

Sun City Lifelong Learning presenter discusses ‘A Community that Changed a Nation’

SUN CITY TRIVIA

(1) Who performed to a standing room only crowd of more than 7,500 people at the opening of the Sun Bowl in 1967? (answers to follow)

(2) Who gave Sun City its name?

(3) From 1973 until 1985, Sun City hosted spring training for which baseball team?

(4) Why was there a scrap metal drive in the Bicentennial year 1976?

(5) What was the name of the racing car Del Webb used to promote his Arizona business venture? (Hint: it finished 3rd in the Indianapolis 500)

(6) What were the first hotel-motels in the area?

(7) Who was the comedian playing golf with Del Webb on the North Golf Course in 1963?

(8) What building utilized all the dirt and sand removed to excavate for the installation of the lake?

(9) What Sun City club began as the cheerleading team for the Saints?

(10) Who were the two sitting presidents to visit Sun City?

1. Liberace; 2. Del Webb; 3. Milwaukee Brewers; 4. to cast an exact duplicate of the Liberty Bell (outside the Bell Recreation Center); 5. The Sun City Special; 6. The Hiway House and the King’s Inn; 7. Bob Hope; 8. Boswell Hospital; 9. the Poms; and 10. Ronald Reagan (in 1985) and Bill Clinton (in 1986).

SUBMITTED PHOTO/SUZY HALLOCK-BANNIGAN

Sun Cities Museum Trustee Ben Roloff and 2023 President Bret McKeand at the Fairway Recreation Center Feb. 6 for a Lifelong Learning class about Sun City.

Posted Monday, February 12, 2024 8:23 am

By Suzy Hallock-Bannigan | Sun City Lifelong Learning Club



When Sun City historian Ben Roloff introduced Bret McKeand, the president of the Sun Cities Area Historical Society, he said McKeand had “lived Sun City history,” and that “he has brought us Sun City history for 40 years!” Roloff also explained that McKeand, a veteran news reporter, was once the vice president and editor of Sun City’s Independent newspaper.

About 50 curious Lifelong Learning Club members were invited to remember 1959 when, McKeand reminded, a “young Queen Elizabeth II was on the cover of LOOK Magazine (and did we even remember magazines?), ‘Gunsmoke’ was the most popular

television show, Audrey Hepburn was starring in ‘The Nun’s Story,’ and the national image of elders included ‘Aunt Bee’ and Mr. Wilson—the neighbor of Dennis the Menace.” Though the image may have included a rocking chair and knitting, the little Arizona town of Marinette was about to engage in a transformation that would change the way America would understand growing old.

In 1920, Marinette holdings were sold to the Southwest Cotton Company, part of Goodyear Tire. Tires need a high grade cotton and for a time, Marinette was buzzing as migrant workers frequented both the saloon and (we are told) the brothel. Goodyear invited the Boswell Company to operate a cottonseed mill at Litchfield Park and some years later the land would be sold to the owner of the New York Yankees: Del E. Webb. That, too, was in 1959. Del Webb, was described by McKeand as “the Elon Musk of the last century,” and he wanted to built an active retirement community.

McKeand explained that part of the success of the Del Webb experiment was that it had been noted that previous envisioned communities sold residences first with the promise of amenities to follow; Del Webb, on the other hand, wanted to establish amenities congruent with the residences to assure buyers of a real community. Visual beauty was important too, and palm trees (initially from California) were planted along the streets. The Sun Cities Museum on Oakmont was the first house built (and sold for \$8,500). More than 100,000 people came to see the experiment; cars were backed up on Grand Avenue all the way to Peoria, and Sun City was a success in the realization that people were buying a life style. McKeand showed the learners photographs taken at the time, which included the first five houses, the first post office, the town halls and, in 1965, the construction of the Sun Bowl.

McKeand remembers that when Ronald Reagan was the governor of California, before he was elected president, he visited Sun City for the first time and became an honorary member of the Posse. And when McKeand with his then-small children saw big, black cars heading to Luke Air Force base, he realized Bill Clinton must be in one; when the car slowed down, a window was opened, and President Clinton gave McKeand and his children a thumbs up.

McKeand still gives Sun City the thumbs up for some of the things that have not changed over the years: Sun City is still a welcoming place with friendly people and good weather, where golf is important, where volunteerism is key and where improvement and optimization continues.

The Lifelong Learning Club of Sun City welcomes presenters with special expertise of interest to Sun City learners. Interested individuals are invited to make inquiries of President Michael Powell at powell14@cox.net or email Vice President Mary Jo Tietge at sczlifelong@gmail.com.