

DAILY NEWS-SUN

WEDNESDAY, AUG. 13, 2003

Buyer emerges for plots

Future uncertain for Sun City gardeners

MICHAEL MARESH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

The Sun City Garden Club has to pull up its roots after members were alerted that the owner of the property has a potential buyer.

Garden club President Pete Petersen said members have been informed not to plant for the coming season.

The land the garden club uses is one of three parcels comprising 27 acres that went on the market in June 2002.

Terry Hemeyer, managing director of the Texas-based Service Corporate



PHOTOS BY JOY LAMBERT-SLAGOWSKI/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Pete Petersen, above, president, and other members of the Sun City Garden Club talk this morning about the sale of their garden plots.

From A1

International, confirmed this morning that the company has a prospective buyer and has decided to terminate its agreement with the Recreation Centers of Sun City.

SCI had been leasing 7 acres of the land to the centers for \$1 a year.

Hemeyer said the gardeners will not have to leave their plots for awhile because the sale could take months to complete.

That doesn't appease Ray Hatfield.

"I will not have anything to do. This is something I looked forward to every damn morning."

Nancy Simon, general manager of Sunland Memorial Park, said to her knowledge no one has told garden club members not to plant for the coming season. That call, she said, needs to be made by them.

Simon said the lease agreement was with the recreation centers, not the garden club. She referred other

questions to the recreation centers.

The Sun City Garden Club has 288 members and about 300 plots.

Member Don Harris said the club knew all too well this day would come.

"I do not know what I am going to do," he said. "This is all I do."

And member Jack McCullough said the people who are really going to be hurting are the recipients of the produce.

"That is the important thing to remember," he said.

The club routinely donates food to the Westside Food Bank and was expected to give more than 60,000 pounds of vegetables this year.

Elaine Harding blamed the RCSC and said the garden club was being discriminated against.

"If we can't have our garden club, they should not have their golf courses, adding the club would gladly take a golf course for its new plots.

Herbert Rehbein said the

pending sale is going to hurt a lot of people.

"They are taking a hobby away from us," he said.

The asking price was more than \$2 million for the five-parcel, 27-acre site that is being sold. SCI owns the parcels as well as Sunland Mortuary. The undeveloped land is zoned for residential use.

SCI had told the centers it would not sell the parcels separately.

Petersen said there is nothing the club can do now, but wait for the inevitable.

"We were hoping the rec board would be able to negotiate a fair price, but that group in Houston did not want to sell the (one) parcel," he said.

Petersen said club members will meet in the second week of September to discuss their future.

Calls to members of the RCSC board of directors were not returned as of press time.

Michael Maresch can be reached at 876-2513 or mmaresh@aztrib.com.

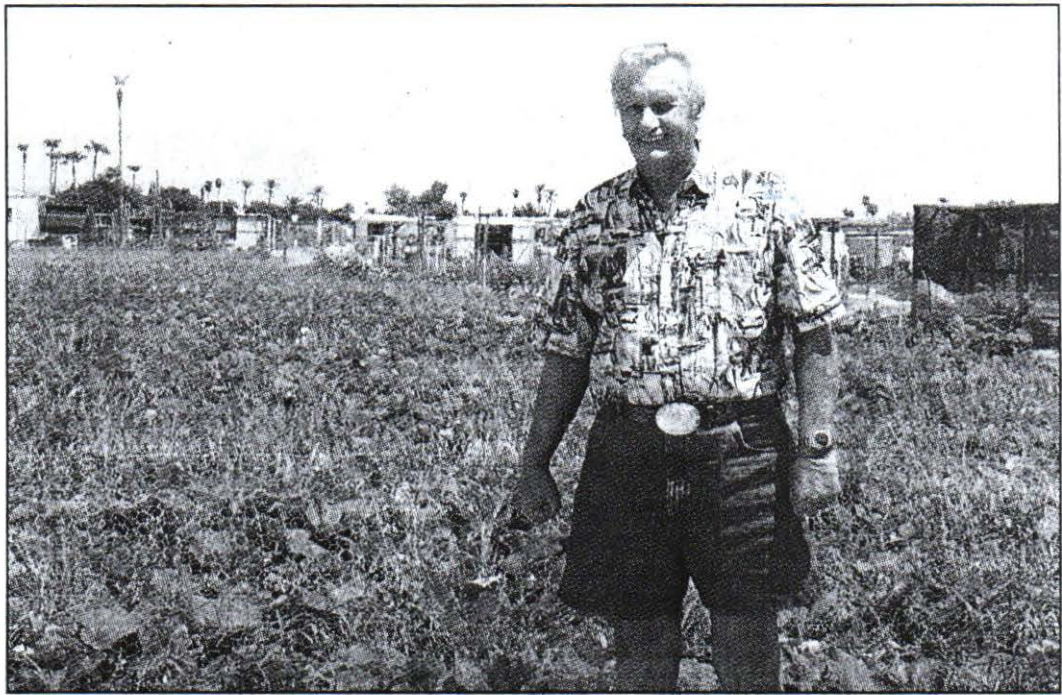


Photo by Lindsey Remington/Independent Newspapers

Pete Peterson, president of the Sun City Garden Club, stands in front of a field of butternut squash at the club's garden behind Sunland Mortuary in Sun City. The vegetables grown on the plot of land where Mr. Peterson stands are donated to the Westside Food Bank.

UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Garden may be uprooted

By Lindsey Remington
Independent Newspapers

Instead of asking "How does your garden grow?", the question facing the Sun City Garden Club is, "Where will your garden grow?"

The club could be without gardens to grow its vegetables if the parcel where its gardens currently are located is sold.

The garden club has been planting and harvesting vegetables at 10916 Sunland Drive, on land behind Sunland Mortuary and Cremation Center in Sun City, since 1974, said club President Pete Peterson.

The Recreation Centers of Sun City has been leasing about 10 acres of the 27-acre parcel of land owned by Sunland on a month-to-month basis for use by the club. The RCSC splits the cost of water with the club.

However, Sunland has put the land up for sale.

"It was excess land that

the company is not using," said Nancy Simon, general manager of Sunland. "The company wanted to sell it off, rather than have it sit undeveloped."

Fortunately for the club, the property has been up for sale for a year and has yet to be purchased. The property is listed at \$2.2 million, Mr. Peterson said.

Now the 288-member club is hoping that the Recreation Centers of Sun City will step in and purchase the land.

"It's our goal down the line," Mr. Peterson said. "We don't expect the recreation centers to pay that kind of money for it."

RCSC secretary Jim Kuchler said the price of the land, which he estimated at between \$1 million and \$2 million, is more than the RCSC can afford. Plus, the club is using only about a third of the property, he noted, and Sunland isn't interested in selling piece-

meal.

"In the discussions I've heard, the price of the land is far more than we can afford," Mr. Kuchler said.

He said Sunland has promised to give 60 to 90 days notice before the club would have to move off the land.

Mr. Peterson said the club doesn't have any ideas about where else the club could be located and what it will do if the land is purchased by someone other than the RCSC.

"There is no other land of this size available in Sun City," he said.

The land is used for members' individual gardens and also for gardens designated for the Westside Food Bank. The club donates vegetables such as bok choy; cabbage; cauliflower; turnips; daikon radish; romaine, leaf and head lettuce; snow peas;

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Garden

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Vidalia onions; broccoli; zucchini; butternut squash; and tomatoes.

So far this year, the club has donated 49,824 pounds of produce to the Olive Branch Senior Center and the Westside Food Bank.

The club also holds a citrus drive each year, collecting oranges, lemons and grapefruits.

Club members also donate fruits and vegetables from their own gardens, both at Sunland and at home.

"It's a good past time," Mr. Peterson said of why people are gardeners. "Gardeners have lots of friends because

they are always giving them fresh food."

Membership is \$5 a year, plus \$18 for a plot of land, which is refundable, \$16 per year for water and \$10 for miscellaneous items.

Members can have as many as five plots.

For more information on the Sun City Garden Club, call 977-4178.



Submitted photo

Yvonne Buckley tends to plants in some of the in-ground beds at the Sun City Garden Club's center. In addition to individual garden plots, the center has a community garden where produce is grown for the community.

Farmers in the Del

Sun City community garden reaps 1st year harvest

By Rusty Bradshaw
Independent Newspapers

Sun City gardeners are seeing the fruit of their labor over the past months. Harvesting of the first crop in the community garden that began to take shape earlier this year. In the spring, gardeners planted a variety of vegetables,

and put in more plantings in the summer and fall.

"It's shaping up to be a beautiful fall harvest," said Larry Bilderback, club president, prior to Thanksgiving.

The Sun City community garden got renewed life more than one year ago when EPCOR Water Co. officials approved in July 2013 a use agreement with the club for about one acre of land at the company's Water Plant 6 near Greenway Road and 91st Avenue. The agreement brought back a long-standing tradition that had been

dormant for a number of years.

The use agreement has a 25-year span and the club paid EPCOR \$10 for the entirety of that span for the use, according to Mr. Bilderback.

For more than 40 years, beginning in the early 1960s, Sun City sponsored a thriving community garden. Members of the original Agricultural Club and later the Garden Club of Sun City tended multiple acres initially at a location near

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Garden

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today's King's Center at Grand and 107th avenues, then a plot behind Sunland Mortuary. But in 2003, with mounting real estate development pressures, Sun City lost its gardening plot and thus began a quest to find available land suitable for re-establishing a community garden.

For the new location, the garden club drew on past experience and the successes of other area community gardeners to develop detailed plans, according to Mr. Bilderback. After getting soil tests, ground was broken in October 2013.

"Then the serious work began to lay-in the infrastructure to support over 30 in-ground gardens, some 32 raised bed gardens and the needed common areas," Mr. Bilderback said.

Members installed more than 2,800 feet of irrigation system; placed, filled and planted an initial 14 raised beds; prepped and planted nine in-ground gardens, several with full enclosures; and laid-out, prepped and planted a portion of a 3,600-square-foot volunteer garden dedicated to growing produce for the community.

"We had a lot of construction to do, we built it from the ground up," said Judy Smith, who spearheaded the project. "It was like herding cats. There was a lot of

work and only a few people to do it."

Some club members could not do the physical work required, she added.

Volunteers hauled-in, spread and tilled 42 yards of manure/mulch and top soil and screened gravel from the native soil, according to Mr. Bilderback.

Despite the challenges, including irrigation leaks and wildlife, gardeners found spring success with lettuce, radishes and carrots early on, and squash, melons, cucumbers, onions, beans, okra and tomatoes in the summer.

"Now gardeners are focused on their fall gardens of corn, lettuce, kale, broccoli, cabbage, radishes, carrots, onions, tomatoes and squash," Mr. Bilderback explained. "And the common, volunteer garden is planted with acorn squash, garlic, onion and radishes."

Ms. Smith said few club members have a farming background and much of the direction for the center is based on trial and error.

"We experimented with composting and that didn't work, so we went to a chipper and that seems to be working out," she said.

The Arizona Master Gardeners provided classes and other assistance, according to Mr. Bilderback. Ms. Smith said gardeners also researched their topics of interest on the Internet.

Garden club volunteers finished laying

the last row of irrigation pipe last month.

"It has been a long trip, but it has been transformed," Ms. Smith said. "And it has been worth it."

The volunteer common garden was a challenge until Landon Grote stepped up to oversee that section of the community garden, Ms. Smith said.

Garden club members are looking forward to their second planting in March, according to Mr. Bilderback. There is also room for more residents to get involved, he added.

"All but one of the raised beds is spoken for, but there are about half the in-ground beds available," he said. "We also have room to expand, but there is no demand yet."

Club member Yvonne Buckley was the group's spearhead in finding a new site. She said Jan Ek, Recreation Centers of Sun City general manager, was a supportive ally in the effort.

"She was the one who originally talked to Shawn Bradford (EPCOR Water director)," she said.

Benevilla in Surprise, which opened a community garden last year, and Banner Olive Branch Senior Center were also supportive of Garden Club efforts to re-establish a community garden.

"We learned a lot from them," Ms. Buckley said.

The club could see other gardens

established if the initial effort at Water 6 is successful.

"If we can show we are good stewards and the interest is there, they (EPCOR officials) talked about providing land for their other facilities," Ms. Buckley said.

The EPCOR site is about one-tenth the size of the community garden which was located on the property near Sunland. When that site was in operation, the Garden Club's membership was above 300. In the decade since membership has been steady at just more than 100, according to Mr. Bilderback.

Ms. Buckley believes the sustained interest without a garden, and renewed interest when it returns, is because of the sense of community gardening provided.

Mr. Bilderback said the new garden would not have been possible without the club's business partnerships. In addition to EPCOR, the club's partners include RCSC, Handley Precast Systems, True Hardware, Sunland Plumbing and Sunland Winds Nursery.

"They are all contributing to make Sun City a better place to live," Mr. Bilderback said.

Call 623-875-5921, the garden club office, or email gardenclubofsun@gmail.com to get involved.

News Editor Rusty Bradshaw can be reached at 623-445-2725 or rbradshaw@newsz.com



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Gardeners Don't Just Sit Around And Watch Their Crops Grow!

by Dick Kemp

*Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home,
Your house is on fire, and your children will burn.*

Like many Mother Goose nursery rhymes, this one contains a truism.

Ladybugs bought in Tucson by the Sun City Agriculture Club to control pesky insects fly south once they clean a plot, or adjoining plots.

That doesn't mean that organic gardening, practiced by more than half the club's 200 members, isn't alive and well. On the club's 10-acre site the USDA is experimenting with tiny wasps that attack whiteflies.

"We've got great hopes," says Jim Little, club president. "Unlike ladybugs, once they clean a garden these wasps find the next closest plot and go to work.

"Gardening without pesticides or manufactured



GARDENING NEIGHBORS – Lloyd Murphy, left, co-founder of the Sun City West Agriculture Club, admires the productive plot of Don and Louisa Leask, which is near his own garden.

fertilizers produces better vegetables," says Jim, who was an organic garden pioneer in Tennessee in the late 1970s.

Club is progressive

Progressive is a word that describes Ag Club members. So are self-sufficient, fun-loving – and charitable.

On 10 of its plots the club raises vegetables for the Westside Food Bank and Olive Branch Senior Center, producing 12,000 pounds in 1997.

Is there hope for a desert greenhorn, or even someone who gardened "back home" where dirt was deep, rich and black, and rainfall was 25-30 inches a year?

Yes, because gardens are still available (those with multiple plots surrender them when needed) and all necessary water, fertilizers, mulches and seeds are on site. And, because advice from fellow gardeners is dispensed freely.

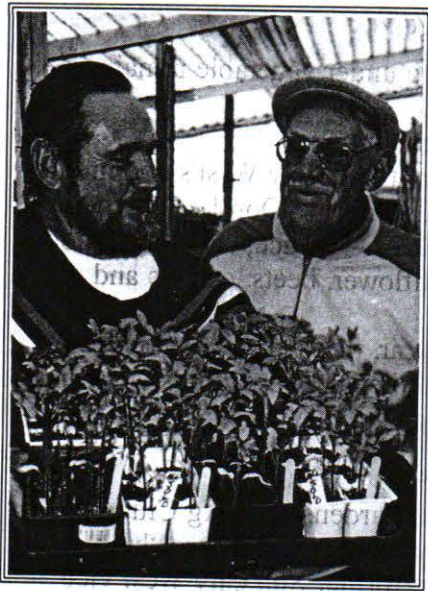
The Sun City Ag Club doesn't miss much.

One member keeps bees which pollinate all plots. Honey from his three hives is sold in the club store.

About 3,000 tomato, pepper and other plants are grown from seed in an on-site hothouse.

Many members surround their 20- x 40-foot plot with frames and wire mesh. This not only keeps out birds and even peskier rabbits, but can support

OVER



**ADMIRING
THRIVING
PLANTS in the
Sun City Ag
Club's hothouse
are club
President Jim
Little, right, and
Bob Faron, hot-
house manager.**

screening that protects from sun.

Eye-popping variety

The store sells an eye-popping variety of seeds, about 80 in all. These include a wide selection of Valley standards and hybrids, and such intriguing exotics as anis, dandelion and Indian beans.

Also available are compost, manure, mulch, and a variety of necessary elements (such as sulfur), as well as some manufactured fertilizer.

All seeds and supplies, including screening materials, are sold at a very low profit margin.

The club owns a small tractor used in a variety of ways. Members can have their garden plowed for \$20.

"However, we have people in their 90s who insist on spading their plot," says Jim. "Gardening is so therapeutic."

The Sun City club, through donations and memorials, has added to its store an enclosed patio, refrigerator and grill for club socials.

Dues are only \$5 per family and \$12 a year for water.

Club is not alone

The Sun City Ag Club is not alone in its love for the soil.

A "sister" club in Sun City West, with about 160 members, still has available plots. It too grows vegetables for charities, and assesses the same dues plus \$15 a year for water.

Members are welcome to Sun City's store to take advantage of its seed and fertilizer buying power.

Arvid Kinnee, club president, says that among members practicing organic gardening, cold

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composting (spading under vegetable remains) is popular.

What do members grow?

In early February at Sun City West's community garden, I watched Louisa and Don Leask tend and harvest nine vegetables – lettuce, cabbage, onions, peas, broccoli, cauliflower, beets, carrots and turnips.

Throughout the year, they grow 20 varieties of vegetables. "One of the very few things you can't grow here is rhubarb," says Don.

Other groups garden

Not everyone that gardens is an Ag Club member. And many Ag Club members "branch out." Marjorie Holt, former Sun City West vice president, and now "plot manager," is a Master Gardener and also belongs to the community's Garden Club.

Marvene Walker, Garden Club president and also a Master Gardener, says her club's nearly 150 members are into all types of landscaping and gardening, mostly at their homes.

The club owns a small greenhouse, conducts field trips and holds mostly educational meetings nine times a year. Since about 30 members are Master Gardeners, the club also conducts seminar for the public.

The Sun City Rose and Garden Club has about 200 members who meet eight times a year, says club President Donald Elliot.

Meetings often include guest speakers, and are always preceded by a "social hour." Members are invited to bring in a flower or even vegetable for display and discussion.

For more information call: Sun City Ag Club – 933-2832; Sun City West Ag Club – 214-0931; Sun City West Garden Club – 546-1023 and Sun City Rose & Garden Club – 974-3101.

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May 23, 2001

NO MORE TEARS

Sun Citian grows award-winning onions

By **JEREMY PEARLMAN**
Independent Newspapers

Marino Bruno has thick muscular hands, a set that seems to have survived the deterioration years can take on an individual as they age.

If it is true that a person's hands reveal a great deal about them, then Mr. Bruno's pair tell the story of an active life. A life in which his hands were depended on immensely.

Prior to his retiring to Sun City, Mr. Bruno worked in a variety of jobs in New York. During the Roaring '20s he was a cement mason, a job he held for eight years. In 1928 he was convinced by a friend to become part owner of a garage.

The business was sold for a loss 15 months later when the Great Depression engulfed the country.

In the 1930s he was in the ice business. After working in ice, he worked in produce in which he also did some importing of vegetables. After a hernia, Mr. Bruno stopped working in produce and eventually ran two businesses before his retirement.

Since the first term of the Nixon administration, Mr. Bruno has spent time in the Sun City Agricultural Club's gardens, growing and harvesting vegetables.

"I have vegetable juice in my veins," he said.

Although he retired to Sun City in 1972, he has kept his hands very busy.

"I belong to eight or nine different clubs. This is the club I enjoy the most," he said referring to the Sun City Agricultural Club, the first club Mr. Bruno joined when moving to the community.

On the warm morning of May 16, his hands were active while walking through the club's gardens.

While going the small distance back and forth between his three 20-by-20 plots beside his son Joseph, the elder Mr. Bruno stopped several times to wave or exchange pleasantries with people nearby. Those passing in cars or golf cars slowed



Photo by JEREMY PEARLMAN/Independent Newspapers

Marino Bruno displays several sweet onions that he picked from one of his plots at the Sun City Agriculture Club gardens.

to offer and receive a wave.

Shaded by a hat and a pair of sunglasses that show the imprints of his fingers, Mr. Bruno used his hands to pick a specialty from his garden that day. He picked some sweet onions, or as he calls them, "Bruno's Italian Sweets."

"Some onions make you cry, mine make you smile," he said about the red sweet onions he grows.

Typically sweet onions are not red. Mr. Bruno imports the seeds

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(over)

from Italy which create a different colored sweet onion than traditionally grown in Arizona. And they are sweet, something that he is not bashful of admitting.

"They are the sweetest onions in existence."

Bruno's Italian Sweets have been part of the Grand Canyon Sweet Onion Festival since its inception 13 years ago, according to Sam Kelsall, coordinator of the festival.

"He has won the largest onion sometimes and usually he sells all of his onions at the festival," Mr. Kelsall said.

According to Mr. Bruno's son, his father sold 500 pounds of his onions two years ago at the festival. That production was not equaled for this year's festival, which took place May 19-20.

Mr. Bruno gave up two of his plots last year at the gardens and failing health has inhibited him from spending as much time working on the onions as he is accustomed to.

Although his hands remain strong, the 98-year-old believes this will be his last year personally producing his sweet onions with them.

"I hope someone will pick up where I leave off," Mr. Bruno said.

Mr. Bruno plans to consult in the production of his brand of sweet onions in the future.

Daily News-Sun, Sun City, Ariz. Monday, August 26, 2002

An edition of the **East Valley Tribune** 50¢

Garden Club set to grow roots

MICHAEL MARESH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Members of the Sun City Garden Club are preparing to start planting next week, even though they may never be able to harvest the crops.

Greg Bolton, spokesman for Houston-based Service Corporation International, owner of the land where the club now operates, said the gardeners can use the land on a month-by-month basis for \$1 a year until the corporation sells the property.

"We are renewing the lease every 30 days," Bolton said. "There is nothing else we can do at this point."

Once the land is sold, the gardeners will be asked to leave. The Recreation Centers of Sun City has been leasing the 11-acre parcel where the Garden Club operates from SCI for \$1 a year.

SCI, which also owns nearby Sunland Mortuary, wants to sell a 27-acre site that includes the club's plots and two other parcels for \$2.275 million. The undeveloped land is zoned for residential use.

Pete Petersen, a member of the Sun City Garden Club, said members have three plans they will put into action to ensure they can remain at the location. He declined to give details. He said that in a normal season, crops usually take three to four months to be ready for harvest, and he realizes if the land is sold in the near future, members' hard work will be for naught.

"Most people are still going to plant anyway," he said. "I don't think they will be able to sell it at the price they are asking."

Petersen said gardeners are buying seeds and planting materials, thinking the sale is a long way off.

"Most of the members know we are not going to roll over," he said. "We can't run on a month-to-month basis. It's not fair."

Petersen said members are not mad at the RCSC, because it is doing all it can to help, to no avail.

"We just want to keep our garden," he said. "We are going to plant and hope for the best."

Michael Maresh can be reached at 876-2513 or mmaresh@aztrib.com.

DAILY NEWS-SUN THURSDAY, AUG. 8, 2002

Gardeners seek land purchase

MONTHLY LEASE:
Club members cool on owner's offer

MICHAEL MARESH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

The Sun City Garden Club may be getting a short reprieve, but one club official said it's hardly a satisfactory solution.

Greg Bolton, spokesman for Houston-based Service Corporate International, owner of the land where the club operates, said an agreement has been reached with the Recreation Centers of Sun City to lease the land to the centers on a month-by-month basis.

But RCSC governing board President Jerry Swintek said no agreement is in place — yet.

"They are suppose to be sending us some paperwork, and we will decide if it is agreeable," Swintek said. "We are still working on it as we have told the members of the garden club.

Swintek said several solutions are being discussed with SCI, including the month-by-month lease.

"If that is the only thing that is available, it sure beats the heck out of nothing," he said.

But Pete Petersen, secretary of the club, said members have to plan ahead when planting crops, so more than a month's notice is needed.

"We can't do that," he said. "It takes three to four months to produce a crop. We won't be able to order new materials, because we buy by the truckload."

SCI, which also owns nearby Sunland Mortuary, wants to sell a 27-acre site that includes the club's plots and two other parcels for \$2.275 million. The undeveloped land is zoned for residential use.

The Recreation Centers of Sun City has been leasing the 7-acre parcel where the Garden Club operates from SCI for \$1 a year.

Petersen said the club would suffer severe effects because members would wonder if the land was about to be sold.

The club is standing firm, with many members believing the centers should purchase its 7-acre parcel, which would cost about \$80,000 an acre for a total of \$560,000.

"What we figure is, if the centers were to just buy our 7 acres, they'd not have to come up with no \$2.3 million," Petersen said.

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC THURSDAY, JULY 18, 2002



Jack Kurtz/The Arizona Republic

Tom Sullivan loads butternut squash harvested from the Sun City Garden Club's plots into the back of a pickup truck Wednesday for delivery to the Westside Food Bank.

Sun City gardens threatened

By Sean L. McCarthy
The Arizona Republic

SUN CITY — Just west of Sunland Memorial Park, Mortuary & Cremation Center, Sun City's seniors are saving lives with their green thumbs.

The Sun City Garden Club has been working seven acres of land since 1974, growing and harvesting crops on 315 plots, and donating most of the results to the Westside Food Bank and Olive Branch Senior Center.

The club's 288 members, however, might need to find new space. The lease on the land runs out Sept. 30. And a "For Sale" sign sits on the parcel that has produced more than 24,000 pounds of fresh donations this year.

"My opinion of the garden club is extremely high," said

Dave Seigler, Westside Food Bank's community relations director. "It's just a fantastic way for a generation of people who hold community service in high esteem to really create their own vehicle of giving."

The club's donations might not represent a large percentage of the food bank's annual intake of 3 million pounds. "But it's significant because so much of what we get is non-perishable food," Seigler said. "That nutritional supplement can be life-saving."

Pete Petersen, the club's food bank coordinator, said the club already has asked the Recreation Centers of Sun City Board of Directors to see if it can buy the garden club's acreage, or negotiate a new lease.

Over the years, club mem-

bers have installed irrigation lines and built structures at the site.

The club hasn't heard anything yet from the board.

Petersen and other club members worry that if they don't drum up enough community support, they'll lose not only their farmland, but also their investment and their ability to help the community's hungry.

Petersen said the asking price for the entire 27.5 acres, owned by SCI Arizona Funeral Services Inc., which also owns the cemetery, is \$2.3 million.

Petersen said he hopes SCI is willing to negotiate with the garden club to allow them to keep harvesting crops.

"I don't think it'd pay them to get Sun City residents too upset. We're their prospects," he said.

FALLOW GARDEN?

Sun City Garden Club fights for life

By Jeremy Pearlman
Independent Newspapers

Judy Achterhof has a passion for gardening.

Reluctant to leave the greenery of Seattle for retirement in the desert, she was willing to move only after visiting the Sun City Garden Club's plots of land located on 10 acres of leased property just west of Sunland Memorial Park Mortuary & Cremation Center.

Taking a liking to gardening during her early adulthood, she has felt compelled ever since to take care of some form of vegetation no matter where she has resided.

To Mrs. Achterhof, the process of a seed becoming a plant, fruit or vegetable is an awe-inspiring miracle of Mother Nature.

"It's just amazing that this wonderful stuff can come from a little seed. It blows my mind," Mrs. Achterhof said.

Like several hundred other Sun Citians, Mrs. Achterhof takes care of a 20-by-40 foot garden plot of land to grow an array of produce throughout the year.

She also serves on the club's board as director of membership, a position in which she is responsible for administering approximately 290 individual plots to members who use the parcel of land to create the garden of their dreams.

Those who choose to tend to a garden are a special lot, Mrs. Achterhof believes.

"I don't know what it is about gardening," she said. "It's in your blood. Either you love it or hate it. It's kind of like beer."

For the Sun Citians who do love it, the land used by the Garden Club for the last 28 years has been a place for their passion to literally come alive.

But that place does not belong to the club nor to the Recreation Centers of Sun City, which holds a \$1 a year

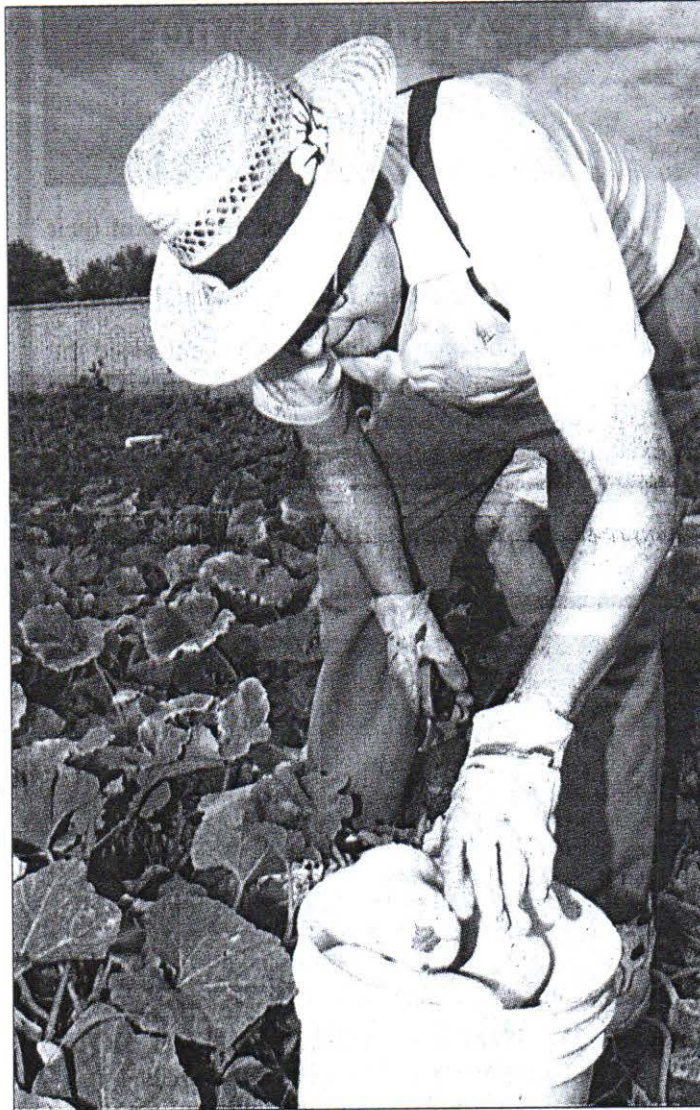


Photo by Jeremy Pearlman/Independent Newspapers
Ewald Koenig helps harvest butternut squash at one of the Sun City Garden Club plots as part of a donation to Westside Food Bank. The land leased for the club was recently put up for sale, threatening the club's future.

lease on the property, which expires in September.

The property belongs to Sunland and it recently put that land and an additional 17.54 acres up for sale.

Not certain of what will happen, members of the Garden Club are concerned that the long-standing group may soon be no more.

"I would presume that all of us would have no place to go

and give up gardening," said Pete Petersen, a member of the club's board and coordinator of its food bank program.

Feeling that the club would cease operations if it loses its current home, Mr. Petersen hopes that either the Rec Centers or a new property will come in and save the day.

"We've earned our right to exist," Mr. Petersen argued, pointing to the club's charitable donations, length of operation and amount of infrastructure the group has put in to the property.

Throughout the group's history, it has donated thousands of pounds of produce to the Westside Food Bank and the Olive Branch Senior Center.

This year alone, it has given nearly 20,000 pounds of produce to the food bank.

"I don't know of any club in Sun City that donates as much to the community," Mr. Petersen said. "The only one I think that matches up is the PRIDES."

The Rec Centers are taking every step it can to keep the Garden Club in its current location, according to Jerry Swintek, Rec Centers Governing Board president.

The Rec Centers holds the lease on the property. It also helps with water costs.

"The board is doing everything it can to find a way to keep the Garden Club in Sun City," Mr. Swintek said. "At this point, we don't have an answer but we are making every effort we can."

Mr. Swintek believes that even in the worst-case scenario, Sunland does find a buyer for the property, it would be some time before the Garden Club would have to vacate.

"They have told us they are not going to throw (the Garden Club) out at the end of the lease," Mr. Swintek said. "It could be four to 10 years for the property to be sold."

The Garden Club is trying to press the Rec Centers to purchase the land for them.

Mr. Swintek was unwilling to tip his hand over what angle the Rec Centers might take in regards to keeping the Garden Club's current location.

"I can assure everybody that we are doing everything in our power to come up with some way to keep the Garden Club right where it is," Mr. Swintek said.

Repeated messages left with Sunland Memorial Park Mortuary & Cremation Center concerning this story were unanswered.

According to Mr. Swintek, the international company which owns Sunland has ordered all of its subsidiaries to sell off any property that is not targeted to be used within the next 15 years.

Club may harvest help

SUN CITY: Rec Centers ponder options to assure gardeners space

MICHAEL MARESH AND JOHN SOKOLICH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Options for the Sun City Garden Club are wilting like a tomato plant in the Valley's June heat, but the Recreation Centers of Sun City are hoping to provide relief.

The garden club is one of three parcels comprising 27 acres that went on the market last week, said Terry Hemeyer, managing director of the Texas-based Service Corporate International. Along with the three parcels, which are zoned for residential use, SCI owns the nearby Sunland Mortuary.

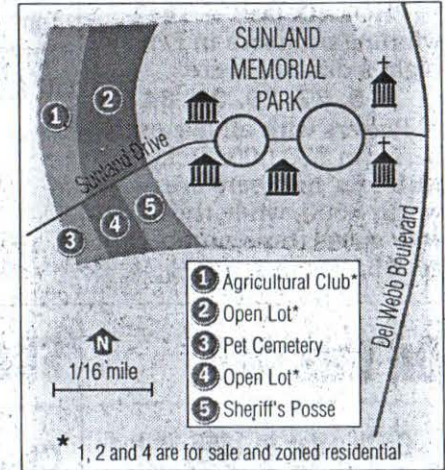
Relocating the garden club, which SCI has been leasing to the centers for \$1 a

year, is one option, but a more feasible one might involve selling the land to the recreation centers.

"What we are doing is working very, very closely with the company wanting to sell the property," said RCSC President Jerry Swintek. "We think that there are some options and time to work everything out in one way or another."

The property is zoned to allow one home per acre, something Swintek said would not be attractive to potential developers.

"It's a long process to get land re-zoned, and a company that buys the land might find it better if they sold the land to us at a reasonable rate rather than going through the headaches of re-zoning," Swintek said. "All of this is a long way down



the road before the club would be put out, so we aren't exploring other options. We are exploring one to possibly purchase the land in the future because we feel that one will work."

Swintek said the centers cannot afford the \$2.3 million price for the parcels, which are being sold together.

See Club will stay, A5



STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Two Sun City Garden Club members harvest tomatoes Wednesday morning.

OVER

From A1

"That is beyond what we can do for the return we would get," he said.

Swintek said the lease expires at the end of September, but club members would not be asked to leave until a sale is completed.

"They are not going to throw us out before the property is sold," he said.

Swintek said relocating the club is not possible because it would require 10 acres of RCSC land, which isn't available.

"What would we say?" he asked. "Here is your land, but only three of you can plant here?"

Westside Food Bank, which gets donations from the garden club, does not have any land available for members to use either, but said it would like to see the club survive.

"There is no doubt that we will miss their products," said Pat Fehlhaber of Westside. "But we rely on donations and don't have any land available for people to grow produce. We would like to be an option for the garden club, but unfortunately we can't be

an option."

One of the three parcels for sale is between the Sun City Sheriff's Posse headquarters and the Sun City Pet Cemetery, while the other two — the 7-acre garden club and the parcel to its immediate west — are across the street.

Club members admit there is little land available in the Sun Cities, and even if there was another location for the gardens, they said it would be too expensive to set up water lines like those at their current home.

Club member Sid Hall said he believes RCSC has a responsibility to step in and take care of the problem.

"This is our club. This is our thing," he said. "It is part of the rec center's function. It's for the people who have nothing else."

The importance of keeping the garden club involves more than just growing produce, a local psychologist said.

Sun Health psychologist Michael Cofield said seniors need hobbies so they can continue to feel they have a purpose in life. Most garden club members who spoke to the Daily News-Sun said the club was their main — and in

some cases, only — hobby.

"I think we would all just die," said club member Don Harris. "We have got guys over 80 and 90 where doctors are telling them to not give up their gardens."

The club's average age is about 75, Harris said.

Cofield said the mind needs to remain busy — especially for seniors — and hobbies and activities are great ways to do this.

"It is so important to identify things to work their minds," he said. "People need a vital interest, and as long as they focus on that and not their frailty, it helps them."

Cofield said seniors who do not have an outside interest generally tend to focus on more depressing aspects of their lives such as failing health, which will negatively impact their lives.

Club member Pete Petersen said members believe their gardening hobby will probably be disappearing because there seem to be no other lots available in Sun City.

Hemeyer said he has been told discussions were going to take place with the club, and SCI officials are researching and looking at maps for

options.

Club members, though, said they know nothing about any such meeting.

Larry Baldocchi, a garden club member for eight years, said he is hoping the new owners lease the land back to the recreation centers.

However, Baldocchi said he believes that is doubtful. "With me it is a hobby and something to do," he said. "It is a way to get some exercise."

Tom Parsons, another member, said he is still hopeful something can be worked out to save the club. "They could give us this and never miss it," he said of the Texas corporation. "Senior citizens will suffer.

"It's a shame," Parsons continued. "I am going to miss it."

Parsons said he is willing to pay a little more in RCSC fees if it results in the garden remaining open.

Bob Davis, past treasurer and 25-year member of the club, said because of his age, he will not go to another location if the club moves. "I am getting too old to do this kind of work," he said. "It is the younger members who will feel the pinch."

Daily News-Sun • Thursday, June 13, 2002

Sale of plot would uproot gardeners

\$2 MILLION PRICE TAG: Land behind mortuary zoned for residential use

MICHAEL MARESH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Residential development could be coming to the Sun City Garden Club's leased plot behind Sunland Memorial Park Mortuary and Cremation Center.

Asking price is more than \$2 million for the five-parcel, 27-acre site that went on the market last week, said Terry Hemeyer, vice president of Dallas-based Service Corporate International. SCI owns the parcels as well as Sunland Mortuary. The undeveloped land is zoned for residential use.

The Recreation Centers of Sun City has been leasing the land from SCI for \$1 a year for the Garden Club's use. The garden center sits on one of the lots totaling about 7 acres.

'Some are Snowbirds, and some are going to come back to find out they do not have a garden.'

— Pete Petersen, Sun City Garden Club foodbank coordinator

To become a Garden Club member, residents must pay an \$18 escrow fee as well as \$10 for miscellaneous items, \$16 for water and \$5 for membership fees in the first year.

Subsequent year fees are \$16 for water and \$5 for memberships.

Pete Petersen, the club member who coordinates fruit and vegetable donations to Westside Food Bank, said the club's lease expires in September. Nearly 100 winter visitors could be returning to Sun City in October without realizing they will no longer have a garden to cultivate, he said.

"We are hopeful the rec centers will come through," he said, adding the high price makes it unlikely. "Some are Snowbirds, and some are going to come back to find out they do not have a garden."

Petersen said the garden club has just purchased \$10,000 worth of material, mostly soil, for the planting season starting in September. Members may lose that investment if they cannot liquidate the material, he said.

Not knowing the site was going up for sale, the garden club also just spent \$1,500 for a heat pump for its greenhouse.

Petersen said the for-sale sign — while unexpected — was not a complete surprise. Knowing their lease was

scheduled to expire in September, club members approached the recreation centers about renegotiating their agreement.

"We knew it was a possibility," he said. "We thought (the RCSC board) must be taking care of it."

While some members have discussed alternative locations for the club, Petersen said he thinks it should dissolve if RCSC cannot work something out at the current location. He said tearing down and then replacing the donated built-in structures would be a chore.

"We would like to know whether we go or not because everything will have to come down," he said.

The Sun City Garden Club donates 19,000 pounds of vegetables and fruit to the Westside Food Bank and the Olive Branch Senior Center annually. Petersen said if the same food was purchased in a store, the cost would be between \$30,000 and \$40,000.

"We are in a bad way," he said. "We were hoping for our lease to be approved."

Michael Maresch can be reached at 876-2513 or mmaresch@aztrib.com.

Final harvest?

GARDEN CLUB: Land owner looks for buyer

MICHAEL MARESH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

The Sun City Garden Club's annual charitable contribution of tons of produce could wither if the property owner sells the land they cultivate.

The loss of the the vegetables and fruit could have serious ramifications for the Westside Food Bank, said Dave Seigler, director of community relations and development for the food bank.

Larry Long, kitchen manager at the Olive Branch Senior Center, said during peak times, about 300 pounds of vegetables are given to the center every month.

"It definitely will have a huge impact on us," he said. "I do well by them."

The Garden Club land behind the Sunland Memorial Park Cemetery is owned by Dallas-based Service Corporate International, which also owns Sunland Mortuary.

Terry Hemeyer of Cushman and Wakefield, which represents Service Corporate International in the sale, confirmed the property is on the market.

Hemeyer said the club location is part of three parcels that make up 27 acres that his firm is trying to sell for its client.

"We feel this is an excess," he said. "We will be contacting the group to see what we can do." Hemeyer said he is not sure if they will be able to find the club an alternative location.

Sun Citian Bill Tijmann owns one of the 280 lots on the 10-acre property where residents grow carrots, beets and tomatoes along with many other vegetables.

Tijmann, who has been gardening for several years, said it has turned into one of his pastimes.

"It's more or less a hobby for me," he said. "I like to putter around a bit."

Members of the club said they were not notified of the impending sale, and on Thursday a for sale sign went up at the property.

Tijmann said what is upsetting is the

members of the club were never notified of the impending sale - even after the for sale sign was posted.

"We do not know how long they will give us," he said. We have no idea of what the story is. Everyone is kind of shocked. What can you do about it?"

Tijmann said more than 2,000 pounds of vegetables are donated to the Westside Food Bank and the Olive Branch Senior Center on annual basis from the club.

Seigler said if the club were to close it could have a dramatic impact.

"It is not going to be the end of the world for us," he said. "In the long-term it will have some serious impacts."

Seigler said the vegetables and fruits that are donated to them from the club are used for its emergency-food boxes. He said the loss of nutrition would be the big detriment.

"It is going to be a loss of resource to us," he said.

Olive Branch Senior Center Manager Ivy Wixson said if the closing happens, the center

will also be hurt.

"Of course if they are no longer to operate it, it will affect us," she said. "We might have to produce the items."

Tijmann said there are some possibilities that have yet to be discussed on where the club could be located in the future.

"How valuable is this location to a developer, he said, adding the nearby cemetery could turn people away.

Tijmann said the person who buys the property could work with the current occupants.

"Whoever buys it might be willing to negotiate with us for a while," Tijmann said, adding that in February he paid \$500 for his lot.

Tijmann, who recently set up a sprinkler system for his gardening lot, said the garden club may be forced to move out of the Sun Cities.

"We know if we can get some farmer to lease another place at a reasonable price we may have to go way out of

town," he said.

Sun City Garden Club President Sam Giordano referred all calls to Recreation Centers of Sun City President Jerry Swintek.

Swintek said the parent company of Sunland Mortuary has been leasing the garden club land to the RCSC, and he said the goal is to work something out with the landowner.

"At this point there is no open land in Sun City," he said. "They have 10 acres there. We are making every effort to negotiate with the land owner."

"We are not looking for a different place," Swintek continued. "We are not throwing up our hands and saying it is done and over with."

Garden Club member Dick Ohnstad said he thinks it would be a mistake if the rec centers did not purchase the land as well as the adjoining lots that are for sale.

Michael Maresch can be reached at 876-2513 or mmaresch@aztrib.com.

OVER



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Bill Tijmann says he bought his plot at the Sun City Garden Club for a few hundred dollars.



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Bob Farron removes some of his property from the former Sun City Garden Club site. A few days remain for members to remove what they want to keep before bulldozers arrive. Someone has been stealing members property from the site, under lock and key until the demolition.

Adding insult to injury

Garden Club members' property disappears while under lock and key

MITCHELL VANTREASE
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Marilyn Olberding fought back tears Friday as she looked at the ruins of what was once her garden.

The Sun Citian and her husband had put a lot of time and effort into their small plot, but now all of their hard work and dedication is gone forever, along with the rest of the plots used by the Sun City Garden Club.

Olberding returned after spending the summer out of town to find nothing left in her garden plot, including a large shed and various pieces

of equipment. She filed a report with the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office on Friday morning after discovering that most of her things disappeared over the last two months.

"I'm appalled at what just happened here," she said. "I would've donated this to just about anybody, but someone had to steal it!"

Olberding said she found out the equipment on her plot had been absconded with a day before the Sun City Garden Club needed to

See GARDEN CLUB, A5

From A1

vacate the premises.

Use of the leased acreage behind Sunland Memorial Park Mortuary and Cremation Center by the club came to an end this month. Infrastructure and other equipment had to be cleared by Friday, but club members were given another week to remove what they want before bulldozers move in to clear the land.

The landowner, Dallas-based Service Corporate International, has prospective buyers for the property and terminated its month-to-month agreement with the Recreation Centers of Sun City. The RCSC had been leasing the land from SCI for \$1 a year for the Garden Club's use.

SCI had been asking for about \$2 million for the five-parcel, 27-acre site.

Vandalism and thefts have been a problem for almost a month now in the acreage, according to some club members.

"I've had things taken out of my garden which I had plans for," said Bob Farron, who was cleaning out the remains of his plot Friday.

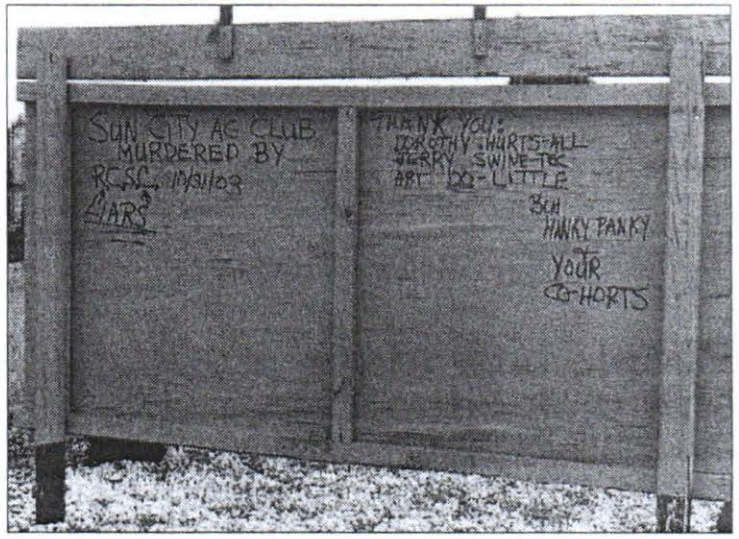
Sheriff's officials have no leads on the thieves and vandals.

Dorothy Hirtzel, president of the RCSC, said a member called her about the thefts.

"It's very sad," Hirtzel said. "I think the only person that could've done this was a member."

Hirtzel said the gates are locked by the Garden Club and the site is patrolled by the Sun City Sheriff's Posse. However, she couldn't understand the rationale for someone wanting to take other members' property.

OVER



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Marilyn Olberding, above left, says someone stole her faucets along with \$1,000 worth of other goods, including a storage shed, from the plot she and her husband worked at the Sun City Garden Club while they were gone for the summer. Club members are being given another week to remove what they want before bulldozers move in to clear the land in preparation for its sale. Above right, someone has expressed sentiments on the club sign just inside the gates which are kept locked when members are not present.

Pete Peterson, president of the Garden Club, said he also received several reports of thefts.

"Everybody knew that we were going out of business," he said. "I think that some people are really trying to

take advantage of us."

Olberding said she worked in her garden for a few years to make it perfect. The small area had a gate, a carpeted walkway and a shed with table and chairs.

Paving stones were

interspersed in the garden on which people could walk.

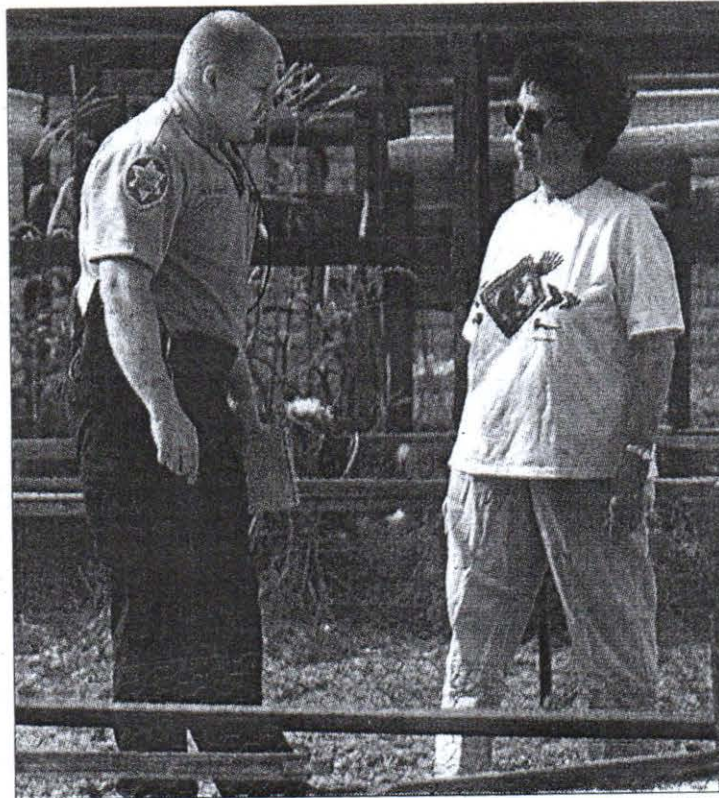
"It was just really cute," she said. "A lot of people came in and out to see this garden."

When Olberding returned to clear her plot Friday, she

found nothing but her sink.

"I wish I could get my stuff back," she said. "I'm just really hurt by this."

Mitchell Vantrease can be reached at 876-2526 or mvantrease@aztrib.com.



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Marilyn Olberding reports the theft of some of her property from her Sun City Garden Club plot to a MCSO deputy Friday.

MONDAY, SEPT. 22, 2003

DAILY NEWS-SUN



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Mike Sheets, left, and Bob Dunn remove items from one of Sheets' plots. Members of the Sun City Garden Club have until the end of October to remove their gardening equipment to make room for the sale of the land.

Sun City Garden Club members clearing out

MICHAEL MARESH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Most of what Irvin Duerksen uses in the Sun City Garden Club plot is headed for the trash.

He's one of about 300 gardeners who have to clear their sites by Nov. 1 because the acreage they use is being sold.

The Recreation Centers of Sun City had been leasing the 7-acre parcel for the Garden Club for \$1 a year from Houston-based Service Corporation International.

Duerksen said Garden Club members have been told anything left on the property as of Nov. 1 will be bulldozed by the landowners.

He said many residents have no use for their garden materials and will let their

plots and equipment be demolished.

"We do not have to clean up the place," he said. "They told us to take what we want to keep."

Garden Club President Pete Petersen said the club will be having a yard sale Oct. 3-4 so members can recoup some of their losses by selling off their gardening materials.

Duerksen said he will be trying to sell some of the wire and metal that surrounds his plot.

Donald Mead was also removing items from his plot; and said there was only so much he could take to his residence.

Mead said he considers himself fortunate because he will be able to remove the

equipment he wants to keep. He said winter visitors yet to return will not have that option.

Marlin Baxter, another Garden Club member, said he will continue working in his plot until Nov. 1.

He is removing small items from his plot every day he works there, but said he wants to enjoy his gardening as long as possible.

Mike Mandic was on hand Thursday morning to remove tools from his plot.

"Everything else will be donated to the bulldozer," he said. "Who has any room in Sun City? You can't build a garden in your back yard."

Mandic said he thinks people are just going to walk away, and said it will resemble how some react when a

OVER



STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN

John Garland carries a bucketful of butternut squash for the Westside Food Bank and the Olive Branch Senior Center as the Sun City Garden Club gleans its plots for the last time.

hurricane warning is issued.

"Take what you can and get out," he said. "It's too bad it had to be like this."

Mandic said the plots served as a social environment, where friends would gather to talk.

He said not having a garden to work in will be a strange feeling.

"I have always had a garden in my back yard," he said. "This was enjoyable."

SCI, which owns nearby Sunland Mortuary, put the 27-acre site on the market last year and announced two months ago it had potential buyers.

The land includes the club's plots and two other parcels selling for a reported \$2.275 million. The undeveloped land is currently zoned for residential use.

Michael Maresh can be reached at 876-2513 or

Sun City Garden Club about to lose its site

By Brent Whiting
The Arizona Republic

SUN CITY — For members of the Sun City Garden Club, there will be no more “silver bells and cockleshells” after Nov. 1.

An estimated 300 garden enthusiasts are about to get kicked off a 10-acre site they’ve tended for 29 years.

Sunland Memorial Park, Mortuary & Cremation Center, the owner of the site, has terminated its \$1-a-year lease.

A “For Sale” sign now sits on the parcel, which is on Sunland Drive, west of the Sunland administrative office.

Without offering details, Nancy Simon, the Sunland general manager, said Thursday that a couple of possible deals are in the works.

“Everybody is hot about this,” said Mike Mandic, 83, who has worked his garden patch for about five years.

Marlin Baxter, 93, who has been gardening there for 16 years, said he’s angry that his

hobby is about to take a hit.

Irvin Kuerksen, 86, another gardener, likened the eviction notice to a barnyard substance that is often spread at the site.

The forced closure also comes as a blow to a number of Valley charities that have relied upon donated produce from the garden to help feed hundreds of needy people.

“This is a huge loss,” said Dave Seigler, director of community relations for Westside Food Bank, based in Surprise.

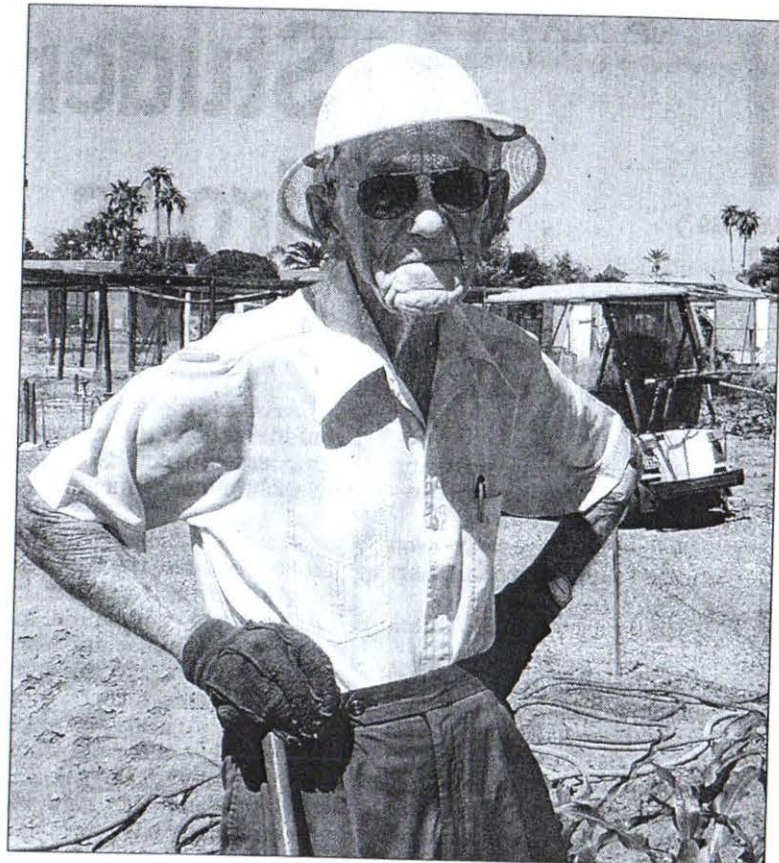
Gardeners blame Recreation Centers of Sun City Inc., the holder of the Sunland lease, for failing to save the spot.

Norm Dixon, the Recreation Centers vice president, said Sunland owns the property and has provided long use of the land at a nominal price.

Dixon said the garden is part of a 27.5 acre parcel that Sunland wants to sell, and the price of the garden, if Sunland was willing to subdivide the land, would be about \$2.3 million, likely a prohibitive figure.

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FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2003



Brent Whiting/The Arizona Republic

Marlin Baxter, 93, is angry that he must abandon his garden plot.

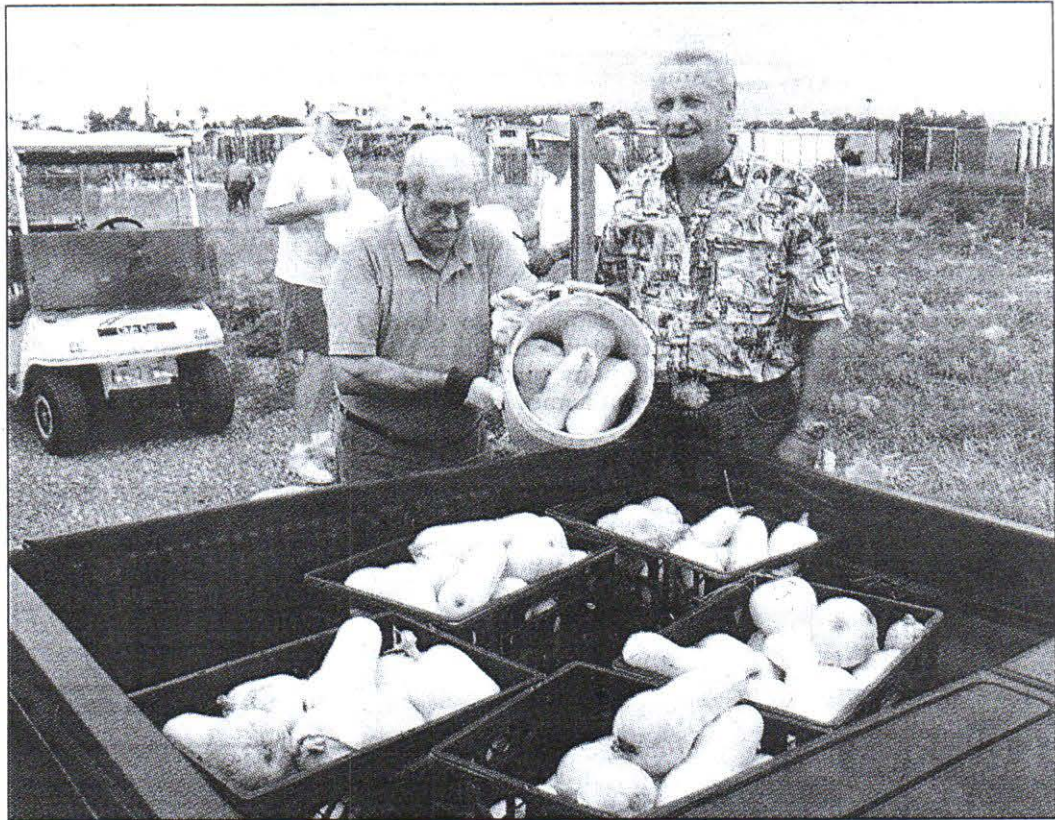


Photo by Tom Barry/Independent Newspapers

From left, Dan Harris and Pete Peterson, president of the Sun City Garden Club, loads a crop of butternut squashes for one final delivery to the Olive Branch Senior Center.

LAST HARVEST

Sun City Garden Club faces eviction

By Tom Barry

Independent Newspapers

This year's harvest of butternut squash is truly bittersweet for many.

As he surveys the remaining crop in the field, Pete Peterson can't help but wonder whether some miracle or act of generosity will prevent an ignominious end to a nearly 30-year-old tradition.

Mr. Peterson, president of the Sun City Garden Club, is trying to reconcile himself to what appears to be the inevitable: eviction from the nearly 10 acres the 288-member club has cultivated for three decades.

In the distance, the American flag is flying at half-mast and upside down above the clubhouse — a symbol of distress.

On Sept. 9, Mr. Peterson and eight volunteers conducted the final harvest of squash for the benefit of the Olive Branch Senior Center. The crop totaled 6,000 pounds. Earlier, they delivered approximately 5,000 pounds to the West-side Food Bank.

The senior center and food bank have been longtime charities of the non-profit garden club. Including last week's harvest, the club has donated in excess of 55,000 pounds to both institutions this year.

The club has less than a month to conclude its gardening activities for good. Its month-to-month lease for the 10-acre parcel at 10916 Sunland Drive near Sunland Mortuary and Cemetery will expire Sept. 30 and the club has to relinquish the property by Oct. 30.

In addition to a plot designated for donated crops, there are scores of smaller plots that continue to be cultivated and tended to by individual members and their spouses. They include everything from vegetables to cacti.

They, too, must cease their activities and leave.

Service Corporate International, which owns Sunland Mortuary and the 27 acres of which the club occupies 10 acres, said any infrastructure, including fencing, irrigation lines and sheds, that remain will be

bulldozed.

Mr. Peterson said other valuable assets and infrastructure that face demolition or removal by month's end include a large store, warehouse, greenhouse, too shed and tractor shed.

The eviction comes as part of an effort by SCI to sell the 27 acres, surplus property that adjoins the cemetery. The asking price is estimated at between \$1 million and \$2.2 million — well beyond the resources of the Sun City Garden Club or the RCSC.

Mr. Peterson and fellow members are clearly disappointed. Despite reassurances that the RCSC board would attempt to ensure the club would not be evicted for at least several years, the owners are adamant.

He also blames the board for failing to hold developer Del Webb Corp. to its pledge to provide garden plots for Sun City residents. He said that in 1982 Webb offered to deed 40 acres just west of Sun City on Bell Road to the RSCW, stipulating that 10 acres

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would be left for the garden club's use. But for reasons unclear today the RCSC board rejected the offer.

Sunland Mortuary General Manager Nancy Simon said SCI had no choice but to terminate the lease at this time because the company has received an offer to purchase the entire 27-acre parcel.

Now, Mr. Peterson and the others are hoping the landowner will relent and permit the garden club to remain at least until the land is sold.

Hall Sitts, a 13-year club member, was resigned to the club's impending fate yet hopeful that someone or some entity will come their rescue.

"Our hope is, somewhere along the lines, (SCI) will let us stay at least through the October harvest season. We

know we have no right to stay, but we'd like the privilege," he said.

Mr. Peterson is likewise guardedly optimistic.

"I really don't know any alternatives. We're basically homeless unless someone comes through for us. We're the unwanted, unloved stepchild of the Rec Center board," he said, bitterly.

Many of the garden club's members, including 92-year-old Marlin Baxter, have been there since the beginning.

"For those gardeners, gardening is a way of life, not simply a hobby," Mr. Peterson said. "Sun City gardeners will long remember Nov. 1, 2003 as they watch the bulldozers erase what has taken 29 years to accomplish."

But, for now, he has to prepare to make way for so-called progress.

"The sad part is I'm too darn old to do anything else," he said.



Photo by Tom Barry/Independent Newspapers

As a symbol of their distress, Sun City Garden Club members are flying the American flag at half-mast and upside down.

DAILY NEWS-SUN

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 3, 2003

Gardeners prepare for end

MITCHELL VANTREASE
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Bob Farron has started clearing his tools and farming equipment from his plot on Sun City Garden Club land.

"I have other hobbies, too, so I won't be bored, that's for sure," he said.

Farron and other Garden Club members were informed not to plant this season in a meeting Tuesday at Sundial Recreation Center.

Club President Pete Petersen read the letter of the lease termination to a small crowd. Then, he fielded several comments and questions from residents.

"Our gardeners are really disappointed with what's taken place," Petersen said.

Use by the garden club of the leased plot behind Sunland Memorial Park Mortuary and Cremation Center appears to be coming to an end. Infrastructure and other equipment must be cleared by Oct. 31.

Dallas-based Service Corporate International announced it had a prospective buyers for the property and terminated its month-to-month agreement with the Recreation Centers of Sun City. The RCSC has been leasing the land from SCI for \$1 a year.

SCI had been asking for about \$2 million for the five-parcel, 27-acre site. Officials said the prospective buyers' names would not be divulged until the sale is finalized.

During the meeting, Petersen and other members talked about options of using the remaining club funds. It included parties and hiring an attorney.

However, a vote on dispersing the money will wait until winter visitors return.

"It's not over until it's over," he said. "We've got a whole month to see what happens."

Club member Bob Davis said dispersing the funds seems to be the most important aspect now.

"We're doomed," Davis said. "If you can't preserve the land, then you can't do anything else."

Mitchell Vantrease can be reached at 876-2526 or mvantrease@aztrib.com.

Garden club out by Oct. 30

By Erik Burg
Independent Newspapers

Marlin Baxter, 92, a member of the Sun City Garden Club for 18 years, recently planted sweet corn on his small plot of land.

Planting the vegetable was a somewhat risky move, considering the crop takes 75 days to mature, he acknowledged.

The land which hosts Mr. Baxter's and many of the other 288 members' gardens on a 10-and-a-half-acre lot near the Sunland Memorial Park Mortuary, 15826 Del Webb Blvd., must be vacated by Oct. 30.

"It's a gamble," Mr. Baxter said of the sweet corn planted Aug. 19.

According to Dorothy Hirtzel, Sun City Recreation Centers' Governing Board president, the RCSC's lease on the land will be terminated effective Sept. 30; after that, the garden club members will have 30 days to vacate to the property. Water lines and all other improvements must be removed from the land by Nov. 30.

A garden club meeting to brief members is scheduled for 9 a.m. Sept. 2 at the Sundial Auditorium, 14801 103rd Ave.

"It's going to be tough telling those people," said club President Pete Petersen. "There's a lot of the members who don't even know yet."

But it is not only the gard-

ners who stand to lose out when the 27-acre parcel, of which the gardens are a part, is sold. The club donates much of its produce to agencies that distribute it to those in need.

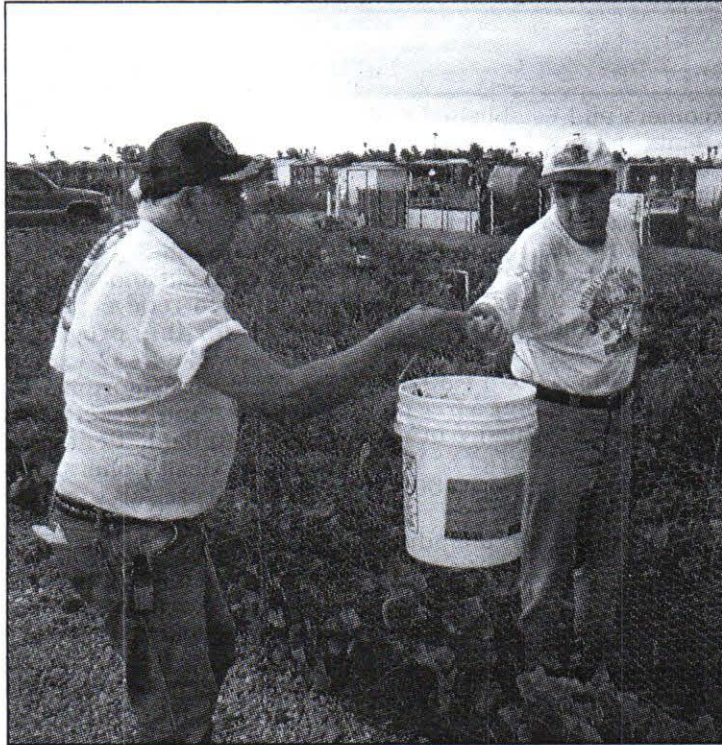
Just last week, the group harvested 2,400 pounds of butternut squash, donating the vegetables to the Westside Food Bank. According to Mr. Petersen, the club has donated 55,000 pounds of produce to the food bank and the Olive Branch Senior Center this year.

According to Ms. Hirtzel, the RCSC offered to buy the portion of the land being used by the club from Service Corpo-

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Photo by Erik Burg/Independent Newspapers
Marlin Baxter tends to his plot at the Sun City Garden Club's gardens near the Sunland Memorial Park Mortuary, 15826 Del Webb Blvd.



Photos by Erik Burg/Independent Newspapers
Ray Hatfield hands off a bucket to Tom Sullivan, as the group harvests butternut squash. The produce will be donated to the Westside Food Bank.



Pete Petersen is president of the Sun City Garden Club, which has to leave its home at Sunland Mortuary in two months.

Garden

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rate International, which owns Sunland and the adjacent parcel, but received no response.

"There is an interested party (in the entire 27-acre parcel). An offer has been made on it," said Sunland General Manager Nancy Simon. "The company felt it was best at this time to terminate the lease, given that there was an interested buyer."

Ms. Hirtzel said there was no way the RCSC could justify buying the entire 27 acres.

"We have to represent all the residents in the community, not just the garden club," she said.

"We weighed the pluses and minuses of buying the land and it just didn't compute," said RCSC board member Jerry Swintek.

Relocating the club's gardens also appears impossible.

"There's no land for it," Mr. Swintek said. "There's not 10 acres of total land anywhere in Sun City available."

Mr. Petersen agreed there are no suitable sites within Sun City and added that if there were, a move would be cost-prohibitive.

"We would have to build it again," Mr. Peterson said. "That'd be a big job if we had to redo it."

Ray Hatfield, club member for eight months, said he had made some great friends in his brief time in the club.

"This is such a unique and pleasant place to be," he said. "It's going to hit some of these people pretty hard when it happens."

Anne Brady contributed to this story.

Gardeners plot next move

Lease expires Sept. 30, \$120,000 in assets has to go

MICHAEL MARESH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City Garden Club members have planted their last crops.

Texas-based Service Corporate International notified the Recreation Centers of Sun City that the lease with the garden club will not be renewed after Sept. 30.

RCSC officials told garden club President Pete Petersen that gardeners would have 30 days from the end of September to vacate the premises.



STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN
Evelyn Higginbotham plants sage in her herb garden at the Sun City Garden Club plots in this file photo.

"It has not been sold yet, but we are talking with a lot of potential buyers," Bolton said. "It was time to make a change."

The land the garden club is using next to Sunland Mortuary is one of three parcels comprising 27 acres that went on the market in June 2002.

Greg Bolton, vice president of SCI, said Thursday afternoon that the company has several potential buyers and decided to terminate the agreement with the RCSC rather than wait for the sale to be completed.

"It has not been sold yet, but we are talking with a lot of potential buyers," Bolton said. "It was time to make a change."

SCI had been leasing 7 acres to the centers for \$1 a year.

Petersen said he was not surprised with the latest development but had hoped the club could continue using the site through the end of the year.

"We got word (Thursday morning) that we will have to be gone by the end of October," he said.

Petersen said he has been busy notifying members of the news, but he will be unable to contact members who are out of town for the summer.

The Sun City Garden Club has 288 members and about 300 plots, Petersen said.

"They will be very disappointed with the closure of the property," he said.

Petersen said decisions have to be made on how to liquidate assets that members have put into the property over 29 years.

Petersen said the most recent inventory revealed the garden club had \$121,000 in assets.

The asking price was more than \$2 million for the five-parcel, 27-acre site that is being sold. SCI owns the parcels as well as Sunland Mortuary. The undeveloped land is zoned for residential use.

"It is a sad situation," Petersen said, adding there is not anything gardeners will be able to do since there are no viable locations in Sun City that the club could use to replace its current location.

"There is no legacy that we will be able to leave for future gardeners," he said, noting future residents will not know a garden club ever existed.

Contact Michael Maresh at 876-2513 or mmaresh@aztrib.com

Land sale means loss of produce

End of free veggies will hurt agencies

MICHAEL MARESH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun Health Olive Branch Senior Center Manager Ivy Wixson views the possible sale of land cultivated by the Sun City Garden Club as terrible news.

"It would definitely hurt us," she said, noting that most of the center's produce is donated by the club.

Wixson said Olive Branch would have to purchase its produce, adding that could be an expensive proposition.

She said the center will not pass any increased cost on to its clients.

Somehow, she said, the center will get by with what it has.

"If you have to pay something, it makes a difference," she said.

And there are other organizations that will be affected along with the senior center. So far this year, the club has donated 43,000 pounds of produce to the Westside Food Bank.

Westside spokesman Dave

Seigler said there is no doubt the food bank will be affected. The timing, he said, could not be worse for the food bank, because more and more people are seeking help.

Seigler said the food bank will have to rely on other sources, and hopes more donations come in to offset the loss of the produce. He said the problem will likely be short term, while officials look at other produce sources, like the Farmer's Market in Phoenix.

Use by the garden club of the leased plot behind Sunland Memorial Park Mortuary and Cremation Center appears to be coming to an end. Dallas-based Service Corporate International has announced it has a prospective buyer for the property and has terminated its month-to-month agreement with the Recreation Centers of Sun City. The RCSC has been leasing the land from SCI for \$1 a year.

SCI had been asking for about \$2 million for the five-parcel, 27-acre site, and officials said the prospective buyer's name would not be divulged until the sale is finalized.

One RCSC director said the centers only received notice of the potential land sale from garden club President Pete Petersen.

"I have neither seen nor heard anything about it," said RCSC Director Art Little, adding that as far as he knows, the centers are still the leaseholders.

Calls to RCSC President Dorothy Hirtzel were not returned.

Petersen said there are no places in Sun City to which the garden club could move, but added he still wants his board to meet with the RCSC board of directors sometime this month.

"It does not look too good," he said. "The fact is, there is no space available. What are they going to do with our organization? There is great disappointment; I do not know what to do."

After meeting with the RCSC board, the Sun City Garden Club will hold a meeting at 9 a.m. Sept. 2 at the Sundial Recreation Center to give members a status report.

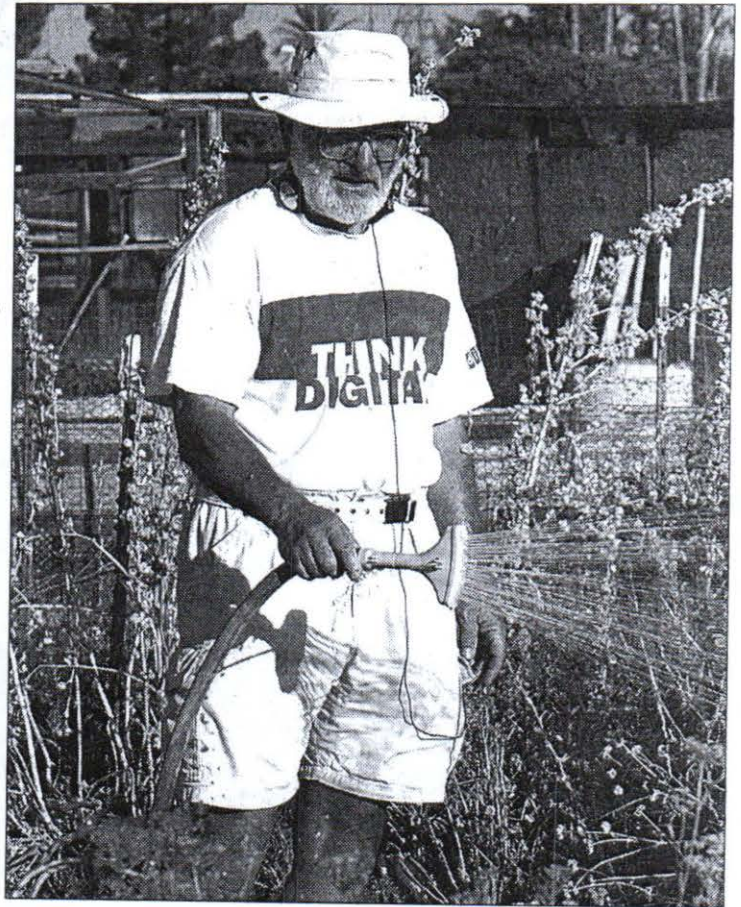
Michael Maresch can be reached at 876-2513 or mmaresch@aztrib.com.

OVER



Tom and Myrtle Parsons, above, pick butternut squash in Tom's garden on the plot of land cultivated by the Sun City Garden Club. Left, Larry Long, food-service supervisor at the Olive Branch Senior Center, displays some of the produce supplied the center by the garden club. Right, Bob Boekenkamp waters his garden on the club's plot.

PHOTOS BY JOY LAMBERT-SLAGOWSKI
DAILY NEWS-SUN



Fruitful surplus for charity

SC Garden Club cleans up

By Matt Loeschman
Independent Newspapers

The fruits of giving turned the Sun City Garden Club's second-annual citrus drive into an enormous success.

"It's amazing the amount of fruit we were able to collect," said Pete Petersen, Sun City Garden Club president. "We did a little more advertising this year, put out a few more posters — and it certainly paid off. We couldn't have asked for

a bigger collection."

The Garden Club recently sponsored their second-annual citrus drive to benefit the St. Mary's/Westside Food Bank Alliance, 13050 W. Elm St., Surprise. Setting a goal to surpass last year's total of 60 tons of fruit collected, the club received donations of more than 223 tons of grapefruits, oranges and lemons.

"I attribute the big numbers to a couple of things," Mr. Petersen explained. "Our increased advertising definitely helped. And we had the three locations where people could drop off their donations. This was a plus, especially for those

people who don't like to deal with Bell Road."

The three collection sites were Bell Recreation Center, Sundial Recreation Center and the Sun Bowl.

Approximately 445,000 pounds of fruit were dropped off at the three sites. By comparison, the 2005 drive collected 119,250 pounds of citrus.

"It was quite an increase. We reached had passed our 2006 goal in just the first two weeks of collection," Mr. Petersen said.

The president thanked Garden Club members who moni-

See Fruitful — Page 9

tored the three site locations 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday through Friday during the six weeks of the citrus drive.

The club's gleaning crew also gleaned 187 citrus trees at 74 residences. The Garden Club received nearly 300 more requests for gleaning, but due to a lack of volunteers the crews were unable to fulfill those requests.

"That was unfortunate. We just didn't have the manpower," Mr. Petersen explained. "We only had four or five gleaning volunteers beyond our own Garden Club members. I'd say we only took in about one-fourth of what is available — I still see plenty of fruit on the trees today."

The Independent also received multiple calls regarding the lack of gleaners.

"We just didn't have enough

people to handle all the calls," Mr. Petersen said.

Not only did the citrus drive keep the community free of fallen fruit, local officials said the donation will help many families in need.

"It was amazing to see this donation," said Pat Fehlhaber, St. Mary's/Westside Food Bank community relations manager. "What a wonderful way to help others."

Terry Shannon, St. Mary's/Westside Alliance executive director, concurred.

"This gleaning project will have an incredible impact on the food bank," Mr. Shannon explained. "It gives us the capacity to do two things — put fresh fruit in the emergency food boxes and make fresh fruit available to our agency partners in various communities."

Some of the fruit will also be shipped outside the state.

"We make arrangements with other food banks," Mr. Shannon

said. "Because of our abundance of citrus here in Arizona, we can ship some to Washington in exchange for apples. We will send some citrus to Idaho in exchange for potatoes. It's nice because it gives up the opportunity to bring other kinds of food into our food bank."

The executive director said Sun Citians really stepped up in their donation effort.

"This type of overachievement is what allows us to effectively help others," Mr. Shannon explained. "The volunteer support we receive is vital and we thank them for their efforts."

Mr. Petersen also thanked residents who made donations to the gleaning crews to defray the costs of the drive and also to fund a barbecue social for the volunteer site monitors and gleaning crew.

The barbecue was held March

28 at the Oakmont Recreation Center.

"We were very pleased to give this donation to the food bank," Mr. Petersen added. "Next year, we will set our goal even higher."

For more information about the Garden Club or the citrus drive, call 875-5921 from 9 a.m. to noon weekdays.

Post your comments on this issue at www.newszipforums.com/forum29. Reach News Editor Matt Loeschman at 972-6101 or mloeschman@newszip.com.

Club's members turn desert soil into farmland

By ANNE RYMAN
Sun Cities Independent

Two groups of residents put their green thumbs to use every day in the Sun Cities, transforming the barren desert into lush farmland.

The desert environment doesn't stop 140 members of the Sun City Agriculture Club or 85 members of the Sun City West Agriculture Club from growing "just about every type of vegetable" on plots of land set aside for farming in the two communities.

The clubs are open to any Recreation Center member, and both have room for more gardening enthusiasts. The Sun City Agriculture Club has 315 lots behind the Sunland Memorial Park while the Sun City West Agriculture Club has 267 plots near 137th Avenue.

In Sun City West, popular produce includes asparagus, artichokes, beets, peppers, carrots, beans, tomatoes, sweet corn, cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, onions and garlic.

"You name it, we grow it," says Raylan Evans, club president.

"There's 85 different people and 85 different methods of farming."

Because many come from different parts of the country, they must adapt their gardening techniques to the desert environment, says Mr. Evans, a California native.

"The soil here is totally different. There it was sand and here it's pure clay and holds no water. The temperature is also a lot different. It's so hot that tomatoes and peppers must be shaded to continue to (bear) fruit," he says.

Although members say most vegetables adapt to the desert climate, Mr. Evans says he has seen at least one exception.

"Pole beans don't seem to produce. I don't know why that is. I was a great pole bean grower in California."

Frank Pasco, a four-year veteran of the Sun City Agriculture Club, has not had any problems.

"You can raise anything here. You can grow corn three times a year."

Most vegetable seem to thrive with a little water and fertilizer, members say.

In Sun City, Berniece and Arthur Torson, who are in their 90s, grow carrots, beets, peas, radishes and beans on a plot of land they have tended for 20 years as members of the Sun City Agriculture Club.

"It's something fresh to eat and you get enjoyment out of it," Mrs. Torson says about the two to three mornings a week they spend working in the garden.

This year, the Wisconsin natives are also trying to raise red raspberries.

"We're hoping to get the big, juicy type," Mrs. Torson says as she examines the berry's green leaves crawling up the



Left, Bill Walker of the Sun City Agriculture Club tills soil in his plot. Below, Harold Kueller, also of the Sun City Agriculture Club, clears an irrigation pathway for his carrots and zucchini. Both the Sun City and Sun City West Agriculture Clubs are open to any Recreation Center member.

Photos by TYSON KUHRT/Sun Cities Independent



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■ SOIL

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trellis.

Like the Torsons, each club member operates autonomously, deciding what to plant and when to work the 20-by-40 plots of land in Sun City and 20-by-30 plots in Sun City West. Plots range from open gardens watered with a hose to wire cages ranging from \$400 to \$1,000 with automatic watering systems. Sun City resident Harry Failing has two plots, both caged to keep the quail, doves, mocking birds and rabbits at bay.

Club members can get seed, fertilizer, soil and mulch from a store located on the property that also has a refrigerator, telephone and rest rooms.

The cost of production, members say, is nominal.

In Sun City, members pay an \$18 deposit, \$20 annually for water plus a \$5 membership fee. In Sun City West, members pay a \$20 land deposit, a \$5 key deposit and \$35 annually for water. Both clubs also provide tiller services for an additional charge.

Members say they either eat the produce themselves, share it with neighbors or donate it to the Westside Food Bank, an organization that provides emergency and supplemental food to individuals and agencies in the state.

Water company solves a growing problem

By Staff
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — The Sun City Water Co. has come to the aid of a local club that is trying to grow vegetables for the Westside Food Bank.

"I think this is just wonderful," said Jim Little, president of the Sun City Agricultural Club. "The water company really cared about our problem and really came through for us."

For the past three years, the club has grown and harvested thousands of pounds of lettuce, green onions, turnips, carrots, beets, cabbage and other vegetables for needy families in the Northwest Valley.

But because of an increase in water rates that went into effect in February, the club members feared that they could no longer afford to irrigate the half-acre plot it has set aside for the food bank.

The new irrigation rates include a \$28.60 monthly base rate and charge of 65 cents per 1,000 gallons used. Previously, the monthly base rate for irrigation was \$52.20 plus 37 cents per 1,000 gallons used after 60,000 gallons.

From Jan. 4 to Feb. 3, 1991, the club used 355,000 gallons and paid \$172.74. Based on the new rates, the charge will be \$258 this year.

From Feb. 5 to March 5, 1991, the club used 672,000 gallons and paid \$298.69. This year, the club expects charges to be \$464.

In essence, each of the club's 250 members would have had to pay about 17 cents more a month to pay the increase in the water bill.

But nevertheless, club members said they thought their crops for the food bank were in jeopardy.

On Monday, Little met with Fred Kriess, manager of the Sun City Water Co. to discuss the club's concerns.

Kriess said he was sympathetic with the club's situation and decided to donate \$100 a month to help defray the water expenses.

"They said the club was interested in conservation and involved in reducing water usage. While we are not able to do anything with the tariff, we do support the food bank and wanted to help out," Kriess said.

Kriess said he has already given Little a check for \$200. The money is coming out of the company's operating budget.

Sun City Water Co. has supported the Westside Food Bank for several years with in-office food collections and baseball tournaments.

"One of my very strong beliefs when I started as manager here is that we had an obligation to support the community we serve," Kriess said.

The Arizona Corporation Commission gave final approval Feb. 20 to a 15.7 percent water rate increase for Sun City residents.

The water rate increase also included an increase in irrigation water rates that the agricultural club is assessed on. The medians in Sun City are assessed on the same irrigation rate.

Renz Jennings, chairman of the commission, said his office suggested that the agricultural club members discuss their concerns with the water company.

"This is the perfect result. It's the kind we encourage," Jennings said. "In the final analysis, though, I believe the club would have continued to do it (grow vegetables for the food

bank) when they realized that it would have cost only 17 cents per member."

The club has 300 20-by-40-foot plots on 5 acres at 10918 Sunland Drive. About 250 members pay a fee to garden on the plots and the money is used to pay for the water bill, repairs, improvements and other club expenses.

Last year members harvested

16,355 pounds of vegetables for the food bank.

When local residents found out that the club may not be able to grow vegetables any longer because of the increase in water rates, Little said many people mailed in checks.

"The important thing is that we can now continue growing vegetables for this good cause," Little said. "We are very grateful for that."

OVER



Stephen Cherek/Daily News-Sun

Patty Swain and Joe Judice pile up bunches of carrots at the Sun City Agricultural Club gardens at 10918 Sunland Drive. The carrots are destined for the Westside Food Bank.

Putting squeeze on vegetables

Water rates boost costs of generosity

By Lori Baker
Staff writer

Sun City

Because of a 108 percent increase in water rates, the Sun City Agricultural Club's vegetable harvests for the Westside Food Bank are growing in expense.

Club members donated about 18,000 pounds of sweet potatoes, onions, carrots, broccoli, cabbage and other vegetables in 1991 to the food bank.

Club members grow and hand-pick the crops, providing the food bank with a truck load of vegetables about every two weeks, said Jim Little, club president.

The water rate increases imposed by the Sun City Water Co. on Feb. 1 caught club members by surprise, Little said.

He said club members attended an Arizona Corporation Commission meeting about water rate increases in December in Sun City but that there was no discussion at that meeting of how the irrigation rates his club pays would be affected.

"We thought we were going to be paying about the same increase as residential customers," Little said.

A 15.7 percent rate increase for residential customers was approved by the commission for Sun City Water Co.

The water company only has two irrigation customers — the non-profit Sun City Agricultural Club for its five acres of gardens at 10918 Sunland Drive, and Maricopa County for its grassy street medians south of Grand Avenue.

Fred Kriess, general manager of Sun City Water Co., said he plans to meet with Little to discuss the club's concerns.

Kriess said the new water rates are designed to encourage conservation, as required by an agreement with the Arizona Department of Water Resources.

Water company officials convinced the commission to allow the irrigation category to continue to be available to the agricultural club because it is a lower rate per gallon than what residential and commercial customers pay.

"We urge the agricultural club members to work it out with their water company. If things don't work out, that's what we're here for," said Jon Poston, spokesman for the Arizona Corporation Commission.

The residential rate for a 2-inch meter is \$44 for the first 1,000 gallons and \$1 per 1,000 gallons for additional water. The irrigation rate for a 2-inch meter is \$28.60 plus 65 cents per 1,000 gallons used.

To help the county reduce irrigation costs, the water company had hired a consultant to suggest how to use less water in the county-owned medians.

Little said his club would like to conserve water, too. But he said the county has more flexibility because it could replace grass with gravel and desert plants.

"We can't just stop using water," Little said. "We'd have to go out of business."

The water bill for the club is expected to increase by about \$4,200 this year for the 256 gardens, Little said. Because it is a chartered club, the Sun City Recreation Centers Inc. pays half the bill.

If the club uses less than its 635,000-gallon monthly allotment, the new rates are about 75 percent higher than the old ones. If the allotment is exceeded — as it was eight of the 12 months in 1991 — then the rates go up by 108 percent. Little estimated the water bill increase based on last year's water use.

Bigger harvest

Fourteen gardens are used to grow vegetables for the food bank. Water costs for them are expected

to increase by about \$355, in part because of the higher water costs and also because more vegetables are being planted. For example, about 2,500 sweet potato plants will be planted in about a month, compared to 1,500 last year.

Little said he hopes to get donations to help the club pay for the water. He has vowed to personally make up the difference if need be.

"We began growing vegetables for the food bank three years ago as a way to help needy families

and Sun City widows," Little said.

Although the food bank occasionally receives surplus vegetables from produce houses, the Sun Citizens provide a valuable service because they grow certain vegetables on request, said Debbi Ennis, the food banks' community relations director.

"Fresh vegetables are important to people's health," Ennis said. "It's nice to have vegetables grown in the northwest Valley because we can specifically ask for what we need, like sweet potatoes."

The agricultural club was started more than 20 years ago under the auspices of the Sun City Recreation Centers Inc. and operates on land leased at no cost by Sunland Mortuary.

Many members have been gardening all of their lives.

Bob Davis joined the club 16 years ago after moving to Sun City from Illinois.

"I've gardened all my life. I have a desire for fresh vegetables," said Davis, a retired chemical engineer.

Joe Judice, a retired horticulturist, said he enjoys raising vegetables for the food bank. "Growing food for hungry people makes me feel really good," he said.

Water rate hike jeopardizes Club can't afford to irrigate crops for food bank

harvest for needy

By JACQUE PAPPAS
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — The Sun City Agricultural Club may have sent its last truckload of vegetables to the Westside Food Bank.

For the past three years, the club has grown and harvested thousands of pounds of lettuce, green onions, turnips, carrots, beets, cabbage and other vegetables for needy families in the Northwest Valley.

But because of an increase in water rates, the club can no longer afford to irrigate the half-acre crop it has set aside for the food bank, said Jim Little, club president.

"Our water rates have jumped a lot more than we thought they would. We thought the rates would go up about 15 percent and instead they have more than doubled," Little said.

The Arizona Corporation Commission gave final approval Feb. 20 to a 15.7 percent water rate increase for Sun City residents, effective immediately.

The irrigation water rates that the agricultural club is assessed on, however, increased by 75 percent to 108 percent.

The new irrigation rates include a \$28.60 monthly base rate and charge of 65 cents per 1,000 gallons used, said Marvin Collins, manager of operations for Sun City Water Co.

Previously, the monthly base rate for irrigation was \$52.20 plus 37 cents per 1,000 gallons used after 60,000 gallons.

The agricultural club and street medians in Sun City are the only entities using the irrigation rate, Collins said.

"The problem was that the irrigation rates were not designed to promote conservation," Collins said. "This is an effort to promote water conservation. It rewards those who use less wa-

ter and those who do not conserve pay the extra cost."

If more than 635,000 gallons are used by those assessed the irrigation rate, they are assessed an additional 148 per 1,000 gallons used. The additional charge amounts to an 108 percent increase.

In 1991, the club used more than 635,000 gallons in eight months, Little said.

"That means that for eight months we will be paying 108 percent more and for four months we will pay 75 percent more," Little said. "The recreation centers pay for half of our water bill since we are a chartered club, but it still is too much."

Little estimates that the club paid more than \$4,200 in water bills last year.

From Jan. 4 to Feb. 3, 1991, the club used 355,000 gallons and paid \$172.74. Based on the

new rates, the charge will be \$258 this year.

From Feb. 5 to March 5, 1991, the club used 672,000 gallons and paid \$298.69. This year, the club expects charges to be \$464.

The club has 300 20- by 40-foot plots on 5 acres at 10918 Sunland Drive, Little said. About 238 members pay a fee to garden on the plots and the money is used to pay for the water bill, repairs, improvements and other club expenses.

Three years ago, Little and other members of the club decided to plant vegetables on a half-acre parcel and donate the crops to the Westside Food Bank.

Last year members harvested 16,355 pounds of vegetables for the food bank, Little said.

Debbi Ennis, the Westside Food Bank's community-relations director, said the fresh vegetables have been used in

emergency food boxes and for people "in nutritional risk" such as pregnant women.

"This is so unfortunate, especially since we had our largest increase in food distribution last year ... which means there was more need than ever before," Ennis said.

In 1990 the food bank distributed 13.8 million pounds of food and in 1991 it distributed 19.6 million pounds.

Joe Judice, who has helped organize the vegetable donations to the food bank, said the club's hands are tied.

"It's a sad case. It's terrible because they really appreciate all of the vegetables we give them. With all the starving people it's a shame we cannot continue to help to feed them," Judice said.

The club headquarters is open from 8 to 10 a.m. Monday through Saturday. The telephone number 972-8020.

OVER



Stephen Chernek/Daily News-Sun

Picking turnips in the Sun City Agricultural Club's field are from left, Wilma Droege, her husband, Nelson, and Jim Little.



Jim Little loads freshly picked green onions for delivery to the Westside Food Bank.

Sun Citians sow success in local field

By JACQUE PAPPAS
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — Planted in the middle of some 5 acres of corn, sweet potatoes and tomatoes, blooms the small headquarters of the Sun City Agricultural Club.

The club, which has roots dating back to July 1960, now has 260 members with green thumbs.

"Gardening is the number one pastime of this country. More people do gardening than watch football games," said Jim Woodard, club vice president.

In an effort to accommodate the club's recent growing number of gardeners, members added a store area to its storage facilities in March, Woodard said.

By the end of the summer, the club had already outgrown the original area and launched a building program that included doubling door space, installation of electrical and telephone services, and a water cooler.

"Before, people kept seeds in the trunks of their car and we had no central location from which to distribute them," he said. "This project was completed with the hard work of club members and generous donations."

This week the club dedicated the "Gene Funke Store" in memory of Gene Funke, a club member who died last year.

The store and club headquarters are located at 10918 Sunland Drive just west of Sunland.

Funke's widow, Mabel, presented the club a check for \$1,334 in memorials. Reggie Purcell presented the club a check for \$175 in memory of her late husband, Jack. And June Gibson donated an electric typewriter for her late husband, Ken.

"They felt they wanted to do something for the garden because their spouses spent so many happy times here," said James Little, club president.

Little said many club members volunteered to help build the store.

Club members borrowed a ditch digger from the Recreation Centers of Sun City golf courses and used it to help excavate a 180-foot ditch to lay telephone and utility lines.

The store is monitored by at least one club member while it is open from 8 to 11 a.m. every day except Sundays.

Sun City residents can purchase sheets of plastic and netting to cover gardens and protect them from the cold, birds and insects; various fertilizers, soil sulfurs; and seeds.

"We have a variety of seeds. There are 15 different types of tomato seeds alone," said Nelson Droege, chairman of the club's seed committee. "It's amazing how much is grown here and how much



Mollie J. Hoppes/Daily News-Sun

Mabel Funke, left, and June Gibson stand in front of the Gene Funke Store on the grounds of the Sun City Agricultural Club. The store sells fertilizer and other gardening products.

is given away to food banks and others."

The club sells almost every seed, from lima beans to swiss chard to sweet corn. Droege said onion seeds are the big seller now because it is a good time to plant them.

The club has 320 garden spots that

average about 20 by 40 feet.

The idea for a garden to be shared among Sun City residents came from Del Webb Development Co. in 1960, said Claire Wheadon, who has been a member of the club since early 1965.

Wheadon said Webb put an ad



Mollie J. Hoppes/Daily News-Sun

Stanley Hernandez checks the seed selection at the Gene Funke Store.

advertisement in the local newspaper that read, "The corn grows taller, the squash bigger and everything grows faster in Sun City."

She said the first garden was located about one-fourth mile east of Del Webb's Highway House, which later became the Kings Inn and is now Smith's at 107th and Grand avenues.

Eventually Sun City residents took over the maintenance of the garden.

Wheadon said they posted a sign along Grand Avenue in front of the garden that read, "Sun City Agricultural Club, for exclusive use of Sun City residents."

"This sign was an integral part of the early home sales in Sun City. So many people would stop when they saw the sign and end up buying homes," she said.

By 1965 the club, sign and all, moved across the railroad tracks to a second garden site south of Sunland Memorial Park.

"Many times a police car was parked under the tree at the garden to discourage people who took off with the corn," Wheadon said. "Another interesting thing we found out is that the first bylaws were written on onion skin paper."

By 1968, another move was made in order to accommodate further Sun City expansion. The club moved to its current site across the street and once again manured and plowed the barren land for gardens.

Club installs phone, electric lines at SC garden plots

Cold, potable water and a telephone are a good back-up system in the desert.

In the interest of convenience and concern about medical emergencies, the Sun City Agricultural Club has added telephone and electrical service to the community gardens in Sun City.

Jim Little, club president, supervised the improvements to the club's headquarters, which are set midway in the 5.5 acre plot west of Sunland Memorial Cemetery.

The club borrowed a ditch digger from the Sun City Golf Courses and club volunteers used it, along with shovels and hoes, to excavate a 180-foot ditch from its west border to the headquarter building.

Arizona Public Service and U.S. West Communications laid their lines in the ditch.

"One of our members died here in the gardens a few years ago," says Mr. Little. "So we tried to make an improvement, after 16 years. We installed the telephone ... our oldest gardener is 96.

"Adding telephone service to the gardens not only will provide a convenience to the gardeners, but may aid in saving someone's life in a medical emergency."

This year, several members suffered heart attacks and another died of cancer, although not at the garden, he explains.

"With humid-ity high as it is, even this time of year, we wanted the phone."

Mr. Little says the club is wholesaling seeds from gardening projects and "we need to plug in a refrigerator, so the seeds won't get hot."

A small air conditioner will be added to the store room for the comfort of volunteers who man the store under direction of Pat Grimes, says Mr. Little.

"Water in our garden plumbing can become contaminated from materials put into our soils. Irrigation water can be vacuumed into the system from hoses used in irrigation" he says.

"The availability of cold, potable water may reduce the chance of one of us poisoning ourselves by drinking from one of those hoses," Mr. Little says.



Nelson Droege, Mike Sheets.

Sun City garden club to provide fresh vegetables for food bank

By TIFFANY MEANS
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — A plot to provide the Westside Food Bank with fresh vegetables has matured into 1,000 plants of cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kohlrabi, and onions.

The Sun City Agricultural Club has set aside one-half acre of garden space to grow crops for the food bank. The members supply plant seedlings, water, fertilizer, bird netting and labor.

The club has always contributed excess vegetables to the organization, but this is the first year of an organized effort to garden specifically to benefit the food bank.

"Personally, I come from a family of

farmers so I really was excited about the garden," Debbi Dorman, Westside Food Bank spokeswoman, said.

Dorman said she appreciates the quality of produce the club is donating, as many times fresh vegetables given to the organization are overripe or misshapen.

"The members think it's great," said Ken Hanna, Agriculture Club president. "They're 100 percent behind the project. It's a lot of extra work for people, but we get a lot of volunteers."

One of the most enthusiastic members is Jim Little, Sun City, who thought of the idea.

He has been gardening organically —

without the use of fertilizers or pesticides — since 1976. One of his first projects was an organic "Pick Your Own" garden in Tennessee.

"People claim organic food tastes different. Fertilizers and pesticides will change the flavor of plants and vegetables," Little said.

Little said the club hopes to begin organic gardening on their next crop.

"We have plans of planting sweet potatoes next," Hanna said.

The group should be providing potatoes to the Food Bank daily for two to three months, Little said.



Tom Tingle / Staff photographer
Erv Freeman (foreground) harvests cabbage with help from other members of the Sun City Agriculture Club.

Garden club tills the soil for food bank

By Connie Cone Sexton
 Staff writer

SUN CITY — Wilma Droege hunched over and began to rummage through the cabbage patch.

With a gentle tug, she pulled from the soil a large green ball of cabbage, its protective leaves flopping in the brisk afternoon wind.

"This is a real nice one," she said, presenting the flowering plant to a fellow gardener kneeling next to her.

Droege and other members of the Sun City Agriculture Club were harvesting cabbage they had been growing in the local community garden to donate to the Westside Food Bank. Several bushels of cabbage went from the garden to the food bank a few miles away.

Tuesday's harvest was the first of many reaping garden club members hope to make for the food bank.

A few months ago, the club set aside about a half acre to grow vegetables for the food bank. Besides cabbage, the garden contains green onions, broccoli, cauliflower and kohlrabi.

"We've got the soil tilled so we can plant for sweet potatoes," member Jim Woodard said. "They should come up just in time for Thanksgiving."

See GARDEN, Page 6.

GARDEN

From Page 1

Debbi Dorman, community relations director for the food bank, said the vegetables will go to good use.

"We put fresh vegetables to a variety of uses. They can go to the 21 senior centers we serve or they'll go into the emergency food baskets.

"It's great to get perfect produce. Many times, we get vegetables that are too ripe or misshapen, like carrots with many legs," she said, and laughed. "It's just wonderful to have freshly handled vegetables grown with loving care."

Sun City resident James Little, who has a plot of his own in the

community garden, came up with the idea for having a special plot for the food bank.

"It's just something we can do for the community," he said. "We have so many residents who use the community garden and I wanted to find a way to get them together on a project, as well."

Woodard said club members enjoy sharing their green thumbs in helping make the food bank garden a success.

"Many times, people buy seeds to plant in their own garden but only use so many," he said. "The leftovers can be used in this garden."

Extra D

Az. Republic Nov. 14, 1984

Agricultural club REPUBLIC still able to watch NOTICE its gardens grow

By THELMA HEATWOLE

Special for The Republic

SUN CITY — Members of the Sun City Agricultural Club will continue to have a site for their green-thumb endeavors.

A new 15-year lease took effect Oct. 1, allowing club members to use a 17-acre parcel on Sunland Drive behind Sunland Mortuary and Memorial Park, 15826 Del Webb Blvd.

Karl Shoemaker, club president, commended the Sunland, the Recreational Centers of Sun City Inc. and the Del E. Webb Development Co. for making the lease possible.

"This lease provides assurance for the continuation of the very successful gardening program initiated by the Webb company nearly 20 years ago," Shoemaker said.

He said that when the cemetery was sold two years ago, many residents gave up gardening because of the uncertainty of having a site to plant.

"The new lease solves that problem and assures newcomers to Sun City and other residents here the opportunity to join the agricultural club and obtain a 20-

40-foot garden plot," he said.

On a recent morning, several gardeners were at work in their individual garden lots. Gardeners arrive by car, pickup trucks, motorcycles, golf carts and bicycles.

One of the gardeners, Carleton Hutchins, said he started gardening in 1974, after moving here from Franklin, Neb.

Hutchins, who also is club vice president, said he got involved because he enjoyed being outdoors.

"Many people coming to Sun City from other parts of the country do not realize you can harvest vegetables every week of the year from the garden," Shoemaker said.

"The garden area offers Sun Citians the opportunity to grow vegetables the year round, enjoy watching them grow, savings on food bills and therapy in community with nature."

Shoemaker said the fall growing season begins in August with corn and beans planted to be harvested before the frost.

Then, lettuce, radishes, onions, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli and carrots are planted as the soil cools off in September and October.

These vegetables thrive in cooler winter temperatures, Shoemaker said.

As the ground warms in January and February, Shoemaker said, gardeners plant the spring garden, getting another crop of corn and

beans before it gets too hot. Such vegetables as tomatoes, eggplant, melons, squash and cucumbers produce through the summer months, he said.

"At some seasons of the year you can produce anything that you can produce anywhere in the United States except tropical and subtropical crops," Shoemaker said.

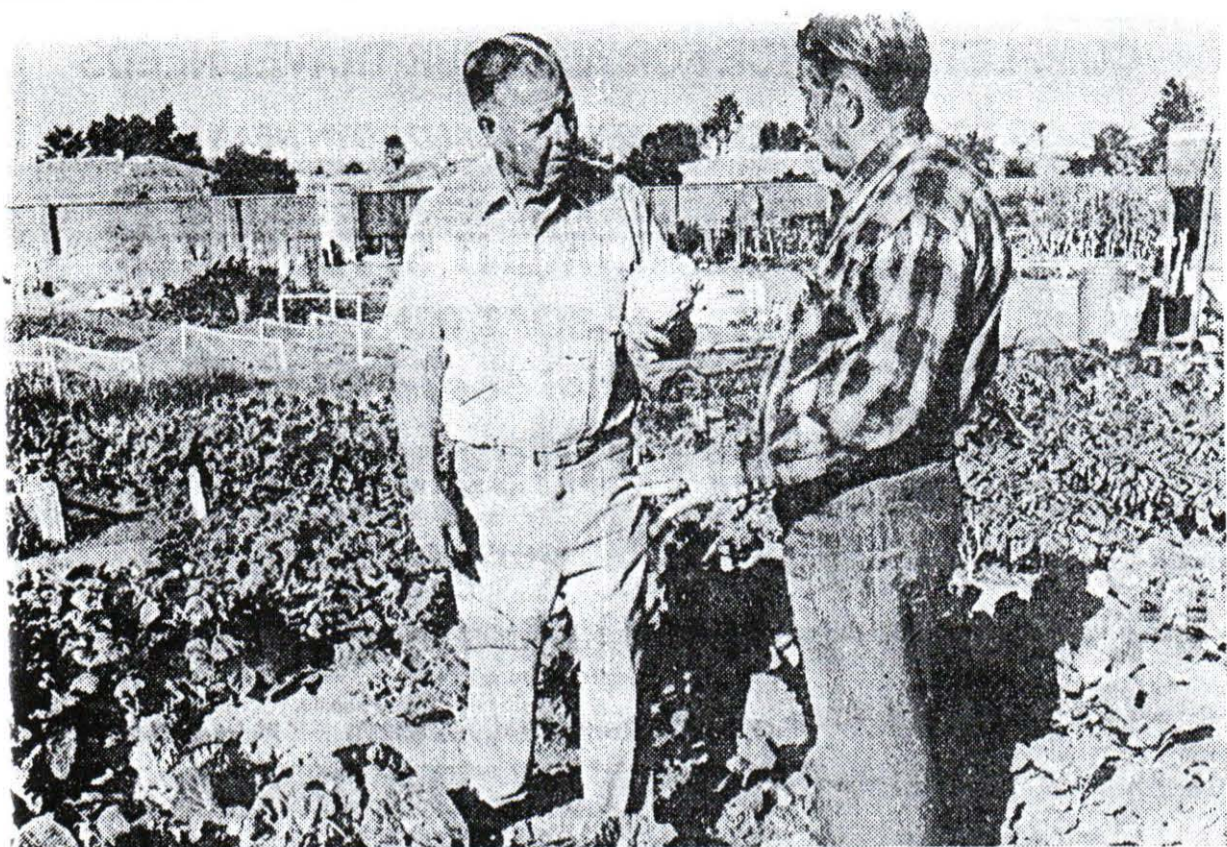
At club meetings, which are held the first Tuesday of each month, except in the three summer months, members are given information about approved agricultural practices and varieties of vegetables adapted to the Valley of the Sun's climate, he said.

There are 500 garden plots, and each plot holder must belong to the agricultural club and share in the cost of its operation.

Membership is \$2 per year. Members also pay \$15 annually for water, and there are individual expenses for seed and fertilizer. Two members with motorized cultivators plow the gardens for a fee.

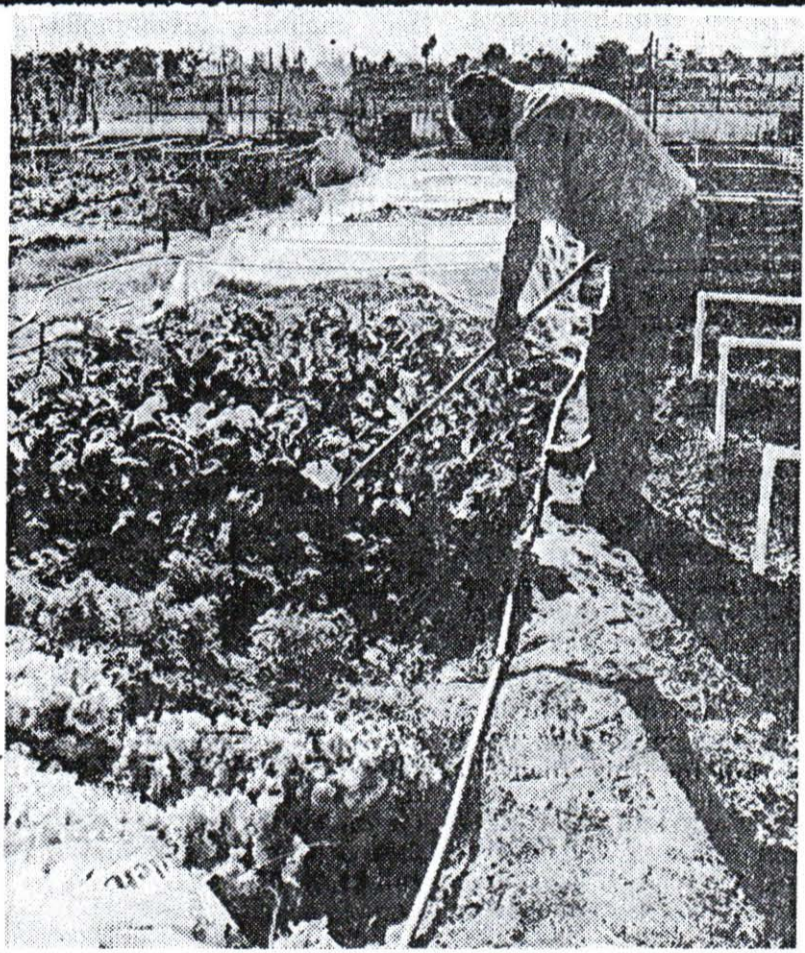
Those interested in joining the club may contact Rudolph Watson at 977-4106 or Duane Van Wegen at 974-9658.

OVER



Hutchins, left, and Shoemaker inspect Chinese cabbage in a member's plot. The

20-year-old club has about 600 members. A wide variety of crops are grown on the land.



Carleton Hutchins, vice president of the Sun City Agricultural Club, loosens soil around Swiss chard plants.



Roy Cosway/Republic

Karl Shoemaker, club president, tends a row of zucchini. Shoemaker said the

Valley's climate allows members to grow almost any vegetable some time

in the year. The project offers exercise as well as cutting retirees' food bills.

Green thumbs in Sun City wrest tasty output from club's garden

By THELMA HEATWOLE

SUN CITY — Gardening to the green-thumbed members of the Sun City Agricultural Club means more than the fresh vegetables they harvest.

Some of the 735 members like the quiet of their garden patches, the opportunity to be outdoors. Others enjoy the camaraderie or just the pleasure of seeing their garden grow.

Take John Sockett, a Canadian transplant.

It was after 4 in the afternoon and Sockett had finished a game of lawn bowling. With thoughts of the dinner hour ahead, he detoured to the club garden and his particular plot. He snipped the succulent dark leaves of chard for a batch for dinner.

"I love to see things grow," said the shirt-sleeved Sockett, a former Toronto policeman. "Right now in Canada they are having 90-mile gales and my place is under 10 feet of snow. It's hard for my Canadian friends to believe the Arizona weather. They're coming down this winter to find out. I'm going to have an influx of Canadians."

In a next-door garden plot, Carleton Cooley was planting radishes and carrots.

"I'm lucky if the vegetables don't cost as much as they do in the store," he muttered.

But that's beside the point.

"Gardening is something other than just passing the time to no good purpose. Besides, a big plus is that almost without exception garden-

ers are people you like to know," Cooley said.

Formerly with the Virginia State Health Department, Cooley says he harvests enough vegetables both to freeze and give away.

Norman A. Brow, from St. Louis, was picking a batch of tender young broccoli and placing it in a plastic bag.

"I had a garden back in Missouri and before that I had a World War II victory garden in Chicago. I like fresh vegetables and I like the idea of growing things," he said.

Brown displayed a patch of strawberries covered with netting to combat the birds.

"We gardeners trade back and forth. I just traded some Jerusalem artichokes for a large zucchini squash. The problem is that most things mature at the same time. I usually give some to my neighbors," he said.

There are 496 plots, each 20-by-40 feet, in the fenced 11-acre area provided by the Del E. Webb Development Co. Dues are \$1 per year per person and water is \$12 per plot per year.

Gardeners plant vegetables according to season and particular taste and preference. Winter gardens are being harvested and spring planting is under way. Gardens include strawberries, peas, beans, chard, asparagus, peanuts, squash and dill. Among the unusual is louff (a sponge) that can be seen drying on posts and fences. Some members plant flowers and already marigolds and snapdragons are adding

extra color to the garden compound.

Over at one plot, Marguerite Bulthus and her visiting sister, Mildred Robinson from Illinois, enjoyed the work in the sun.

"I had four dishpanful of green beans to freeze last year from the garden, and I made a lot of pickled beets," Mrs. Bulthus reported as she nimbly moved the hose to send the water down another row.

Her husband takes care of the cultivation. She does the watering chore. Some gardeners hire out the plowing.

At monthly club meetings, members hear visiting speakers. They receive tips on planting, compost, use of netting and agricultural gypsum. Gardeners new to Arizona get special advice.

"Plant down the side of furrows so the salt and alkali in the ground can leach out on the top of the furrow," says Jack Bess, a former employee of International Harvester.

His winter garden boasts fava beans, parsnips, kalorabe and Dutch flat cabbage. His spring garden will include different produce. Bess estimates he harvests \$350 to \$400 a year in produce.

The Orville Browns, from Moline, Ill., were working in their garden plot.

"You raise the stuff and then run around giving it away," Mrs. Brown said. "It's good occupation, and something we do together." OVER



Republic photo

Jack Bess, director of the Sun City Agricultural Club, expects to harvest \$350 to \$400 worth of produce this year.

Story and photos
By THELMA HEATWOLE

SUN CITY — It was a hot August morning and Jack Bess pushing the motor driven roto-tiller left a neat row of fresh turned earth behind.

Bess, the "official plower" of the Sun City Agricultural Club, turned off the motor to chat about his garden. Besides his own garden plot in the club's 15-acres, Bess shares in the work and fruits of the garden of a local dentist.

"There's butternut and Mediterranean squash, okra, green beans, bell peppers, peanuts and eggplants," Bess named a few of his garden varieties. "And, black-eyed peas, they're wonderful and do real well.

"And these Armenian cucumbers — there's not a burp in a carload. Use them in a salad or fry them. They are delicious. Make good bread and butter pickles too.

"Another thing we grow out here is Jerusalem artichokes," Bess continued. "They grow in the ground like potatoes. They're delicious, taste more like an Irish potato. We take them home, wash 'em, refrigerate. They just crackle when you bite in to them."

Bess, who had heart surgery last May, declares he can save by gardening. But he adds that the inexperienced gardener and "strangers to the Valley" should consult with the knowledgeable on how to prepare seed beds, sow seeds, irrigate.

"I'm a firm believer in Victory gardens," he said. "That's what we did during World War II. Gardens can again be classified Victory gardens. And, there's the satisfaction of having something you have grown yourself.

"We don't buy any vegetables except lettuce in between seasons," Bess continued. "We freeze okra, green beans (eight gallons this spring) carrots and squash. We'll freeze more this fall."

Bess stopped to pick two choice butternut squash. "Bake 'em whole," he said, "until they're soft, at 350 degree oven, about an hour. Split them and remove seeds, cut in squares, put in a casserole, top with butter and brown sugar and run them back in the oven a little longer."

The Sun Citian picked up a choice looking Armenian cucumber, but was chagrined. Something else had beat him to the prize.

"Probably a field mouse," he said. "And there may be a half dozen rabbits here. We try to get rid of them, and fight insects. The birds like to snip the little plants when they are short."

Some freshly sprouting gardens were covered with net to thwart the birds and rabbits. One gardener specializes in trapping gophers.

But despite the pests many Sun City gardeners grow bumper crops. One man last year gave 750 pounds of Mediterranean squash to the Salvation Army.

The club has 168 members and 32 on the list waiting for someone to give up his garden plot. Most plots are 20 by 40 feet in size. Sun City's builder,

Continued on Page K 2

OVER



Strat Nelson shows his prize Mediterranean squash



Tillers and plowers of Sun City enjoy their work

A garden potato

More about

Sun City's green thumbs set for fall

Continued from Page K-1
Del. Webb Development Co. provides the acreage where green thumbs can garden to their hearts content. Water and a small building for tools are furnished. Gardeners are busy these days putting in new crops and many will participate in the October fair here

"After April 1 and during summer months there is not much need to worry about vegetables. It's too hot," said Bess. "But butternut, Mediterranean, acorn, Italian Squash, okra and melons do well in the summer."

Strat Nelson, first vice chairman of the club, stopped watering his Jerusalem artichokes to explain about the club and 50-cent membership dues per year.

"There's a \$5 escrow fee when members get a plot of ground," he reported. "When they give up their garden they get the \$5 back if their plot is left clean."

Nelson explained that club members meet once a month to discuss and learn more about gardening — bugs, fertilizers, preparation of soil and to hear guest speakers.

"Gardening is fun and recreation," said Nelson. "Economically it probably pays off too. I don't know

about my radishes — they may cost more than in the store. But I don't think we bought any vegetables from November to April.

There are women gardeners too.

Mrs. Ada Cronin, club secretary, coasted into the garden compound on her bicycle to water her garden.

"I planted these radishes four days ago," she said, "and they've already popped through

the ground. It does give you such satisfaction. I love anything out-of-doors. I'm an avid sun-lover."

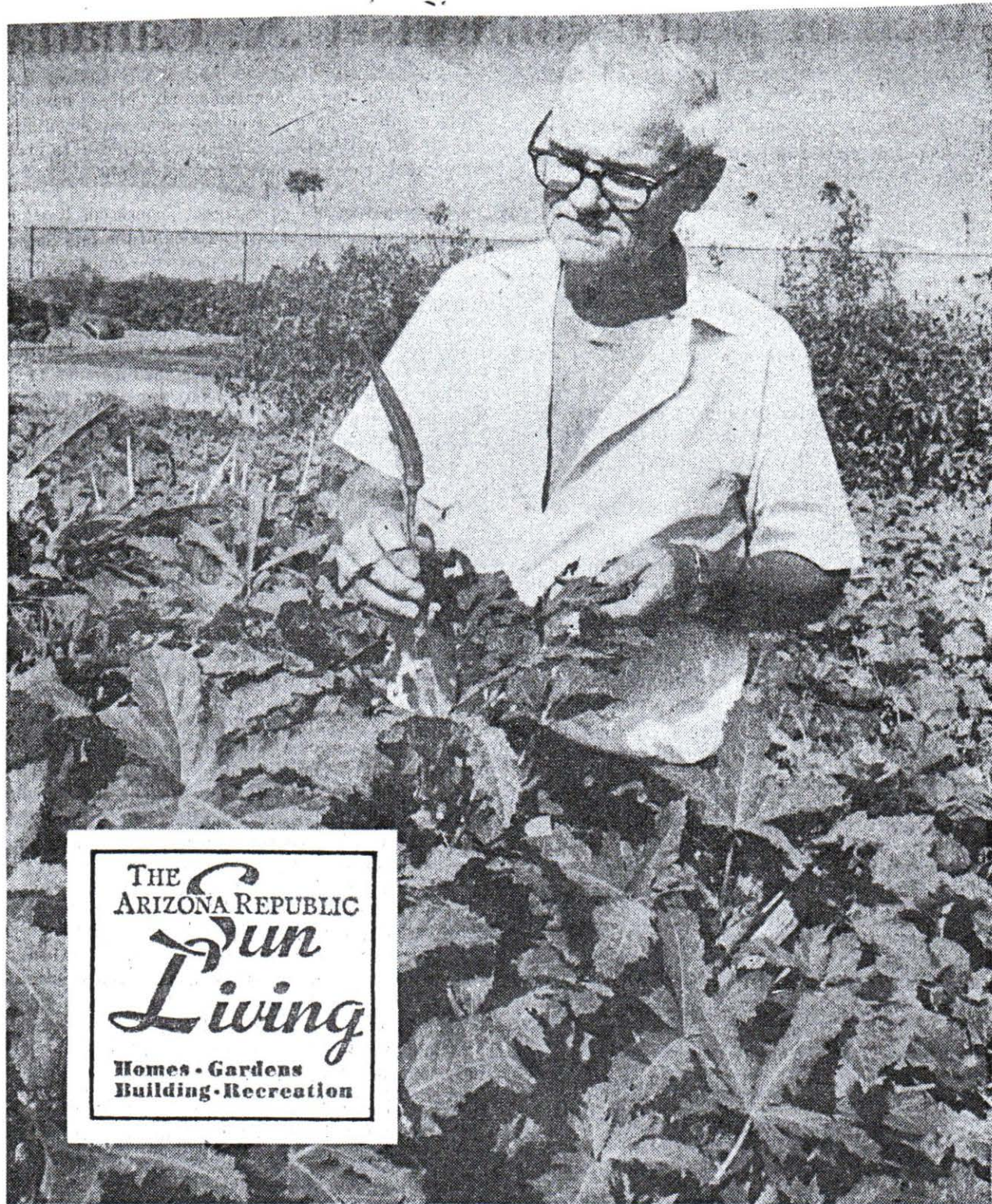
Reared on a farm in southern Idaho, she renewed her interest in gardening after moving here.

"Gardening gives me an activity that I can do at my own pace without having to get in on organized activity that I am not as enthused about," she said.

Mrs. Cronin said her summer garden burned up but added that fall gardens do well.

"Price of vegetables was not the reason I started gardening," she said, "but, it is very important now. I think I will have enough vegetables to store some in my freezer. It will certainly help our food budget."

Mrs. Cronin considers the garden acreage plot a great activity for many Sun Citizens.



THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC
Sun Living
Homes • Gardens
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Jack Bess declares his summer okra crop a success



Mrs. Ada Cronin checks row of bell peppers

They also Reap Youth

Growing Own Food Delights Sun Cityans

SUN CITY—"I feel better than when I was 16," confided Mrs. Martha Hoffman, 76, aglow with the fun and activity in the Sun City Agricultural Club's mass garden.

She was one of the 50 green thumb club members, who tend 40-by-40-foot garden patches provided each retiree with a yen to grow fresh vegetables.

Sometimes breakfasting in the garden with figs from her special tree, Mrs. Hoffman grows radishes, cucumbers, asparagus, chrysanthemums, green beans, parsnips, and more other vegetables than she can shake her hoe at. She had a garden at Pewaukee Lake, Wis., for 40 years before coming to Sun City.

"FOLKS ASKED ME why I came out here Thanksgiving Day," Mrs. Hoffman, treasurer of the club, said, snipping a piece of spicy mint and handing it to this reporter. "I told them that I thanked the Lord I could go digging."

Part of her patch, as were others, was covered with a fine cotton netting to keep birds from the tender young crops.

"It's the little finches," she said. "They're cute and sing to us, but they're little devils."

MRS. HOFFMAN and other gardeners, tending and harvesting their crops in the bright sunshine, agreed that the fellowship with other gardeners was a big part of the fun. They talk about the birds and bees and insect pests, exchange garden tips and vegetable cooking notes.

"There's no limit on what we talk about," said Charles Cox, vice chairman and another former Wisconsinite. "Nor is the time of day we garden. Some, who can't sleep, get out bright and early, and some garden in the evening."

THERE WERE people from all over the United States, a retired minister, an ex-druggist, an Iowa corn farmer, and women who like the out-of-doors. Some are city folks, who never gardened before. The mass garden, provided by the Del Webb Development Co., is on 107th Avenue.

"Gardening is ideal for those who do not participate in golf and bowling," said the Rev. J. A. Howard, a retired Presbyterian minister. "We love nature, and spend from one to four hours a day here. It's an avocation."

Stewart Cotter of Madison, Wis., was busy raking his garden patch.

"Gardening here is different than where I came from," he said. "Irrigation is something new, and we use a lot of fertilizer."

Club members pay close attention to the advice of the state agriculture agent. The club meets for potlucks, featuring home-grown vegetables, listens to local gardening lectures. Right now it is planning a display in a Sun City fair next month.

President Shirley Easley, holding a bunch of bumper turnips, gave his opinion: "Boy, do we have fun out here."

Minister Howard added, "and the vegetables help feed the entire neighborhood."



FOR THE BIRDS—Shirley Easley, agricultural club chairman, said his scarecrow, the only one in the garden, is to help ward off the birds, which threaten tender young crops. "We have fun out here," Easley said.

Republic Photo-Feature
By Thelma Heatwole

OVER



GREEN THUMBER—Stewart Cotter, formerly of Madison, Wis., found gardening in Arizona much different than in his home state. Irrigation was a completely new gardening practice to him. *AZ. REPUBLIC 11-30-67*



TALL CORN — Allyson Zachary of Thousand Oaks, Calif., shows a clump of sweet potatoes

from the garden patch of her grandparents, the A. H. Zacharys, ardent gardeners of Sun City.

AS REPUBLIC PHX Thursday NOV. 30, 1967

OVER

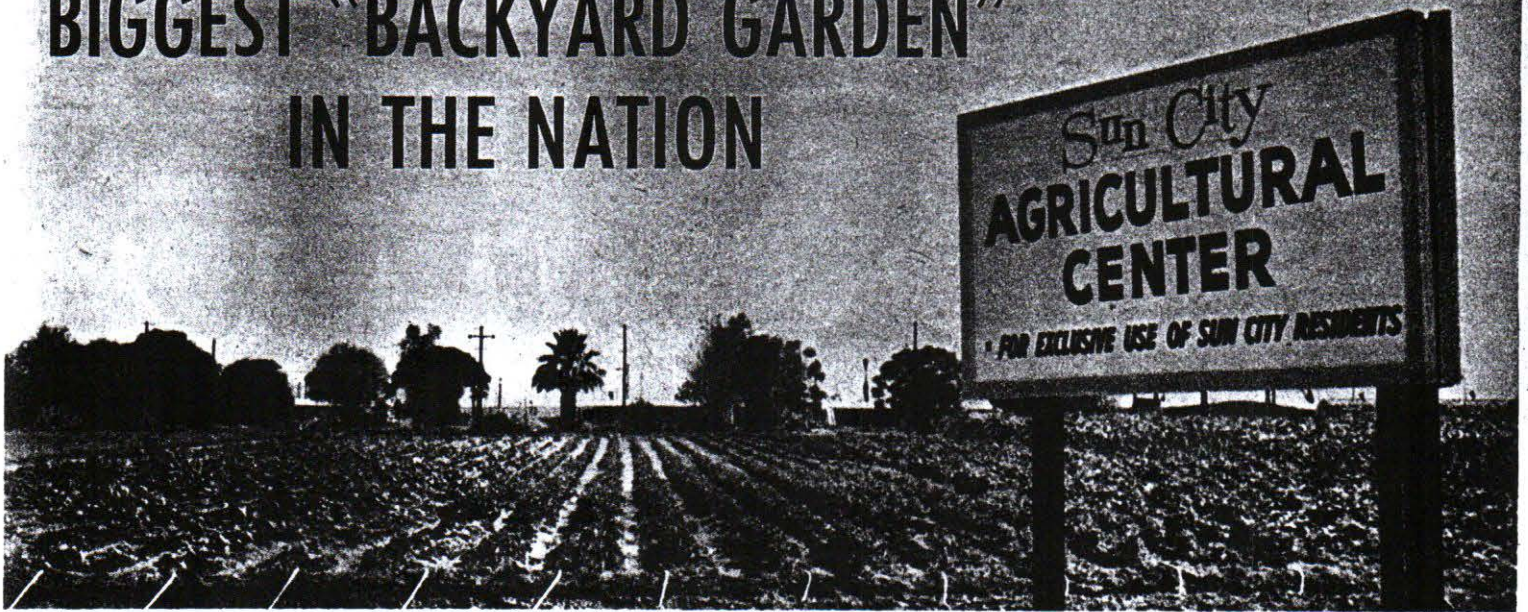


GARDEN BOUNTY — Fred Geis, Iowa; Charles Cox, Wisconsin, and Charlie Green, Pennsylvania, tried their hand (most successfully) at growing vegetables in individual patches in Sun City garden on 107th Avenue.



SOME RADISHES—Mrs. A. H. Zachary, agricultural club secretary, is a garden fan. She'd rather garden in Arizona sunshine than play bridge or attend other Sun City social functions.

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ARIZONA DAYS AND WAYS MAGAZINE, NOVEMBER 13, 1960



JULY 7, 1970

THE AGRICULTURAL CLUB

RECOLLECTIONS

JULY - 1970

In 1960

The Del E. Webb Development Company advertised the fact that a garden area was available for Sun Citians interested in gardening. Brochures and newspaper advertising stated that the corn grew taller, the squash bigger and everything grew faster and better at Sun City. All the equipment, water and advice they could need was at their service. This, then, was the beginning of the Sun City Agricultural Club in 1960. The Del E. Webb Development Co. management in Sun City handled everything. They contacted Mr. H.B. Atha, general manager of Boswell Co., who in turn contacted Mr. D.H. Pickett at the Boswell Co. in Litchfield. Mr. Pickett was a very knowledgeable gentleman having arrived in Arizona in 1917 and who has just completed 40 years of service with the Boswell Co. It became his task to get a garden started for The Del E. Webb Development Co. Mr. Bill Barbee, who was in charge of all machinery at The Boswell Co., arranged for the plowing of the garden area described as being $\frac{1}{4}$ mile East of Highway House ^{now Kings Sun} on Grand Avenue. With the help of the boys at the ranch, Mr. Pickett did the furrowing and planting of all seeds. Almost all seeds were planted by machinery and each time a different seed was to be planted, the machinery had to be adjusted to size. Peas, beans, corn, okra, etc were planted in late Spring. Squash, cucumbers and melons were planted by hand. Commercial type of irrigation was employed by Mr. Pickett with water coming directly from the pump into the irrigation ditch. After setting up this entire garden plan, the vegetables began to grow and flourish. Mr. Pickett retired from the project and Sun Citians interested in gardening, took over the hosing, watering and care. It has been stated they did a wonderful job in spite of the hot sun. The Del E. Webb Development Co. had a sign erected at the site facing Grand Ave. which read: SUN CITY AGRICULTURAL CENTER *** FOR EXCLUSIVE USE OF SUN CITY RESIDENTS. This sign was moved later to the second garden site. A large water storage tank filled by a deep well pump adjacent thereto and belonging to the Boswell Co., furnished the water for some nearby irrigating, a Boswell machine shop, plus the garden. Pictures were taken of maturing vegetables for brochures and newspaper advertising and a $\frac{1}{2}$ hour length movie was made and later shown to Sun Citians. Residents of Sun City were invited to go to the garden and help themselves to the vegetables. A nearby farmer was the recipient of the corn stalks which he fed to his hogs. A meeting was held at Community Center to get various clubs started and volunteer chairmen were assigned. Mr. George Klein volunteered for the Agricultural Club and served during 1960 and 1961. Early in 1961, Mr. Klein rented a large Ford tractor and plowed up the entire garden area. He devised the plan to have 30 x 30 foot plots with paths between and a water line was run from the storage tank along the North edge with four hydrants. Twenty plots were made available. That Spring interested gardeners planted their own vegetables. Meetings were very informal and were held at the garden while enjoying a sandwich or picnic lunch. By 1962, clubs had to be organized and within the confines of Sun City.

As officially organized clubs, they would be recognized by the Del E. Webb Development Co. and could make requests when needs arose. Mr. Thomas Austin, who was activities Coordinator for the Del E. Webb Development Co., was influential in working out details of club activities and organizational efforts at Community Center. And so the first official meeting was held on Feb. 13, 1962. Officers were: Mr. Argyle Knapp, chairman; Mr. Cecil Williams, vice chairman; Mr. Thomas Goggin, secretary; and Mr. Tony Caccarelli, treasurer. Others present were: Martha Hoffman and her sister, Elizabeth Turlington and Jake Strohmaier

A Mr. Seik from the Extension Service in Tempe, talked to members on gardening in Arizona. More pictures were taken at the garden and new plots assigned. In the Spring of 1962, Mr. Knapp, chairman, was able to obtain 1 1/2 tons of gypsum at \$15.00 a ton to spread over the entire garden area before plowing was done. On April 17, 1962, Mr. Knapp invited all members to a dinner at his home. In June, the first pot luck dinner was held at Town Hall on Peoria Ave. The pot luck dinners were held quarterly and were a huge success until they became burdensome and were discontinued some three years later. A police car would be parked quite frequently under a big tree at the garden to discourage vegetable pilfering. A story related by Martha Hoffman covers an incident at the garden when one day she arrived there to find a big Cadillac parked nearby and a man busily picking corn in the garden. When questioned, he replied a Mr. Smith said he could pick all he wanted. Martha gave him a piece of her mind realizing the Mr. Smith story a fabrication and the man took off very hurriedly---corn and all. Martha was unable to get the car license number. Mr. Knapp served for 2 terms as chairman, leaving office in the Fall of 1963. Mr. Clarence Schulze served from then until the Fall of 1964. By 1964 the garden had expanded to its fullest allotted area and 44 plots were available and all were assigned. The water line was extended via a lateral southward thru the center of the garden and garden hose could be attached for watering. The first recorded Minutes in Book no. I and in club possession, are dated March 3, 1964. On April 7, 1964 recorded Minutes stated that meetings would be held the 1st. Tuesday of each month at Town Hall. The entry is under the caption, 'Sun City Agricultural Club'. At the June meeting that year, summer recess was voted in for June, July and August. Meetings reconvened the 1st Tuesday in September. Mr. Thomas Goggin took the chairmanship in Oct. of 1964. It was he who chairmanned the 1st writing of the By-Laws for the Club. The committee followed a form obtained from a book which Mr. Goggin's son acquired from the Veteran's Administration and thus evolved the 1st. draft of By-Laws. The process of amending them continued from Dec. 1964 until March 1965 when they were finally approved by the Del E. Webb Development Co. Of the very few copies typed for the Club by Mrs. Dolly Jenkins in Sun City on onion-skin paper, there are two or three copies still in existence. The ^{Sun City} Agricultural Club garden had to be moved from the original site on Grand Ave. to a new site located South of Sunland cemetery. The move began early in 1965 and continued until mid-year.

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(plots assigned on Feb 2, 1965)

Roadways and double faucet hydrants were planned for the 40 x 40 foot plots. Before McClelland's nursery was to plow the area, \$50.00 worth of manure was bought by the club. This wasn't enough for the area, so the members consented to borrow \$50.00 from Col. Elliott who volunteered the sum and additional manure was bought. The \$50.00 was repaid later from an assessment of 50 cents voted by the members in addition to the regular \$1.00 dues. This was done in Feb. 1965 as noted in the Minutes book. Mr. Knapp's son drew the plans for the sanitation system for the tool house which the Del E. Webb Development Co. consented to construct. The tool house was built in the south central section of the garden in the Spring of 1965. Mr. J.S. Shafer was elected to the chairmanship in Nov. 1965. In December 1966 after two postponements to elect new officers, there was still no election held and a suggestion was made that the present officers serve another year which they did. At the Dec. 1967 meeting, Mr. Shirley Easley presided as newly elected chairman. On Nov. 5, 1968, Mr. J.W. Fulton took office as chairman. With the Sun City building expansion came another move for the gardeners. A new site for the garden plots was selected and fenced by the Del E. Webb Development Co. This was located West of the cemetery. ^{The gate at the north} The area was manured and plowed and plotted by the Del E. Webb Development Co. and Boswell Co. Moving took place after May 6, 1969. The tool house was moved in the Fall to this garden location and all 72 plots were assigned. A waiting list was started. Mr. H.E. Janke took office as chairman on Nov. 4, 1969. By April 4, 1970, a fenced area South of the present garden and adjacent thereto, was developed in the same manner as the previous garden to accommodate the growing membership. Plots were manured and graded to a 20 x 40 foot size with retaining walls. Three foot paths were planned as before and the one big improvement over the plots to the North was the excellent placement of water stand pipes which would eliminate accidental breaks because of the proximity of pipes to the roadway. With this development, the water supply was converted from irrigation water to city water and for the first time was now safe for drinking. New Rules and Regulations were in operation. However, this was not the first time for rules, for 'Housekeeping' rules were read and accepted Mar. 3, 1964 when the chairman spoke at a meeting about keeping each plot clean also the walk way between plots. Chairman H.E. Janke saw the need for new By-Laws and a revisions committee was appointed in March, 1970. At the May 5, 1970 meeting, the proposed changes were read in part and with much pro and con, it was moved that copies be printed and distributed to the members. Following this occurrence came the directives from the Sun City Community Association that as a result of the consolidation of facilities under the Sun City Community Association on Dec. 11, 1968, it was necessary for the operations of the Sun City Agricultural Club to be brought into agreement with the Articles of Incorporation and the Club Rules and Regulations of the Sun City Community Association and so a completely new set of By-Laws had to be offered. A special meeting was held on July 7, 1970 for the adoption of these new and very complete By-Laws and Garden

Operating Rules. It is noteworthy to state that the Club has been asked from time to time to display the garden produce at local country fairs and special functions. The latest display was shown at the opening of Lakeview Center on Jan, 3 and 4, 1970.

So as not to conflict with the newspaper advertising of 1960, the produce was indeed taller and bigger in Sun City when the public viewed one item in particular----- a 51 pound banana squash!

Before the last chapter is written, it is proper and fitting that we enjoy some wit. Taken from the Minutes Book no. I are the following: Sept. 1st. 1964 --- Quote: " All officers absent except secretary" .

Another one dated Sept. 7, 1965 ---- quote: "Some discussion on lack of production of the Spring gardens. Some blamed the water, some the pilfering, some the rodents. No one blamed the lack of work ".

Compiled by the secretary, Claire N. Wheadon, for the Club's 10 th Anniversary.

Dated: July 7, 1970.