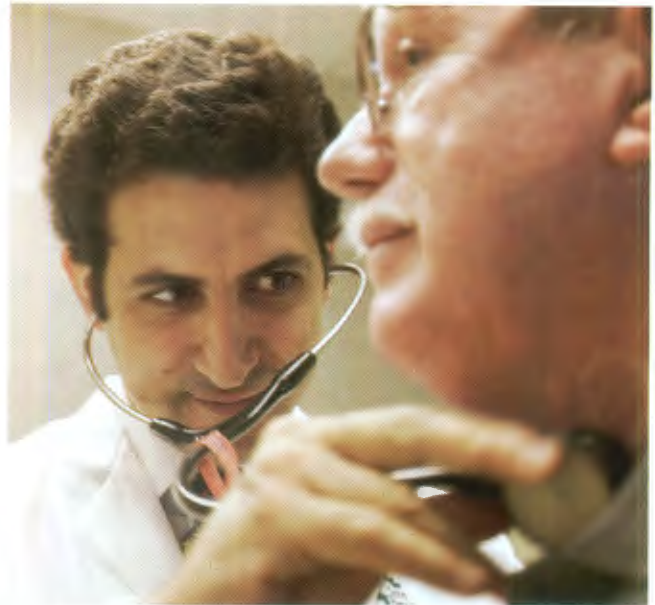
Like many of the ideas planted decades ago by the pioneers who built Sun City, the small community medical center that opened in 1970 as the Walter O. Boswell Memorial Hospital has acquired a global significance, far beyond the ambitions of its founders: the campus of the hospital – now Banner Boswell Medical Center – is home to one of the world’s foremost laboratories devoted to the science of aging.

The Sun Health Research Institute was established in 1986 as part of the logical evolution of the hospital’s attitude toward its residents: the hospital’s parent organization, Sun Health Corporation, decided that its guiding purpose should not only be to provide the best possible care to the sick, but also to find cures and therapies that would keep people out of the hospital to begin with.

The Institute’s nationwide search for the person to direct this effort led them to Dr. Joseph Rogers of the University of Massachusetts and Harvard University’s National Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center. Rogers, a leader in the study of Alzheimer’s and other degenerative brain ailments, came to Sun City for one reason: to immerse himself in the nation’s largest 55-and-over population. The facilities and the funding didn’t yet measure up to his experience: Rogers set up shop in an abandoned building on the Boswell campus and borrowed a folding plastic table from the cafeteria to serve as his lab bench.

Rogers, however, came to Sun City with much faith in the community’s willingness to rally to a shared cause: checking the advance of age-related diseases such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s among an increasing segment of America’s population. His faith was vindicated almost immediately, as prominent Sun Citians Bob and Cleo Roberts kick-started the Institute with its first donation of \$750,000 – the first installment in what would become millions of dollars in gifts over the Roberts’ lifetime.

Rogers had also wanted to launch a tissue donation program that would enable him to study the brains of those who had suffered from age-related diseases, but he did not have a board-certified pathologist to run it. Once again, he was rescued by a Sun Citian, this time a retired pathologist he met at church named Dr. Harold Civin, who told him: “Not



Director of Clinical Research at Sun Health Research Institute Dr. Marwan Sabbagh examines a patient. Those who take part in the Institute’s tissue donation program undergo rigorous annual examinations.

only am I board-certified – I’m bored, period. Just give me an office and a microscope.”

## The Last Gift of Sun City Pioneers

Civin ran the Institute’s tissue donation program for the next 10 years, until the onset of Parkinson’s forced him to retire as a volunteer. His last gift to the Institute was his own brain, donated to the program he had helped to become world-renowned for tissue quality and availability.

Diseases such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s are unique to human beings, and in order to study them, researchers need tissue collected as close to life as possible, before the process of decomposition alters the chemistry of the brain and other organs. Today, because of the intimacy between donors and the scientists at the Institute, it boasts the fastest postmortem autopsy time in the world, at 2.7 hours. Researchers are able to do work with these samples that wouldn’t be possible with those taken from other sources.

Volunteers who sign up for the tissue donation program have to go through rigorous annual assessments of their mental and neurologic functions. “By the time these people come to autopsy,” said Dr. Marwan Sabbagh, head of the Institute’s Cleo Roberts Center for Clinical Research, “we know more about them than their own doctors.”

As Brian Browne, the Institute's director of communications and education, put it: "We say here that when they do discover the cure for Alzheimer's disease, it'll probably be from tissue of somebody here in the Sun Cities. That's how confident we are that our tissue is the best, and that it is coveted. We take pride in that."

The importance of quality tissue samples has increased in recent years; today, about 75 percent of the clinical trials submitted to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) include provisions for sampling and storing human tissue for future analysis.

In 2006, the Institute's tissue donation program expanded to become a "full body repository" that includes samples from all organs, in order to enable more thorough systemic studies. In 2007, for example, the Institute's Robert J. Hoover Center for Arthritis Research was awarded a \$1.4 million grant by the National Institutes of Health to establish the world's first tissue bank dedicated to the research of fibromyalgia, a chronic syndrome with symptoms that include fatigue and muscle, bone, and joint pain.

### Of, By, and For Sun City

Since 1986, the Sun Health Research Institute has grown considerably. It now hosts more than 14 distinct research programs, in areas that include orthopedics, cancer, the cardiovascular system, and molecular biology.

Sun City helped to build the Institute, and in the long view of Rogers and his team of more than 100 world-renowned scientists, the Institute exists to improve the lives of the 85,000 retired people who live within 10 miles of its campus – and of every person who lives to a ripe age. The Institute's work has already produced tangible results – milestones in the history of the fight against age-related diseases and disorders. Examples include:

- The first publication about the link between brain inflammation and Alzheimer's disease. Building on the pioneering work of Rogers, the Institute has definitively documented this link, a turning point in Alzheimer's research. Said Browne: "The brain goes through an inflammatory process during Alzheimer's disease similar to if you were to bang your elbow ... and if we could somehow calm or mitigate the inflammation, the same way the body would be able to get rid of the dirt in a cut, it could potentially have less brain-damaging effects than we see happening right now. That's where the field headed when Dr. Rogers made that discovery."

- Identifying an enzyme that boosts production of amyloid beta-protein, prevalent in the brains of Alzheimer's patients. Down the road, the discovery may enable clinicians to prescribe a drug that could control the production of this enzyme, resulting in the prevention or cure of Alzheimer's.

- Studies indicating that lower cholesterol may be an effective treatment for Alzheimer's. Dr. Larry Sparks, head of the Institute's Ralph and Muriel Roberts Laboratory for

Neurodegenerative Research, was one of the first to discover a connection between cholesterol and Alzheimer's, Brian Browne said. "We did the first ever clinical trial using Lipitor, a statin, or cholesterol-lowering drug, and studying its effect on preventing Alzheimer's disease. And the trials were very successful." After a one-year trial among 63 participants in Sparks' study, more than half of the patients stabilized or improved.

- The discovery that an FDA-approved compound may reduce the bone deterioration associated with arthritis by 70 percent, and reduces arthritic inflammation by 50 percent, in laboratory models.

- The discovery of a strong correlation between Alzheimer's and cardiovascular disease. "Another body of science has branched off from this finding," Browne said, "to investigate whether a lack of oxygen and nutrients, because of blocked arteries, is an aggregate to the cause of Alzheimer's. The hypothesis is, if you can reduce your cardiovascular risk, you can reduce your lifetime Alzheimer's risk as well."

The pioneering work of the Institute has attracted much attention in recent years, and its scientists are increasingly entrusted with the task of expanding the frontiers of research. "For example," said Browne, "later on this year we'll be one of only six centers in the United States to perform gene therapy, where we basically take genes from you, modify them, implant them into your brain, and see if that treatment does modify or mitigate the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. It's truly futuristic."

The Institute's role in the Alzheimer's fight was featured in a five-part HBO documentary, *The Alzheimer's Project*, produced by Maria Shriver and released in the spring of 2009. Because of Sun City's integral role in the fight against the disease, an advance screening of part of the series was hosted at the Phoenix Convention Center on May 7, 2009, followed by a discussion with a panel that included Rogers, Sabbagh, and Dr. Tom Beach, director of the Civin Laboratory of Neuropathology.

The Institute's flagship Alzheimer's research initiative is a premier program, ranking among that of the nation's most illustrious institutions, such as Harvard and Johns Hopkins. Most of the nation's major clinical trials are conducted in Sabbagh's clinic, and the Institute is typically one of the only sites west of the Mississippi with access to the latest medical treatments for patients in the early stages of Alzheimer's.

To Dr. Joseph Rogers – who stepped down as president of the Institute in 2008, in order to devote more time to his laboratory work – none of this would have been possible without the good will of the Sun Cities community. "We exist because of this community, and we exist for this community," he said. "The community made it possible, and we accept the trust they have given us. And we are dedicated to finding medical breakthroughs that will benefit them as well as others worldwide."



# Today and Tomorrow: Sun City's Evolving Legacy

When men from the Del E. Webb Construction Company first visited the cotton fields west of Phoenix more than 50 years ago, they were not seeking to change the way the world thought about aging. They were businessmen, pursuing a business opportunity; their business plan was not a lightning strike of pure genius, but the result of hard work and clear thinking. The Webb Company had simply recognized, and devised a solution to, a worsening problem in America: the marginalization of older people who had been nudged out of the workplace and into retirement.

In hindsight, Sun City's success was like threading a needle. Few remember the two other Sun Cities, in California and Florida, which were launched with much excitement by the Webb Corporation on the heels of the Arizona grand slam. The failure of these communities sent Webb and other developers back to the drawing board, to examine what had gone wrong there – and what had gone right in Arizona.

Said Maryanne Leyshon, editor of the Sun City *Daily News-Sun*, "I think there has never been, anywhere in the United States, an experiment like Sun City. And basically what has evolved here, including the programs, is what's going to be happening around the coun-

try as the Baby Boomers retire. What we have here actually is the framework for what other communities are going to have to deal with in the future."

Since 1960, the Webb Corp. – which was purchased by Pulte Homes in 2001 – has sold almost 80,000 homes for the active-adult buyer in more than 50 communities in 20 states. These buyers represent the fastest-growing demographic segment in the United States, with 65-and-older Americans on the verge of accounting for 25 percent of the population.

Among the many studies of Sun City conducted today, said Executive Director of the Sun City Visitors Center Paul Herrmann, many are done by groups from overseas. "The aging population is a worldwide phenomenon," he said. "Del Webb was, in a sense, 50 years ahead of his time. Prior to Sun City, all we had in this country were 'old-people homes.' That's what the rest of the world still has. They don't know how to do active lifestyle."

Groups from overseas study not just the overall concept of a master-planned retirement community, but the minutiae of the Sun City retirement experience as it has evolved over the years: a Dutch group studying financial issues, for example, or a Japanese group interested in food banks.



Lookout Mountain, next to the Lakeview Recreation Center, remains a popular place overlooking Viewpoint Lake.

“Their interest,” Herrmann said, “is often volunteerism, because volunteerism is unique to this culture. I’ve been told by most groups from Japan: ‘Unless our people get paid, they don’t do it.’ So I try to explain to them: well, if that’s the case, then you’re not going to have a Sun City type of community, because we rely so heavily on volunteers.”

Many of the most recent visitors to Sun City have come from Asian societies who have found themselves unprepared for an aging population that wants to live a younger lifestyle. “Korea is in the process of developing a master-planned community with everything in it, just like Sun City,” Herrmann said. “Korea is kind of master-planning the country, actually. And the government is subsidizing some of these businesses, which they’re calling Silver Towns and developing around the country.”

No matter where they come from, said Herrmann, Sun City’s foreign visitors all have one thing in common: “They all want to learn about one of the many factors that have combined to make Sun City such a success.”

### **The Changing Landscape**

The answers to these visitors’ questions, not surprisingly, are more complicated than they might have been in 1960. As American society continues to change, the dynamic community of Sun City continues to adapt along with it. These changes are most readily apparent on the surface – the hardscape – of Sun City, as once-avant-garde buildings and infrastructure are refurbished and reborn.

“I think one of the big things we’re seeing right now,” said Leyshon, “is the transformation of the homes in the Sun Cities. It’s a huge trend in Phase I, particularly because those were the cheapest homes to purchase, just little block homes that were the original Del Webb models and sold for \$8,000 to \$12,000. If you drive down 103rd Avenue, you’ll see how many have been stuccoed, how many have been retrofitted with modern appliances and have had the plumbing and heating all redone.” In the 14 years Leyshon and her husband have lived in their Phase III home – a large home



Sun City homes have been remodeled in a variety of ways, both inside and out.

with a swimming pool, on a big golf course lot – they’ve remodeled four times.

The recreation centers, too, have evolved; all have undergone extensive renovations. Most recently, the Bell and Sundial Centers have undergone a total of \$10.5 million in renovations to their pools and fitness centers. The Fairway Recreation Center – the former Town Hall that once provoked Sun City’s “Berlin Wall” standoff – was completely demolished in October 2008 to make way for a new \$17 million center, scheduled for completion by the end of 2009. The new Fairway Center will include a fitness area, walking pool, and lap pool, along with facilities for clubs and meeting rooms.

According to Norm Dickson, who served as a director of the Recreation Centers of Sun City, Inc. (RCSC) for six years, future plans for Sun City call for a new auditorium to accommodate the 11 performing groups in the community and the thousands of residents who come to see them perform. The way in which these projects are administered, said Dickson, is an example of a unique feature that has contributed to the success of Sun City: its unincorporated status.

Local community needs in Sun City – water, sewers, police protection, care of the roads, and streetlights – are handled by Maricopa County, while the Sun City Fire District provides fire protection. Sun City’s liaison between residents and the county government, and other outside agencies, is the Sun City Home Owners Association (SCHOA), which is also charged with enforcing the simple community standards and deed restrictions – for example, the age restriction on home ownership – that make Sun City unique.

“Sun City is not a city,” Dickson said. “We’re not a municipal government. The closest thing we have to a government body is the RCSC, and they don’t fix sidewalks or check for parking violations or hire policemen or anything like that. When people come here from elsewhere, they’re shocked to find that this is not a municipality.” The RCSC involves more than 150 member-volunteers who serve on its 15 standing committees and oversee everything from facilities inspection to long-range planning. Dickson describes the RCSC as “an independent nonprofit corporation of considerable size

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## The City of Volunteers

It was in 1993 that the signs were raised at all entrances to Sun City, identifying it as the “City of Volunteers,” but the signs were honoring a tradition as old as Sun City itself: In 1961, Sun City’s first library opened, led by a retired librarian. In 1962, Sun City volunteers began lending out equipment to the community’s frail and sick. In 1969, before the Walter O. Boswell hospital had even been built, Sun Citians organized the Boswell Hospital Auxiliary to provide volunteer assistance to its operation. In 1973, the Sun City Sheriff’s Posse was organized, and today its members do everything from emergency first response to changing light bulbs for residents. In 1980, the Sun City PRIDES began cleaning up the streets and medians of Sun City.

These people have never expected to be paid for their services, but it’s no exaggeration to say that without volunteers, Sun City – like so many developments that sprang up to imitate it in ensuing years – would have failed to fulfill the promise of a “different way of life” for its residents.

Part of what makes Sun City different is that it is not a municipality; there is no mayor, no city council, no police force, no social services department. It has always been self-sufficient – an interesting distinction, given that many seniors, and especially the elderly, tend to rely heavily on social services in their later years. In Sun City, residents have relied on each other – and the community has prospered. The closest thing it has to a civil government, the RCSC, is led by a nine-member board of elected volunteers. Its 130 chartered clubs are all run by volunteers. When Sun Citians have seen a need, they’ve met it – in 1981, for example, when a group of citizens, concerned that community residents would not be able to obtain important local services to prolong independent living, founded Interfaith Services (now Interfaith Community Care), a leading care provider and coordinator in the West Valley.

Sun City’s volunteer spirit has always embraced the community at large, as well: Sun Citians serve as teachers’ and lunchroom aides in local schools, especially in the neighboring Dysart School District, and today around 1,500 volunteers serve the hospitals in Sun City and Sun City West. “Boswell Medical Center has saved thousands and thousands of dollars because of the people who volunteer at the hospital,” said Norm Dickson, who served as an RCSC director for six years. “They drive golf carts, taking people from their cars to the building. They greet people when they come in, and register them. They shuttle documents and orders back and

forth between offices. They roll silverware and deliver oxygen tanks.” As of December 2008, the Auxiliary had provided more than 11 million hours of service to both hospitals – a contribution that amounted to a total of \$9 million in value to community health care.

### The Future of Volunteerism

In the past two decades, Sun City’s seniors have mirrored nationwide demographic trends, some of which have raised important issues for its future. Increased life expectancy and economic instability have compelled many Americans to work longer, sometimes into their 70s, or even later. At the same time – and probably in part as a result of this later retirement age – volunteerism among older Americans is on the decline.

The impact of this decline seems to be less severe in the City of Volunteers than elsewhere. Volunteerism is still an influential force in the civic life of Sun City. In the mid-1990s, a few years into the national downturn in senior volunteerism, nearly 60 percent of Sun Citians were still volunteering their time and talents.

“The Posse and the PRIDES are having difficulty getting the same numbers they once had, but they’re not lacking members,” Dickson said. “They’re still thriving. You’ve got to look at percentages. We’ve got 42,000 people here. A very small percentage of them are working people. Is the percentage increasing? Yes. Is it to the point where Sun City is going to be crippled because we have more people working than we do retired? It isn’t, and I don’t think we’ll ever reach that point.”

Bret McKeand, a veteran newsman and Vice President of Arizona’s Independent Newspapers, followed his parents to Sun City more than 25 years ago, and he’s seen the community through good times and bad. He thinks the odds are in Sun City’s favor: “I don’t know what it’s going to be like 10 years from now, but Sun City always tended to attract community-minded people,” he said. “Maybe it’s a little bit tougher today, but they’ve never really had a problem getting people to come out for a cause. I think people tend to come here from small communities, where they’re used to taking care of each other.”

Dickson isn’t worried, either: “The amazing thing – and the thing that makes Sun City unique – is that a community, incorporated or otherwise, has operated successfully, almost entirely with the work of volunteers from its residents, for 50 years, and shows all signs of continuing that success well into the 21st century.”

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and holdings. Its operation affects most aspects of residents' lives, from property values to lifestyle. Its annual budget is \$17 million, and the fact that it's a private corporation gives us some benefits as far as being designated as a retirement community – it allows us some federal tax breaks, and allows us to do some things that other communities aren't able to do."

Most recently, Sun City has been able to absorb the costs of overhauling the Bell, Sundial, and Fairway centers – to the tune of nearly \$28 million – without incurring any debt. "We've got a financial system that allows us to put up a \$17 million, brand-new center, and pay cash," said Dickson. "There aren't many 50-year-old communities, let alone retirement communities, that can do that." The RCSC's careful management of reserve funds derived from modest fees – an annual property assessment fee, and a one-time contribution to Sun City's Preservation Fund from first-time home buyers – has not only allowed cash payment for these renovation and construction projects, but is, as of 2009, enabling the buildup of an even larger reserve fund, to meet future unexpected expenses. Among the dozens of Del Webb com-

munities nationwide, Sun City has the lowest per-person annual fee.

Today, the recreation centers also illustrate the ways in which Sun City continues to accommodate issues that, for residents, grow increasingly complex. Among the most significant of these issues: they're living longer, and working later. Eighty percent of America's 78 million Baby Boomers, in fact, plan to continue in paid labor through their 60s and 70s, according to a 2003 study by AARP.

"We've got people 55 years old moving out here, but some are continuing to work," said Paul Herrmann. The trend has been significant enough that the community's recreation centers have adjusted their hours of operation. "Our fitness centers – and every club here in Bell Recreation Center – are now open at least one night a week," he said. As a sign of the changing times, one of the largest clubs in Sun City is now the Computer Club, with more than 2,000 members.

Some of the demographic changes facing Sun City have been strictly local: once a desert oasis prized for its remoteness, Sun City is now just one of 14 cities and towns in the West Valley, where for many decades its residents tended to

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## The Incorporation Question: Settled - for Now

It wasn't long after Sun City's first residents moved in that they began to look to the future: what, they wanted to know, would their community look like after Del Webb's company wasn't around to take care of things? Residents were divided into two camps:

The incorporationists believed Sun City should become a municipality with a mayor and a local government. Their argument: Sun City was throwing away thousands of dollars in state shared revenue the community would receive if it became a municipality – revenue that could be used to provide services and maintain infrastructure.

The anti-incorporationists believed residents would see a dramatic increase in taxes, because the cost of running the city would far outweigh the state revenues, and there was always the possibility that state revenues might decline in the future.

The question appeared settled in 1964, when the Civic Association – forerunner to the Sun City Home Owners Association (SCHOA) brought the issue to a vote. The Del E. Webb Development Company (DEVCO), which favored incorporation, offered to donate land for a civic center and build it at cost. But in this, the first and only official election ever held in Sun City on the issue of incorporation, it was rejected by residents, 2,558 to 1,036. A ballot cast among SCHOA members in 1971

yielded an even more decisive result: 5,563 against, 258 in favor.

According to McKeand, who was then a reporter for *The Sun City Independent*, it remained a hot-button issue for many years. "People were really, really into it, because they cared a lot about Sun City, on both sides," he said. "If you brought it up, I'm telling you, people would just come out of the woodwork. The anti-incorporationists just felt that if you incorporated, you'd have this bureaucracy and taxes, and we didn't need that out here. The Rec Centers played the role of the government, for the most part, and dues were the taxes."

Despite more than one independent study projecting that incorporation would not raise the taxes of Sun Citians, public opinion has not budged in the last 50 years.

Several petition drives have been led by the Charter Government Association, an organization founded and led for many years by Sun City resident Les Merydith, but none of the drives has ever been strong enough to force another vote – a 1992 drive came close, but fell 120 signatures short. For now – and the foreseeable future – Sun City's residents will continue its tradition of self-reliance. "If you had a government now, I don't know if things would be any different or any better," McKeand said. "I think they're probably fine just as they are."

## On Later Years

*Sun City has evolved to accommodate a variety of living styles for older adults*

In 1960, as the first wave of active seniors hit the golf links, pools, and recreation centers of Sun City, most gave very little thought to what would happen to them in their later years. At the time, life expectancy at the normal retirement age of 65 was only a few additional years. Gradually, however, the community began to plan ahead to meet the needs of its aging residents. The first facility to care for seniors who could no longer live independently was the Sun Valley Lodge, which opened its doors in 1965.

It wasn't until the 1980s that a broader perspective of seniors' living needs came into focus. A second continuing care facility, Royal Oaks (now Royal Oaks Lifecare Community) opened its doors in 1983 and now is home to more than 600 residents on 36 acres in Sun City. Another organization, Interfaith Community Care, was formed as a not-for-profit organization in 1981 by Sun Citians who were concerned about the lack of important services available to local residents.

To Maryanne Leyshon, who has lived in Sun City for 14 years, the evolution of organizations such as Interfaith has placed the community on the leading edge of providing living options for retirees. "At Interfaith they originated by seeing a need for care for people who wanted to stay in their homes," she said. "So they provided some in-home services. Then they developed their adult day care centers. But what happened was there were so many people who needed all-day care, Alzheimer's patients and so forth, that they now have centers in Sun City, Sun City West, Peoria, and Surprise."

In addition to its five day centers, Interfaith offers various support and educational services, a comprehensive care-management program, volunteer services, and social activities. Its goal is to provide a continuum of care that promotes independence and instills a sense of dignity and self-empowerment, regardless of a resident's ability to pay for services.

Interfaith was at the vanguard of a nationwide movement toward recognizing an essential truth about what Leyshon calls the "second phase" of retirement, when seniors begin to require more assistance: not all people need or want the same level of service, and their needs are as varied as the number of people in the community.



The United Church of Sun City operated Sun City's first nursing home, the Sun Valley Lodge.

Within Sun City, activities and clubs have broadened to accommodate all kinds of interests and abilities, and have embraced seniors who may need the kinds of assistance offered by Interfaith. At residential complexes such as Royal Oaks, the Heritage Palmeras, Brighton Gardens, and the Woodmark, Sun City seniors can receive whatever level of assistance they desire. Independent living facilities offer meal service or limited services such as linen changes, maid service, or transportation. Assisted-living centers are available to those who cannot be fully independent, but don't require medical care. Co-location, a trend pioneered in Sun City and other communities, allows residents to "age in place" – to become less able to care for themselves without having to move away from spouses and friends.

"I think we are the standard-bearer in the United States for how a community should evolve with elders," said Leyshon. "There are different levels of being a senior, and I think it's important for people to understand that all the entities and the organizations of the community – and especially the recreation centers – have reached out to try to develop programs to help."

## The PRIDES: *Keeping Sun City Beautiful*

It was 1980. DEVCO, having completed the development of Sun City, had turned over the responsibility for maintaining its streets to Maricopa County. A record crop of oranges from the trees along Sun City's streets and medians, however, had overwhelmed the county's resources, and for awhile Sun City was carpeted with rotting citrus.

Sun Citian Joe McIntyre decided to do something about it. He fired off a passionate letter to the editor of the *Daily News-Sun*, asking residents for help cleaning up the mess. Three people showed up. They and McIntyre filled their own cars with oranges, which they deposited in the garbage containers of local businesses.

The work of McIntyre and his volunteers inspired other residents to the cause of keeping Sun City clean and beautiful, and about two years later, the growing organization, calling itself the Sun City PRIDES (Proud Residents Independently Donating Essential Services) incorporated as a nonprofit.

Today the 172 members of the PRIDES maintain 210 miles of streets and medians within Sun City's 14 square miles. They are easily recognizable by their orange vests as they trim trees, pick oranges, rake leaves, paint tree trunks, collect litter from 11 miles of drainage ditches, feed and water about 2,500 trees, maintain the county watering system, and remove tons of trash, which they leave for county pickup in bright orange bags.

The PRIDES work closely with the Maricopa County Department of Public Works, which – while not providing financial support – supplies them with vests, supplies, plant food, paint, and weed control equipment. This, along with the rest of the PRIDES' gear – the vehicles, tools, and supplies provided through the generosity of residents, clubs, and local businesses – are housed in a building made especially for them at 91st Avenue and Greenway Road.

The PRIDES have won national recognition for their service: in 1981, they were



honored by the National Association of Counties for their outstanding volunteer effort. In 1982, they received the George Washington Honor Medal from the Valley Forge Freedoms Foundation. In 1985 the PRIDES received the president's Volunteer Action Award, bestowed by President Ronald Reagan in a White House ceremony.

Today, their work is valued at about \$500,000 annually.

## The Sun City Home Owners Association

In Sun City, a community without a municipal government, community leadership has always been about much more than keeping up appearances. In the community's early years, a group called the Sun City Civic Association served two functions: it administered the community's recreation facilities, and also dealt with zoning issues and other civic matters. When Sun City's second recreation center was added in 1963, the Association decided to split these two functions between separate organizations. The Sun City Home Owners Association (SCHOA) articles of incorporation were signed in April of 1963.

The new SCHOA was a voluntary organization, with dues set at \$2, and from the start it existed to serve the community's civic needs. One of its first tasks was to print the Sun City Directory – a brochure listing the name, occupation, home city and state, address, and phone number of each of the community's 2,000 residents. Soon after SCHOA came into existence, it began selling a group health care plan to residents. SCHOA was instrumental in several events and organizations that have become landmarks in the history and culture of Sun City: it provided essential support to establish the Sun City Posse and Sunshine Service, and it played a key role in the long, expensive, and often acrimonious battle to rid Sun City of neighboring cattle feedlots. SCHOA also prepared the legislation that placed all of Arizona's sewer and water companies under a single Corporation Commission.

Today, SCHOA continues to play a leadership role in preserving the values of Sun City. In addition to enforcing Sun City's simple six-page list of minimal community standards, known as the Covenants, Conditions, and Restrictions (CC&Rs), it plays the role of liaison between Sun City's residents and the governments of Maricopa County and the State of Arizona on issues such as roadways, public safety, air quality, and political issues. It also operates two programs to preserve property values: a financial assistance program, through which SCHOA provides volunteers to help clean and maintain properties belonging to those unable to maintain homes and lots themselves, and a community intervention program for abandoned properties. Under this program, SCHOA cleans up abandoned properties under its own initiative, to be reimbursed for its services when the property is sold.

While membership in SCHOA is voluntary, the CC&Rs, written into the property deed of every Sun City home, are mandatory. Given the array of benefits and services provided through SCHOA membership – vendor discounts, voting privileges, free maps and plot plans, and above all, active participation in continuing the traditions that make Sun City special – the Sun City Home Owners Association considers the \$15 price tag per household per year to be one of the biggest bargains in the West Valley.

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call the shots. No longer, said McKeand: "That's changed over the last 10 years," he said, "as Surprise and Peoria have grown and the area has been redistricted." Western Maricopa County's population, in fact, is expected to surpass 800,000 by 2010 – meaning that Sun City's population, on its 50th anniversary, accounted for less than 5 percent of this total.

Ironically, as its political clout has been tempered at the regional level over the years, Sun City has become more involved in local issues – crime prevention, traffic problems, and road work (including discussions of the widening of Grand Avenue), and even the abatement of rampant pigeon and coyote populations. This work, like most of the work done by Sun Citians, is performed by volunteers – thousands of them – building on Sun City's decades-long tradition of lending assistance to institutions such as schools, hospitals, food banks, and other charitable organizations.

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**LEFT:** The Sun City Visitors Center at Bell Recreation Center, with two of Sun City’s newest residents. **RIGHT:** From Sun City’s earliest days, golf cars were used for much more than navigating the course. Today, thousands of golf cars and neighborhood electric vehicles (NEVs) can be seen plying the streets of the West Valley.

### A Bright Future in the Desert

The enduring spirit of volunteerism in Sun City illustrates that despite the changes that have swept across America and the West Valley over the past 50 years, Sun City’s culture continues to flourish.

To Dickson, Sun City’s legacy, on its 50th anniversary, is that it’s still as prosperous and forward thinking as Del Webb was in 1960, when he ushered in a new way of life for America’s retirees. “We’re still a vibrant community,” Dickson said. “We’ve got 500,000 square feet under the roofs of seven activity centers, which are visited a total of 1.4 million times every year, often by the members of more than 130 chartered clubs. There are nine pools in Sun City, one of them an indoor pool. There are eight golf courses on 1,300 acres of land.”

There is plenty of fun and diversion to be had in Sun City, but its tireless volunteers – who ensure its prosperity while reaching out to the larger community – make clear that it’s much more than an island of leisure in the desert. And that’s fine with Maryanne Leyshon. Through the 20 years of changes she’s witnessed in Sun City, her faith in its people – and her love for her new home – have only grown. “Every story I hear, every person I talk to,” she said, “I just

shake my head and think: This is the most amazing place in the world. I couldn’t live another hundred years and cover every story in this community.”

“When Del Webb put this place up in 1960,” added Dickson, “it was visionary – but even he had no idea what it would become. We’ve adapted and met whatever the challenges were. We’re still here, and we’re still thriving.”

### From Golf Car to “Neighborhood Vehicle”

Several plans for Sun City never made it past the brainstorming stage. For most of these – including the concept for a community clustered around Venice-style canals in the middle of former cotton fields – hindsight has reinforced the wisdom of discarding them. But at least one, put forth by Webb executive Tom Breen, seems visionary today: Breen imagined a large central parking garage where Sun City’s residents would deposit their automobiles, and then rely on small electric golf cars for their daily needs.

Sun Citians were among the first Americans to discover that most of their activities – trips to the post office, to the store, to the home of a friend – did not require an automobile, and they pioneered the use of the golf car as a neighborhood vehicle; if you wanted to know where the action was – at the



Sun Bowl, at the baseball stadium, at church, or at a recreation center – all you had to do was look for a concentration of parked golf cars. Their simplicity and maneuverability has made them a mainstay of the Sun City lifestyle.

The federal government was slow to catch on to the trend of using golf cars as neighborhood vehicles; it wasn't until 1998 that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration issued a set of rules designed to make golf cars street legal: requirements for turn signals, seat belt use, headlights, and turn signals, for example. The ruling differentiated between a "golf car" – which travels at a top speed of 20 miles per hour or less, and is exempt from these requirements – and a "low-speed vehicle," capable of greater speeds.

Maricopa County, Ariz., is now home to around 30,000 registered golf cars, most of them purchased from one of about 30 local dealers. Many dealers prefer the term "neighborhood vehicle" (NV) for the street-legal class, and the use of them for neighborhood errands – to the doctor's office, to social events, to drop the kids off at school or the swimming pool – long ago expanded beyond the West Valley's retirement communities. To accommodate this growth, in the spring of 2009, Sun City's neighbor, the city of Surprise, issued a map, viewable from the city's Web site, of the streets where golf cars are legal – streets where the speed limit is 35 mph or lower. As fuel economy becomes a greater concern in the West Valley and elsewhere, look for more NVs to carry people along the routes of ur-

## Sunshine Service

The nonprofit known as Sunshine Service is nearly as old as Sun City itself: It began in 1961 when the Sun City Civic Association (now SCHOA) appointed a committee and a chairman, the Rev. E. Duane Thistlethwaite, to oversee the lending of medical and home health care equipment to residents in need.

Thistlethwaite and his wife, Fern, had noticed the need for such equipment among Sun City residents, and in April of 1962 they started to lend it out. At first, their holdings were minimal: four hospital beds, a wheelchair, some walkers, and some crutches, which the Thistlethwaites kept in their carport. In 1964, DEVCO donated the land and built a new building at cost for Sunshine Service at 10307 Coggins Drive. Nine years later, the company donated a larger lot and built another home for Sunshine Service at cost, at its present location, 9980 W. Santa Fe Drive. The organization has since added on to that building, bringing its current capacity to more than 22,000 square feet.

Thistlethwaite served as president of Sunshine Service until failing health forced his retirement in 1981. Over time, residents have donated more items and provided more financial support, and today the service is run by a paid executive director, who reports to an elected board. The Service has a part-time staff of 13 and two full-time employees.

Sunshine Service owns more than \$1.5 million worth of equipment, including more than 800 wheelchairs and more than 400 roll-away beds. In addition to medical equipment, the service also loans out equipment for visiting grandchildren or great-grandchildren, such as cribs or baby furniture. Sunshine Service equipment is used in about 2,800 homes each year, at no cost to residents.



**LEFT:** The 1990 ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Historical Society's new home, at 10801 Oakmont Drive. From left to right: Glenn Sanberg (past president); Les Merydith (president); Carol Carpenter of the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors; Dr. Walter Eitt, first minister of the United Church of Sun City; and Evelyn Parry, a 1960 Sun City pioneer. **ABOVE:** The Sun Cities Area Historical Society was founded by a group of people that included Jane Freeman (pictured), Glenn Sanberg, and Rita Wright.

ban and suburban America – and remember, it all started in Sun City.

### **THE AMBASSADORS: Sun City's Visitors Center**

It wasn't long after 1978, when DEVCO moved its offices out of Sun City to focus on its new development, Sun City West, that a consortium of Sun City's economic, social, and spiritual leaders woke up to the fact that Sun City was becoming merely one of many active retirement communities in the United States.

These leaders – who called themselves the Ambassadors – had no intention of becoming a face in the crowd. In 1986 they organized the first Sun City Visitors Center, and dedicated themselves to promoting the community to potential home buyers and businesses.

"One of the fortunate things for us," said Paul Herrmann, executive director of the Sun City Visitors Center, "was that Ken Meade, who was an important realtor in Sun City, was one of the founders of the Visitors Center. He had money, he had contacts, and he had the clout to get the Visitors Center off the ground. We started in an office building at Boswell Boulevard and Palmeras Drive, and it was more of a phone center than anything else."

The Ambassadors – with representatives from the local business community, the Recreation Centers Board, and SCHOA – became an official organization on November 3,

1989, when the Visitors Center moved to the Promenade Shopping Center at 99th Avenue and Bell Road. In June of 2003, the center moved to its current home in the Bell Recreation Center.

"It's nice," said Herrmann. "Now when people come to visit here, they're in a Rec Center that showcases everything there is to love about Sun City – the pool, spa, fitness center, tennis courts, bowling lanes, mini-golf course, and the Library and Cultural Center, in addition to all the social activities and clubs. It beats working out of a commercial space."

The Visitors Center is a busy place, staffed by about 60 volunteers who, in any given month, host about a thousand visitors from all over the world, and send 300 informational packets to every U.S. state and a dozen foreign countries. In addition, the Visitors Center's Web site, [www.suncityaz.org](http://www.suncityaz.org), receives about 20,000 hits monthly.

"I think the Baby Boomers are going straight to the Web site," said Herrmann. "They're not filling out the card in the back of the magazine, saying, 'send me more information.' I think the Web is the way to go now."

### **LIVING HISTORY: The Sun Cities Area Historical Society**

In 1984, as Jane Freeman was putting the finishing touches on *Jubilee*, the 25th anniversary history of Sun City she had co-authored with Glenn Sanberg, she visited the of-



Visitors to the museum at 10801 Oakmont Drive step back 50 years into a kitchen and living room as they may have looked in the original model home. Note the washing machine placed in the kitchen. The dryer was the warm Arizona sun outside.

fices of the Del E. Webb Development Company (DEVCO) for some information.

DEVCO had just completed the construction of its newest development, Sun City West, and was in the process of moving its offices there. "They were cleaning out a lot of stuff," said Freeman. "They had let a lot of people go. And they were literally taking file drawers and dumping them upside down into dumpsters."

Freeman, who moved to Sun City in 1970 and has served on so many boards, committees, and clubs that she is informally known as the "First Lady of Sun City," was appalled at the sight of such treasures – old marketing photographs, brochures, newsletters, media clippings, and other historical materials – disappearing into the trash. She gathered up some friends and, quite literally, went dumpster diving. The Sun Cities Area Historical Society – a group effort spearheaded by Freeman, Sanberg, and Rita Wright – was born.

"After *Jubilee* came out, we had all this material," said Freeman. "And we talked about organizing, and of course, we had to get incorporated. The Webb people were very helpful to us on that." A few years after its incorporation, the Society was presented with a golden opportunity: Sun City's very first model home, at 10801 Oakmont Drive, was available for purchase. With the help of community groups, individuals, and a pair of old friends – the Webb Corporation and the J.G. Boswell Foundation – the Society purchased the home.

The home, it turned out, bore only slight resemblance to the Kentworth model that was built in 1959 – it had undergone extensive remodelings and additions. The Society had the living room, kitchen, and bathroom restored to their original condition, including the furniture and appliances; today, these sections of the home serve as a museum, offering a glimpse of Sun City's origins.

The materials that were salvaged from the DEVCO dumpsters – which, according to Freeman, account for "99 and 99/100ths" of the Society's collection – occupy a wall of cabinets in the offices behind these rooms. The Society has catalogued and described everything it collected in those days, and also collected Sun City-related media clippings from around the nation, dated from 1959 onward. In the 1990s, it began an ambitious oral history project, compiling recorded interviews and transcripts from residents and DEVCO figures who were instrumental in Sun City history.

Freeman, however, points out there is still plenty of work to be done – especially in scanning and creating digital copies of the original materials, very few of which were accompanied by photographic negatives. Also, since the Society was formed, other snapshots and documents have trickled in from residents eager to contribute to the record of Sun City's rich history. All will have to be catalogued and preserved. "That's my next project," Freeman said, "working on those."



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