

Sun City's first and only movie theater – the ALCO *Signs of Sun City's Past by Ed Allen*

By 1971, Sun City's population had grown to more than 18,000, and a 4th shopping center was started – the La Ronde Center. Like the streets around it, the center was circular with Del Webb Blvd slicing through the middle. Surveys of residents had showed a desire for a local movie theater, and this center would include one – the ALCO.

DEVCO owned the building but leased the theater and parking spaces to a group of Phoenix-area investors. The 450-seat theater opened Jan. 12, 1972 with the film "Song of Norway."



While the movie theater had been widely anticipated, it was lightly patronized. DEVCO tried to help keep it going by reducing the leasing fees, but the theater struggled.

A deal was worked out with the Boswell Memorial Hospital Auxiliary to sell books of tickets at a discount to help build attendance, as well as raise funds for the medical center. In 1978, sales through the Auxiliary accounted for more than 60% of the theater's revenues but nowhere near enough to achieve profitability.

Along the way the theater tried to broaden its appeal by offering some "R" and "X-rated" films, but those were even less popular. A return to the "golden oldies" like "Gone with the Wind" spurred attendance for awhile, but the popularity of TV – and movies on TV for free – worked against the ALCO.

As a result, the investing group announced plans to close the theater at the end of their lease. This would be to DEVCO's advantage as they had been leasing the space for a much lower rate than could be obtained from a commercial tenant. Sun City Town Meeting Association members strongly protested the closure, and Meeker gave them the opportunity to show their support by providing a written promise to sell the number of tickets required for the theater to break-even. They had the hospital auxiliary's support, and only needed to marshal their members to add to the number of tickets sold to meet that goal.



The theater stayed alive and in subsequent years was managed for a time by Blair Theatres, and then by United Artists Theatres. Oddly enough, the greatest success of the Alco Theater would come as a place to host community meetings. While residents didn't turn out in great numbers for movies, they filled the theater for public meetings of SCHOA, the Sun City Taxpayers, and other civic organizations. Meetings to discuss Incorporation filled the theater to overflowing. Church groups used the theater until their memberships grew to the point they could build their own facilities.

But movie attendance continued to decline. An offer to turn the ALCO into a live theater fell through, and its last film, the police thriller "Q&A" was shown Feb. 4, 1990. Fewer than 40 people paid the \$2.50 to attend.

The building was soon converted to other commercial uses. The entire center was given a new façade a few years ago, but the curbside planter and two thin, twin pillars remind us of the ALCO's location on the west side of the center. Today, the building is part of the Maxwell Group clinic and offices.

Re: Just connecting

From: Jerry Svensen (jersven4@gmail.com)
To: edsonallen@yahoo.com
Date: Tuesday, November 10, 2020, 9:28 PM MST

Ed, I've learned more from you about ALCO Theater than I ever knew when employed by Webb. I'm surprised that John Meeker didn't send the PR dept. over there periodically at unspecified times to give out door prizes. Residents loved such occasions. They'd have attended more consistently in hopes of being there at the right time. I'm certain that we'd have come up with other promotional ideas to boost attendance.

I treasure the two decades of work in Sun City from late 1961 when the population couldn't have been more than 3,500 to completion of the community with a population of over 47,000. Working with my fellow employees and particularly with individual residents and groups was truly a pleasure. Together we built what today continues to be a Nationally Famous Resort Retirement Community. I was blessed to play a highly gratifying role in the creation of Sun City, Arizona.

Thanks, Ed.
Jerry

On 11/10/2020 3:44 PM, Edson Allen wrote:

OK ... here's the story I've pieced together. ED

You never fully appreciate what you have until it is gone. Toilet paper is a good example.

On Tuesday, November 10, 2020, 4:33:17 PM MST, jersven4 <jersven4@gmail.com> wrote:

Ed, just to let you know, message received. Looking forward to the read.
Thanks
Jerry

Sent from my T-Mobile 4G LTE Device

----- Original message -----

From: Edson Allen <edsonallen@yahoo.com>
Date: 11/10/20 3:53 PM (GMT-07:00)
To: Jerry Svensen <jersven4@gmail.com>
Subject: Just connecting

Hi Jerry! Tried contacting you a couple of days ago, but the emails came back as undeliverable. Turns out I was using your previous cox.net address from older emails.

Thinking you might have changed addresses, I tried calling you. 623-937-7378 The phone rang and rang ad rang, and finally told me that messages could not be left at this



Now Maxwell Group

REPUBLIC CITY
Thu., Feb. 16, '78 ○ The Arizona Republic

Theater closure raises ire

The planned closing of the Alco Theater, after seven years of showing movies in Sun City, has raised the ire of at least one group of Sun City citizens.

Nat Jampel, a spokesman for the Sun City Town Meeting Association, said this week his group is circulating petitions in hopes of keeping the theater open.

The theater, located in the La Ronde Centre, is scheduled to close June 1 when its lease with the Del E. Webb Development Co. expires.

Ed Metzgar, a retiree who manages the theater on the side, said this week he would like to keep open the theater, which in addition to showing movies has been used for civic and church meetings. "It is definitely an important part of the community," he said, "but it doesn't make enough money to satisfy Del Webb."

THE DEVELOPMENT COMPANY has been renting the theater building at a reduced rate, according to Dr. John Aiello, holder of the lease, but now wants a more commercial tenant in the building.

"Everyone is making a mountain out of a molehill here," Aiello said Wednesday. "The fact is Del Webb owns the building and has the right to decide who's in and who's out. That's free enterprise. It doesn't bother me. I would like to see the theater continue but the fact is the people of Sun City have not supported it."

Jampel, who says his group has collected about 3,000 signatures on petition to support the theater, said that the

Alco is a unique operation in a unique setting.

"THIS CITY IS A monument to the late Del Webb," Jampel said. "He understood older people and created Sun City for their comfort, convenience and safety. The Alco is part of that and should not be closed because the development company wants another dollar or two per square foot. It's a matter again of money against people."

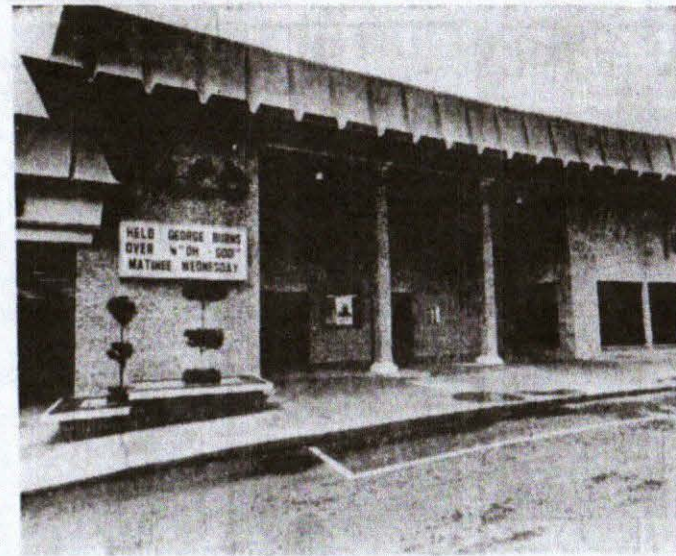
Jampel also charged that Alco closure will be a result of "terrible increases" in rent Del Webb is asking of businesses in the area now that the homes in the first phases of Sun City have been sold. "They want to get every nickle they can out of the storekeepers," he said.

Joe Bulkeley, Del Webb's vice president in charge of commercial leasing, declined to comment on the Alco, other than to confirm the June 1 closing, because John Meeker, head of the company, plans to speak on the subject Feb. 22.

"WE DON'T WANT to steal his thunder," Bulkeley said.

Dr. Aiello, who said he felt as if he's been caught in the middle between the citizens' protests and the theater's economic realities, summed up his comments by saying "Del Webb has been fair with me yet a city that size should have a theater. It would be ideal if one of the theater chains would take it over so it could get the better pictures but none of them have wanted it because the fact is that most of the people who go to movies are under 35 years old."

MIKE PETRYNI



Republic photo

The Alco Theater in Sun City

The Troc is no more

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — The Troc, where for years teen-age kids gawked at the wonders of the female anatomy and old men came in out of the cold, is closing — the victim of automated pornography.

It's been bought by a Chinese restaurateur, Stephen Pang, who plans to restore it to its original Victorian splendor, and then reopen it as a

JUMBO SHRIMP SPECIAL

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Cinema Name

Alco Theatre



2003 Photo from the Adam Martin collection.

14668 N Del Webb Blvd
Sun City AZ 85351

CLOSED

Record #7936

Opened: **January 12, 1972**
Closed: **February 4, 1990**
Current Use: **Hospital**
Demolished:

Capacity: **400 seats**
Architect(s):
Architectural Style(s):
National Register:
Current Organ: **none**

Also Known As:

Previously operated by: **Blair Theatres, United Artists Theatres**

An article in the 1/12/1972 edition of the Arizona Republic reported that "Song of Norway" opened "the new Alco Theater in the La Ronde Shopping Center, Sun City, today..."

A number of articles in the Arizona Republic from early 1978 discussed plans for this theatre to close when its lease was up on 6/1/1978 as it was not supported by the residents of the surrounding Del Webb retirement community.

Blair Theatres operated this location in the 80s before selling it to United Artists.

The theater was used for town meetings for a number of years after and in 1990 a deal was rejected to turn it into a live theater. It has since been turned into a series of medical offices.

Ticket-sales pledge is sought to keep Sun City theater open

By JOHN HARRIGAN

SUN CITY — Town Meeting Association members who have protested the closure of Alco Theater were told Thursday they must promise written support to keep the action alive.

John W. Meeker, president of Del E. Webb Development Company (DEVCO), told Rotary Club members here Wednesday the company will continue to lease space to the theater at cost if the association would promise in writing to sell movie tickets for the hospital auxiliary.

Boswell Memorial Hospital auxiliary has helped support the theater and itself by selling tickets, but sales have dropped from 2,575 in 1975 to 2,000 in 1977. Auxiliary sales account

for more than 60 percent of the theater's revenue.

Meeker warned that the theater wasn't the only endangered species.

"The bus system and women's softball, both underwritten by DEVCO, are also on the endangered species list that are going to require community support."

Dr. John Aiello, the theater lessee said last week that the development company had been renting out the theater building at a reduced rate and now wanted a more commercial tenant. The theater has been scheduled to close upon expiration of its lease with the Webb company June 1.

Aiello could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Meeker said Webb had received many petitions and letters bemoaning DEVCO's closing of Alco.

"For the record, DEVCO is not closing Alco. The lessee, Dr. Aiello, up until now has given us every indication that he could no longer endure the losses," Meeker said.

Meeker claimed Webb was currently renting at a breakeven figure of \$3.86 a square foot per year. He also noted that Webb received no rent from Aiello from October 1976 through May 1977.

He said the majority of residents have simply given up on movies and watch television. The minority here who attend movies go to see only those that are not featuring sex, pornography, or violence, he said.

"We felt it could no longer succeed as a commercial operation," Meeker said, but added that DEVCO would keep it open if TMA would make its commitment.

Association treasurer Nat Jampel said the association would not make a decision on the matter until its March 13 meeting.

Jampel said he doubted that the current rent of about \$2,000 a month, was really a breakeven figure.

"I don't care if only 100 people go to that theater. The point is that this something promised to us by the late Mr. (Del) Webb as part of the recreational complex," Jampel said. The present Webb administration, he claimed, has "no head, no heart, no consciences. They're only out for a buck," he said.

3 waken occasionally after hatchet assault

Central Arizona Bureau

Three members of a Coolidge family who were clubbed in the head early Wednesday with the blunt edge of a hatchet drifted in and out of consciousness Thursday while receiving treatment at the University of Arizona Medical Center in Tucson.

Dicky Ray Barnes, 20, and his brother, Terry Lee, 14, were listed in guarded condition. A sister, Neta, 11, was reported in serious condition.

The youngsters' father, Olf Dempsey Barnes, 48, has been charged with three counts of assault

The jailer said an order has been posted in the complex restricting Barnes from all visitors except his attorney. The jailer said he does not know whether the order was posted by law enforcement officials or by the suspect's attorney.

Barnes is serving five years probation on a plea-bargained aggravated assault charge in 1974 that was reduced from assault with intent to commit rape and lewd and lascivious acts.

That charge stemmed from an incident involving another of Barnes' daughters, court records show.

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Theater opens

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“Song of Norway,” the film musical, will open the new Alco Theater in the La Ronde Shopping Center, Sun City, today with continuous performances beginning at 1 p.m.

nd

General manager of Alco Theaters is Frank Langley; house managers at Sun City will be John Pyrtle (one of the partners) who has had over 20 years experience in sound and projection equipment; and James Langley who will be in charge of service. Other members of the Alco organization are Dr. John S. Aiello and attorney Daniel Cracchiolo.

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Arizona Republic January 12, 1972

Clipped By:



tericson
Mon, Nov 9, 2020

**Pyrtle Partner
in Sun City theater**

John Pyrtle has retired after 17 years with the RCA service department to become a partner in the Alco Theater to be opened in La-Ronde Shopping Center at Sun City. Pyrtle will be in charge also of installations for Alco, a fully automated system, Frank J. Langley announced.



Pyrtle



Hadley

Re: Alco Theater

From: Benjamin Roloff (bensuncity@gmail.com)

To: edsonallen@yahoo.com

Date: Monday, November 9, 2020, 9:26 AM MST

Hi Edson,

I apologize for the delay in responding, but after the election last Tuesday I consciously tried to detach from all the noise of the outside world for a week, which included TV, radio, Internet, etc. It was a nice break with movies, books, and music substituted. I'm back!

I do not know as much as I would like about the ALCO theater. Do we not have a 3 ring binder or two at the museum that contains all the SCAHS newsletters?

Anyway, I would go with the earlier date for sure as to the start. I know we have pictures of the groundbreaking for the La Ronde Center, and I think the group that was leasing the theater and parking spaces were represented. For some reason, I know that the theater was widely anticipated but lightly patronized. I recall that the very first movie to show there was "Song of Norway." For some reason, the first information I found on the theater led me to believe the location was on the east side of Del Webb Blvd. and I clung to that idea for several years. It was my assumption that the space was where Lou's "Tivoli Gardens" was operating back in the mid-90's when we first explored Sun City as a potential retirement home. In the last 3 years I found some short references to correct that idea but led me to another false assumption. I falsely concluded the location as to where the original "Lucky" (?) grocery store was located. (BPD's current site.) I remember asking Don Tuff's about that a couple of years ago, and he said, "No way!" He told me the theater was down on the other end of the center and the most SW lease space. I think that site was a furniture store when we moved here in '97. Maybe "Albin's"? You might check with Don tomorrow before or after the zoom meeting?

Yes, I know that the theater really struggled with profitability early, and I recall somewhere reading about DEVCO kind of helping them out as a community service. (reduce lease numbers for both interior space and for parking spaces.) Yes, I know about the deal cut between the Boswell Hospital Auxiliary and the ALCO owner to sell books of tickets and the arrangement had some initial success. However, even that was not sufficient to reach profitability and the original lessor gave up the lease. As I recall, two residents formed a partnership with an investor from Phoenix to take over the lease. They, too, renewed the agreement with the Boswell Auxiliary to sell books of tickets, and tried through news releases to coax residents into purchasing them in larger numbers than they had when working with the previous tenant. I don't know if the Auxiliary wearied to this fund raising activity, but I do know the results were even less successful than past efforts. The new tenants also vocally complained of the cost of the monthly lease per sq. ft. and for the required payment to use parking spaces.

One of the great successes of the ALCO was in hosting community meetings in a nice setting with its seating for 500-600 guests. During the 70's and 80's the number of meetings with large attendance by residents was staggering compared to today. It was not only meetings of organizations like SCHOA or the Sun City Taxpayers but also groups like the Sun City Retirement Community Association, Town Meeting Association, Incorporation groups, DEVCO, church groups, (services for churches before their buildings were finished etc.) who made pretty much constant use of the facility. I have never found any reference as to whether those groups paid for the use of the auditorium.

Back to the second group who held the lease. They promised to have one of the owners at the theater for each movie night to greet customers, answer questions, listen to concerns etc. The new group changed movie distribution companies and promised a wider variety of films including some "R" and maybe even an "X" rated film on occasion. However, to head off potential problems with concern over "edgy" offering, the new operators offered an instant refund to any patron who walked out because they were offended by either audio or visual transmission.

Ben

p.s. The AZ State History Archives began a "soft" opening about five weeks ago. They now allow me, and other register researchers, to make an appointment once per week to look at materials for a four hour block of time. I had a time slot last Friday and am scheduled again this Friday. The last three trips down there I was the only one in the reading room other than 3-4 librarians/archivists who were working. The reading room is the size of a small basketball gymnasium. Talk about socially distanced! Anyway, I have attached a copy of the notes I took on Friday, as they cover January 1 to April 1 of 1979 issues of the "Sun Citizen." A lot of the news items concerned building in Sun City West, the creation of PORA etc. I thought you would likely be interested so my notes are attached.

On Thu, Nov 5, 2020 at 1:45 PM Edson Allen <edsonallen@yahoo.com> wrote:

Greetings, Ben! Do you have any info in your files on the Alco Movie Theater that was in the LaRonde Center in the '70s and '80s? I thought I'd do an article on it for my "Sigs of the Past" page in our monthly ACORN here at Royal Oaks, but can not find the article I did years ago for a SCAHS newsletter.

I did find some conflicting notes, however. Meeker in his report of developments by year, claimed it opened with the center in 1971. I have another source that shows 1974. I believe its final showing was May 31, 1990.

I recall there was quite a story about how interest was drummed up in having a movie theater, but the details are all in the lost article. Don't find anything on our website. Also discovered while working on the hospital history that at one point a deal was worked out so

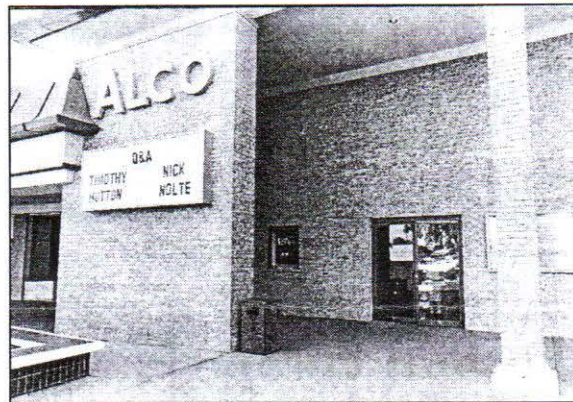
Before we give you the answers to the quiz in our Spring Newsletter, here's a new search for little known facts about our past. Be the first to call in the correct answer to the Historical Society at 623-974-2568, and you'll receive a set of 26 "*Memories of the Sun Cities.*" Call at any time of the day, as the answering machine will record your answer and tell us when you called. As before, the answers will be on display at the Society.

- 1) *What were the original names of the first three Sun City recreation centers — the ones we now call Oakmont, Fairview, and Mountain View?*
- 2) *What three things had been planned for the vacant land located between the former Sundome and the former Crestview/Vacation Headquarters building?*

Now for the answers to the last quiz:

The first question asked about Sun City's movie theater. It was named the **Alco**, and opened in 1974 in the LaRonde Center in the building that now houses the Amish Furniture Store. Its final showing, on May 31, 1990, was the police thriller "Q&A," starring Timothy Hutton and Nick Nolte. Fewer than 40 people were in attendance in the 437-seat theater.

Tickets cost \$2.50!



Our second question asked about the largest model home offered in Sun City West. It was the 4,580-sq. ft. English manor style **Tudor**, with a base price of \$395,000. It included a 900-sq. ft. "Great Room," a library, maid's quarters, butler's pantry, and an exercise room off the master bath.

Among the fine interior touches were a spiral staircase leading to a study loft, Roman columns lining the entry to the living area, arched doorways throughout, and a tiled garage floor. Outside security shutters could be programmed to close when the sun struck them. The deluxe features drove the price to more than \$500,000.

John Meeker, president of DEVCO, hoped that offering larger luxury homes would attract the affluent that were moving into Scottsdale. The Tudor, and a slightly smaller Spanish-style **Monterrey**, drew 25,000 lookers in the first three weeks — but no buyers. The two new luxury models were announced just as interest rates skyrocketed, and they are the only two of their kind in Sun City West.

The Search for Floyd Johnson's Museum

We wish we had met Floyd Johnson when he lived in Sun City! Like many who move here, Floyd had an intriguing background. But he had something more, a strong drive to start a museum.

Floyd loved the west. After returning from World War I, he worked as a game warden in Colorado and New Mexico. One time, he was assigned as an undercover agent in Louisiana, and brought a band of poachers to justice. His passion, however, was preserving the old west, and wherever he went, he collected items of historical value. Eventually, he moved to Sun City.

He wanted a permanent home for his collection, and he began to look for an old homestead to convert to a museum. Harvey Finks, a local attorney, recalls traveling throughout the state with Floyd, looking for the right location. He established a non-profit, tax-exempt entity known as the Johnson Historical Museum of the Southwest. Unfortunately, Floyd died in 1978 before finding the right location. Having no family, he directed that his estate be used to create the museum he had so hoped for.

Mr. Finks served as corporate secretary and continued the search on behalf of Floyd's estate. Events unfolding in the southeast corner of the estate would soon lead to the opportunity that Floyd Johnson had been searching for.

Let's step back to 1884, when a Texan by the name of John Slaughter bought a Spanish land grant near Douglas consisting of some 80,000 acres, most of which lay in Mexico. It was known as the San Bernardino Ranch. Slaughter died in 1922, and his widow continued to live on the ranch until she sold it in 1936. At that time, the Mexican government would not allow the land in Mexico to be sold to an American. As a result, the ranch was split into two pieces.

About 20,000 acres lay north of the border and was purchased by an American. In 1978, the Nature Conservancy acquired 2380 acres. This included a 130-acre section that had been designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL), and that included the ranch buildings. Four years later, the United States Fish & Wildlife Service took over the land from the Conservancy, but did not want to administer the NHL.



Mr. Finks learned of the opportunity and immediately took steps to acquire the historical section, as the ranch buildings would be an ideal place to house Floyd Johnson's collection. Johnson's estate, however, covered less than one-third of the funds needed for purchase and restoration. Mr. Finks was determined to realize Floyd's dream and raised the additional capital. After three years of planning and reconstruction, the Slaughter Ranch Museum opened to the public, administered by the Floyd Johnson Foundation. At last Floyd had his museum!

If you wish to visit the museum, take 15th Street east from Douglas. It becomes Geronimo trail, a well-maintained dirt road. It crosses high desert country for 15 miles, and then drops down into the lush San Bernardino Valley. Flowing springs and ponds dictated the location of the ranch house more than 100 years ago, and the springs continue to flow. The museum is open Wednesday - Sunday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. There is a \$5.00 charge for adults.

A New Look for Our Old House

This “new look” really means giving visitors a better idea of how things might have looked in 1960 and the early years of both Sun City and Sun City West. A donation of furniture from **Julie McGlynn** of Sun City has started the process of returning the living room to a 1960s look. We envision splitting the room diagonally, with everything to the right of the door as you enter being circa 1960 . . . furniture, accessories, draperies, and carpeting. A life-sized likeness of Del Webb will greet you alongside a large photo of opening day.

Wall displays will be greatly simplified, with a shelf beneath holding “flip books” of photos. Eventually, on the wall to your left will be a flat-screen TV on which we will be able to play some of the early films about life in the new community.

Attending to the kitchen tasks will be a life-sized cutout of a 1960s housewife. Other than this, the kitchen and bathroom look like they did when this was a model home.

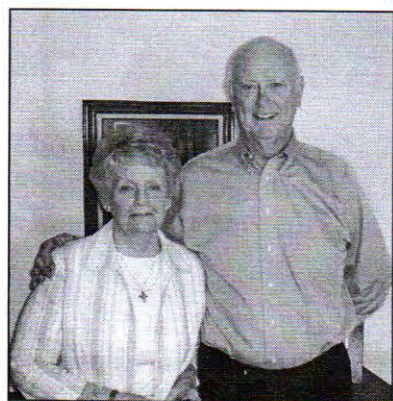
The front bedroom will become a display room for exhibits that change periodically. Perhaps one on baseball in the spring, or the story of the evolution of medical care. Other possibilities include a look at early transportation options, and the evolution of the church community. Each new exhibit will give you another reason to return to 10801 Oakmont.

The present meeting room will feature the birth and growth of Sun City West. The former sales office that was appended to the house will continue to feature the town of Marinette and the story of the years leading up to 1960. We have more ideas, but we need to take this step-by-step as funds permit. All donations toward this worthwhile project will be greatly appreciated.

We’re excited about the possibilities of telling an old story in a new and fresher manner. We’ll keep you posted on progress, and at some point will announce a “grand opening” for members to preview the first round of changes. Meanwhile, stop by and watch “the good old days” unfold.

1960 Webb Sales Manager Visits

Had you come out to Sun City on the opening weekend in January 1960, you’d have found **Owen Childress** busy marshalling his small sales force. They were completely overwhelmed by the crowds, never dreaming that 100,000 people would show up over the four-day weekend! Owen and his wife, Marie, stopped by the SCAHS house on Oakmont recently, and he admitted it was his first time back since the days of the five original model homes.



Looking out the window, Owen recalled running over to Safeway for receipt books, as the Webb sales forms were soon used up. He instructed his men to get names and addresses, along with \$500 deposits, and they would follow-up later with the proper sales forms. The paved portion of Oakmont ended at the fifth model, and Owen recalled one man running in, wanting Owen to accompany

him to a specific site further along the dirt path. “Here,” he said, “I want whatever lot has this tall tree.” Owen promptly wrote out a receipt specifying the tree and the approximate distance from the end of the paved road. Sales of 237 houses that opening weekend laid to rest any doubt about the success of a well-planned, active adult community!

In Search of Yesterday

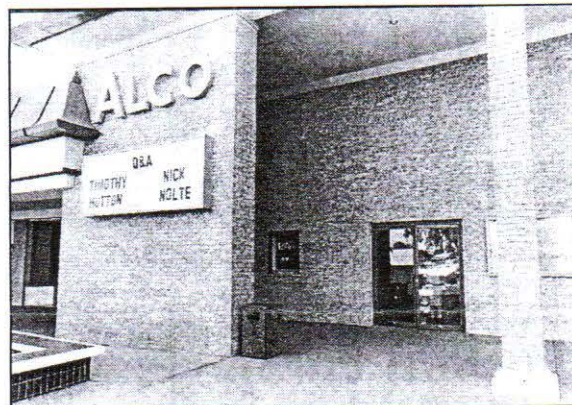
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running.

- Jimmy Durante was among the featured entertainers at the Sun Bowl.
- DEVCO produced a movie titled "**The Story of Arizona and Sun City**", and it was shown to sales complex visitors in a small theatre. It was narrated by Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater and was a bit corny, but it was very well received.
- Sun City became the 9th largest city in Arizona.
- A joint venture of Leisure World and Western Savings announced a new gated retirement project on the failed Golden Hills property. An intensive advertising program featuring television personality Arthur Godfrey was aired on television, radio, in newspapers, and on billboards with words to the effect: "Sure, visit Sun City, but then come to Leisure World and buy." It was the best free advertising Sun City ever received. There really wasn't any comparison between the two projects except in Gary Driggs' mind. Mr. Driggs was the executive vice president of Western Savings. Also, Ross Cortese began a paid column in the Sun City newspaper advertising Leisure World benefits such as safety.
- Ahwatukee was also opened as a combination retirement and conventional housing development on I-10 south of Tempe. This project was developed by the Presley Company out of Southern California. Initially retirement was the main focus but was not very successful, and it was subsequently phased out with only conventional housing being offered.
- Sun Lakes opened a mobile home retirement community late in the year south of Chandler one mile east of I-10. Lots were sold along with manufactured mobile homes around a circular golf course copied after Lakes West in Sun City. After the first subdivision was nearly sold out, mobile homes were dropped, and stick-built homes were offered. They continued to sell lots separately with the restriction that a home had to be constructed within certain time limits by Sun Lakes at prevailing prices.
- 107,600 sq. ft. **La Ronde Shopping Center** opened with El Rancho Market, Mayo's Home Furnishings, Revco Drug Store and Alco Movie Theatre. DEVCO made rental and other concessions to obtain the theatre, a highly requested facility, for the enjoyment of the Sun City residents. *See Appendix No. 2.72*
- Del E. Webb Corporation Contracting Division was approved to build all future commercial and recreation buildings for cost plus a five percent fee. DEVCO previously did all of this work with its own forces.

Health update: Alzheimer's research continues



Submitted photo

Larry Sparks, lead scientist at the Sun Health Research Institute in Sun City, is the principal investigator of the pioneering studies. His AD Cholesterol-Lowering Treatment Trial showed that Lipitor can slow down the progression of Alzheimer's and improve depression in patients with the disease.

Sun Health seeks participants

By Cecilia Chan

Independent Newspapers

Marshall Pond can still do the rumba, waltz and tango.

The 86-year-old can even belt out a few bars from the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," which is remarkable considering he was diagnosed with the brain-deteriorating Alzheimer's disease some 15 years ago.

"I think without the added help we've had from Lipitor and the Sun Health Research Institute, he would be much further along (in his disease)," said wife June Pond in the living room of her Sun City home. "I think they have done wonders for him. I do think it has helped slow it down."

Mr. Pond was the first of 63 participants who signed up four years ago for a break-through research study that showed the cholesterol-lowering medication Lipitor can slow the progression and reduce the ravages of Alzheimer's disease. The AD Cholesterol-lowering Treatment Trial results were released in April.

A separate trial called LEADe is under way to validate the



Independent Newspapers/Cecilia Chan

Rose and Marshall Pond share a dance at the Sun Health Residence for Alzheimer's Care. Mr. Pond still goes out dancing once a week. The couple plans to take their annual pre-Christmas trip next month to visit family in Kansas.

findings of the first research.

As many as 4.5 million Americans suffer from Alzheimer's, according to the Alzheimer's Disease Education and Referral Center. A form of dementia, Alzheimer's disease usually begins after 60, with the risk increasing with age. The

cause is unknown and there is no cure.

In the clinical trial, which Mr. Pond was involved, two-thirds of the 63 patients on active medication derived some clinical benefit and half of the

See **Alzheimers** — Page 5

OVER

Alzheimers

Continued From Page 1

patients stabilized or actually improved.

The Estee Lauder Trust awarded a \$450,000 grant for the study. Pfizer Pharmaceutical, Inc. supplied the Lipitor and placebo for the research.

Patients showed significant improvement in memory and cognition six months after treatment with Lipitor and in one year's time symptoms of depression improved, said Larry Sparks, Ph.D, senior scientist at the Sun Health Research Institute and principal investigator of the study.

"It extended the quality of the treated individual's life by a year or more," said Dr. Sparks, contacted last week in New Orleans where he presented his findings to the American Heart Association.

"Someone who came into the trial with mild to moderate Alzheimer's would have been in a fetal position, bedridden or dead (by now)," he said. "Mr. Pond is still dancing. We extended the

The LEAD clinical trial needs participants

The trial will investigate the connection between cardiovascular disease and Alzheimer's disease by using a cholesterol-lowering drug.

The trial will use an FDA-approved statin in a 20-month, multi-center, double-blind, randomized and placebo-controlled study.

To be eligible participants must meet the following criteria:

- Be between 50 and 90 years old.
- Have a diagnosis of mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease and have been prescribed a stable dose of 10 mg per day of Aricept.
- Are not currently taking a cholesterol-lowering medication.
- Have a stable medical condition.
- Have a study partner or caregiver available.

For more information about this clinical trial, call Sun HealthLine at 876-5432.

quality of this man's life by two years easily. We can only hope the larger trial will demonstrate the exact same benefits we have seen."

Ms. Pond says her husband has his good days and bad.

"Most people don't see a difference in him," she said. "He's danced all these years and can still dance. As far as we are concerned, it definitely has slowed down the progression of the disease."

A choir singer for 60 years, Mr. Pond at times will hum a tune or break out in a song like he did one day at the Sun Health Residence

for Alzheimer's Care.

Although he remembered the death of a brother who died young, he forgot he viewed a morning news show featuring him and the clinical trial that very morning.

He knows his favorite vacation spot is Hawaii and his favorite dance is the waltz.

Asked about his recent sea trip, after some prompting from his wife, he replied, "It was a delightful cruise."

The LEADe trial will be conducted at 40 different sites, including at Sun Health, in 14 countries with 600 participants, Dr. Sparks

said. Sun Health's study will use 16 participants and so far five participants signed on for the trial. He said it will take three years to complete this second study. Call 876-5432.

"The drug has some benefits in the treatment of individuals and the next step is proving it with the LEADe trial," Dr. Sparks said. "After that, we would demonstrate it may have preventative(qualities). If it is taken before someone is demented does it stop it or delay them from becoming demented?"

If the studies bear out, it might be 10 to 15 years down the road before the drug is prescribed as a preventative measure against Alzheimer's, he said.

In the meantime, he recommends against people with Alzheimer's from taking Lipitor until the Federal Drug Administration approves it.

Although the widely used cholesterol drug seems to slow down the debilitating disease, Dr. Sparks said he does not believe cholesterol is the cause of Alzheimer's, but "it's clearly a promoting factor." He noted Mr. Pond's cholesterol levels at the onset of the trial was "fairly high."

Dr. Sparks said when Mr. Pond entered the study he was in the mild to moderate stage of Alzheimer's and now he is considered "more moderate."

Mr. Pond will continue taking Lipitor and also takes Namenda, a medication specifically used to treat the disease, Ms. Pond said.

The couple just returned from a cruise on the East Coast and plan future trips.

He was placed in an Alzheimer's assisted living facility in May because her health problems prevented her from giving him the care he needed, Ms. Pond said. But every Saturday, she picks him up for church services and every Sunday, they still go dancing.

"It's terrible what has happened to a great mind," said Ms. Pond as she talked about Mr. Pond's double master's degrees in civil engineering and electrical engineering from California Institute of Technology and his career as a business owner.

"But we couldn't be in a better place than we are now in Sun City," she said.

Sun Health study lifts Alzheimer's research

Cholesterol-lowering meds used to slow disease's progression

MITCHELL VANTREASE
DAILY NEWS-SUN

A cholesterol-lowering medication could help slow down the progression and deterioration of Alzheimer's disease, according to a study by Dr. D. Larry Sparks of the Sun Health Research Institute.

"It provides a glimmer of hope," he said. "This would help the caregiver and patient a lot."

Sparks unveiled his latest findings this week at the eighth International Symposium on Advances in Alzheimer's Therapy in Montreal, Canada, attended by more than 300 scientists from 15 countries.

"We're going in the right direction," he said.

The drug, Lipitor, was

used on 63 participants for the one-year treatment trial. More than half the patients stabilized or improved.

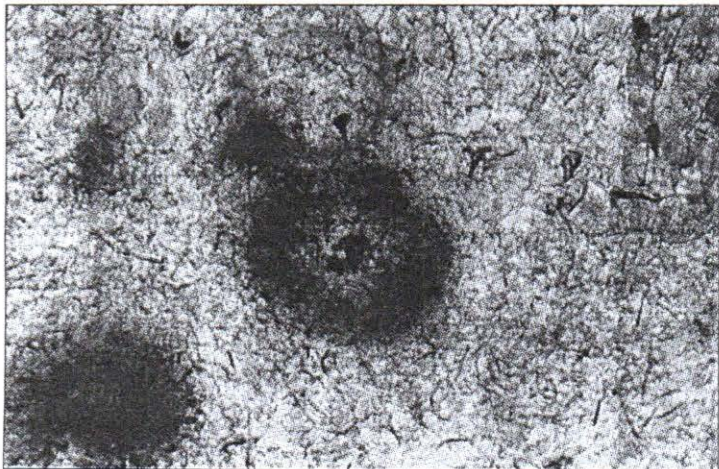
In the study, people weren't excluded from medications taken for pre-existing conditions. The results indicated Lipitor's effectiveness in real life scenarios.

"This is truly exciting news," he said. "No other prior clinical trials have shown long-term improvements with Alzheimer's



Sparks

See **STUDY, A5**



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Senile plaque, larger one with a few smaller plaques around it, is characteristic of Alzheimer's disease. The main constituent of the plaque is a protein whose production is enhanced by excess cholesterol. Dr. D. Larry Sparks has shown that lowering cholesterol is of clinical benefit to people with Alzheimer's disease.

From A1

disease."

It's the first clinical trial of its kind to test the medicine in both memory and behavioral measures.

The study received support from the Institute for the Study on Aging, which awarded Sparks a \$450,000 grant. Additional funding came from Pfizer Pharmaceutical Co., which supplied the Lipitor and placebo.

The IOSA, a New York-based private foundation established by Estee Lauder Trust whose mission is drug discovery for Alzheimer's, gave its support to Sparks realizing the full potential.

"They, together with Pfizer, supported the study because

they believed in research rationale and really took a chance that I was right on track," said Sparks. "Today, everyone is a winner with this news because it brings us one step closer to another effective treatment for this mind-robbing disease," Sparks said.

Although the study shows promise, he said people should consult with their physicians regarding the suitability of using the cholesterol-lowering medication.

"I don't suggest Alzheimer's patients use Lipitor until their doctors say it's OK," he said.

Sparks has been involved with several studies on the disease at the institute. Along with this trial, Sparks is

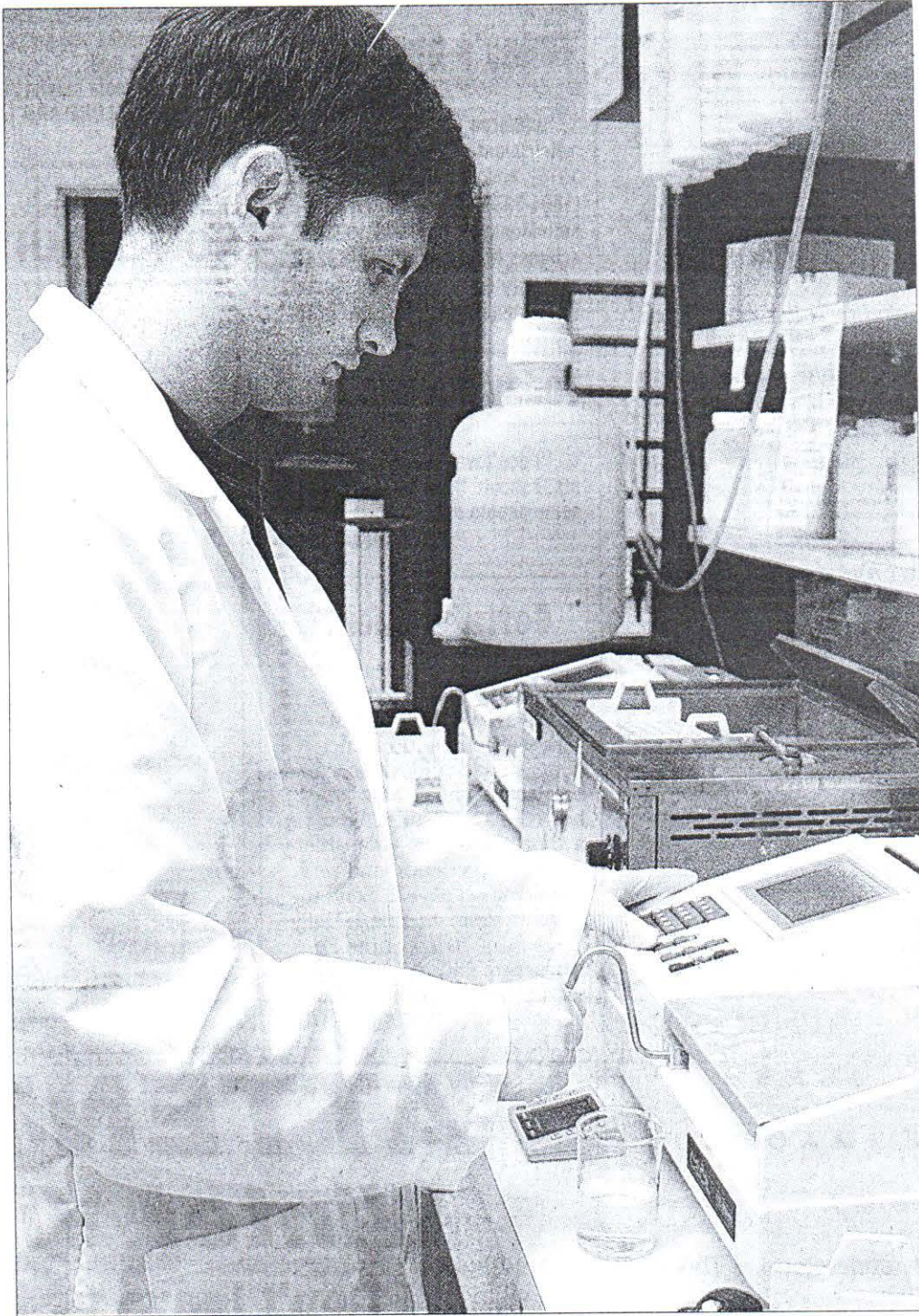
involved with the ongoing LEADe study sponsored by Pfizer, which compares the safety of Lipitor in combination with another medication, Aricept, in patients with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease.

In November, he also unveiled that distilled water could help reduce the illness.

Pioneering studies by Sparks linking high blood pressure, coronary artery disease and elevated cholesterol levels to Alzheimer's, have been highlighted by several magazines and television shows, including Newsweek, Reuters, ABC World News Tonight and CNN.

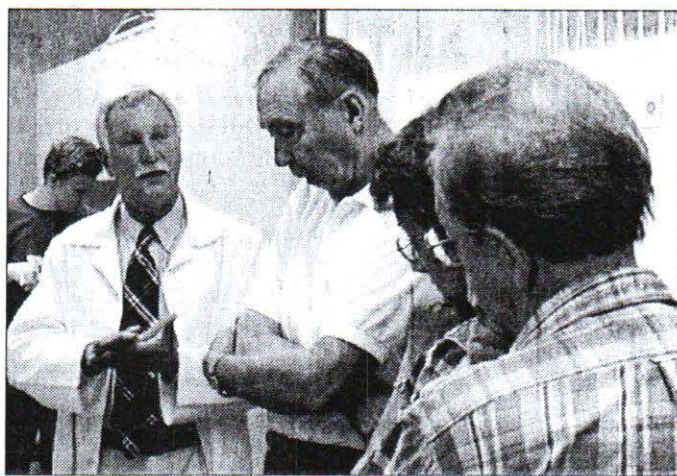
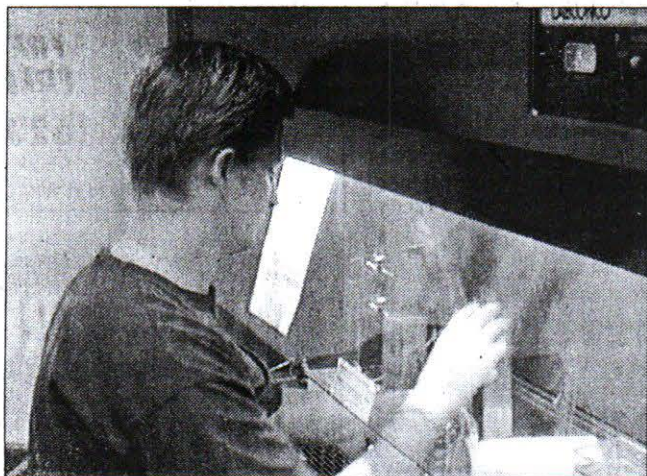
Mitchell Vantrease may be reached at 876-2526 or mvantrease@aztrib.com.

OVER



JOY LAMBERT-SLAGOWSKI/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Jeff Lochhead, a research technician at Sun Health Institute in Sun City, runs enzymes through a spectrophotometer as part of an Alzheimer's study.



Spencer Guest, a research technician at Sun Health Research Institute, studies tissue cultures at the facility's "brain bank." The institute's brain repository collects donor tissue, which is shared by nearly 200 scientists around the world.

Dr. Joseph Rogers, president of Sun Health Research Institute, explains ongoing research into Alzheimer's and other brain related diseases to visitors at the 50,000-square foot facility in Sun City. The institute hosts monthly tours of its laboratories and adjoining library.

Photos by TOM BARRY/Independent Newspapers

Banking on Your Brain

Brain bank vital to institute's ongoing research

By TOM BARRY
Independent Newspapers

"Rats, cats and dogs don't suffer from Alzheimer's — only people do," says Dr. Joseph Rogers.

The same is true for many age-related disorders, he explains to the dozen or more assembled guests at the Sun Health Research Institute. "For this reason, research is critically dependent on obtaining brain tissue samples from willing donors."

Dr. Rogers is a highly-regarded research scientist in the field of geriatric neurological disorders, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. He also serves as president of the prestigious non-profit institute located on the campus of Boswell Memorial Hospital in Sun City.

Once a month Dr. Rogers leads his guests on a tour of the vast 50,000-square-foot facility, which he was instrumental in building. Wide eyed, the guests eagerly follow him through the serpentine corridors and the multitude of laboratories on each floor, where

““

We're so close, maybe three or four years away from finding an effective cure for Alzheimer's.

Dr. Joseph Rogers
Research Scientist
Sun Health Research Institute

scores of scientists study every facet of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease in the hopes of some day finding a cure.

Situated on the second floor is a little known feature of the complex — the institute's brain bank, where human brain tissue is collected, stored and shared with nearly 200 scientists the world over for vital research.

"We're so close, maybe three or four years away from finding an effective cure for Alzheimer's," said Dr. Rogers,

whose optimism is fueled by the recent development of a vaccine that has shown great promise in laboratory mice.

But researchers won't truly know the vaccine's effectiveness without human trials, which must await federal approval. Meanwhile, at Sun Health Research Institute, they must rely exclusively on human brain tissue donors for their research.

"Unfortunately, the demand far outweighs the availability of donor tissue," said Dr. Rogers.

Since its inception in 1987, the institute has enrolled approximately 1,000 voluntary donors from residents of surrounding communities in the west Valley. To date, more than 500 brain autopsies have been performed.

Those enrolled in the program — both normal and sufferers of neurological disorders — are visited annually by a neuropsychologist and neurologist to see how they are doing and to keep them abreast of new developments. There is no charge to the family or donor, except

See ■ BRAIN BANK, Page 5

■ BRAIN BANK

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for transportation to Boswell Memorial Hospital upon death so the autopsy can be performed.

Dr. Rogers said removal of the brain takes about a half-hour and is non-disfiguring.

After death, an evaluation of the brain is conducted and the results are shared with the family. "For Alzheimer's, in fact, this is the only certain way to know that a family member actually suffered the disease and not something else," said Dr. Rogers.

Normal brain tissue is as important as abnormal tissue if not more so, he noted. Nationally, only about 3 percent of donor tissue comes from normal individuals.

"In the Sun Cities, however, we've made a special effort to recruit such people, and the community has responded with great generosity," Dr. Rogers said. In fact, about 30-40 percent of those enrolled in the tissue donation program are so-called non-demented

elderly volunteers, he added.

Unlike other organs, he emphasized that brain tissue donation must follow a unique procedure and autopsies must be performed within two to three hours of death. "You cannot simply indicate on a driver's license that you're an organ donor. You have to enroll in the program should you decide to donate your brain," said Dr. Rogers.

At the conclusion of the 60-minute tour he hands each guest an information packet, including consent forms, and tells them in all seriousness, "Although monetary donations are always welcome, we want something more personal than a check: Your brain."

It is hoped that at least a few will oblige him in his quest for a cure.

Free public tours of the institute are conducted on the first Tuesday of each month. Additional information about the program may be obtained by calling (602) 876-5328.

Institute makes difference

Alzheimer's research booms

By MAMIE LIMERICK
Staff writer

Since its inception in 1986, the Sun Health Research Institute in Sun City has been a pioneer in research on aging disorders.

Joseph Rogers, Ph.D., the founding director and senior research scientist at the institute, recently was presented a Zenith award, which provides up to \$300,000 for funding research.

While Rogers expressed elation over the grant, he credited members of the Sun City communities for the ongoing success of the institute.

In his introduction at a monthly tour of the institute, he paid tribute to Sun Citians who "have donated everything to the institute from the bricks and mortar to money for research."

The institute is known worldwide for its contributions to the search for cures to debilitating age-related diseases such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and arthritis.

"We send brain tissue all over the world for study," said Rogers. "If we find a cure for Alzheimer's, it most likely will come from a Sun Citian, if not from Sun City."



Dr. Joseph Rogers, director of the Sun Health Research Institute, shows brain tissue to Jane Matlock of Sun City, right, and another visitor. Dr. Rogers gives a monthly tour of the institute.

Mollie J. Hoppes/Daily News-Sun

Rogers was one of the first scientists to show that inflammatory mechanisms similar to those that damage joint tissue in arthritis also damage the brain in Alzheimer's disease.

His research led to the conclusion that anti-inflammatory drugs similar to ibuprofen can delay the onset and slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease. Researchers are studying more sophisticated drugs which attack the inflammation at its specific site in the body, thus sparing the rest of the body from side effects, such as stomach upset.

Rogers is joined in his studies by Dr. Alex Roher, head and senior scientist of the Robert S. Haldeman Laboratory for Alzheimer's Research. Roher is researching the proteins which cause the brain to deteriorate.

At the Robert J. Hoover Center for Arthritis Research, Dianne Lorton, Ph.D., researches the role of nervous and immune systems in causing arthritis. She is examining the possibility of altering nervous system pathways with drugs and surgery.

Rogers pointed out the importance of what he called the "brain bank" of the institute, otherwise known as the Harold Civin Histopathology Center.

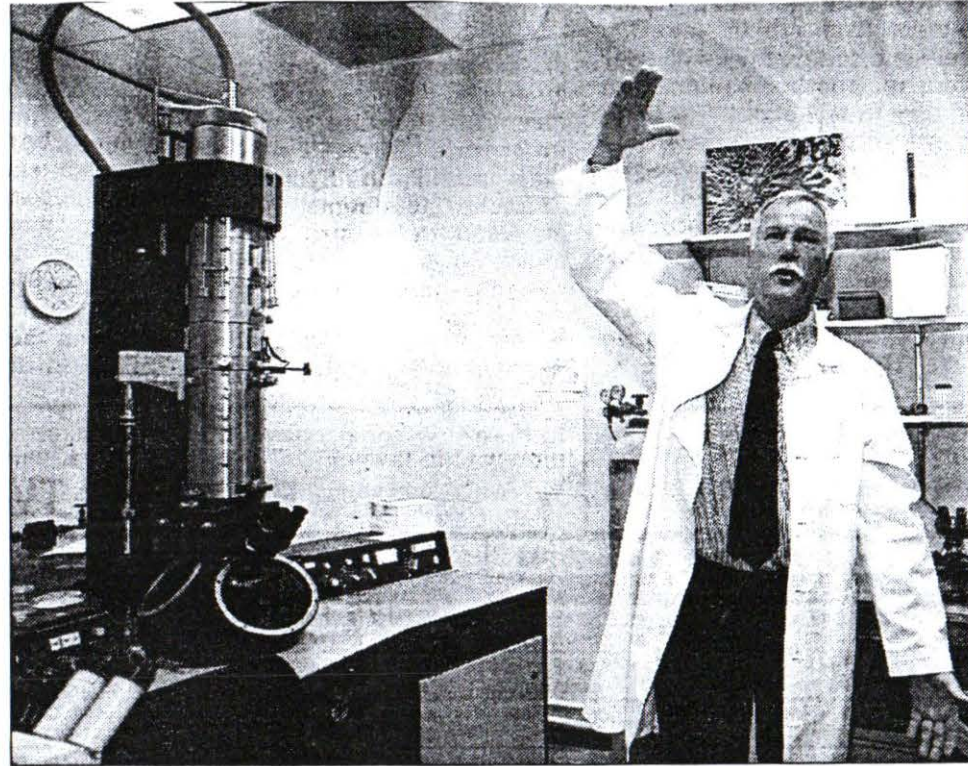
"If we find a cure for Alzheimer's, it will most likely come from a Sun Citian, if not in Sun City."

*-Dr. Joseph Rogers, Ph.D.,
founding director and senior
research scientist at the Sun Health
Research Institute in Sun City*

In this area of the institute, donated brains are autopsied, preserved and prepared for research. Since Alzheimer's does not occur in animals, the institute relies on human brains for its research.

Most of all, the brain bank needs normal brain tissue, said Rogers. "We need to compare normal brains to Alzheimer's brains," he said.

Rogers and his colleagues developed an innovative and crucial breakthrough when they discovered a method for keeping cells alive in a test tube. This new technology enables scientists to perform disease-specific research.



Mollie J. Hoppes/Daily News-Sun

Dr. Joseph Rogers tells visitors how the electron microscope magnifies the brain tissues hundreds of thousands of times.

At this time, 890 donors are listed in the brain-tissue donation program at the institute, Rogers said. Out of this total, 400 donors have been autopsied.

For information on the weekly guided tours of the Sun Health Research Institute, scheduled on the first Tuesday of each month, call 876-5387.

Sun City study hints Alzheimer's advance

Drug shows promise in slowing disease

By David Cannella
The Arizona Republic

In a small but promising study, a Sun City researcher has found that a commonly prescribed anti-inflammatory drug slows and may even halt the progression of Alzheimer's disease.

Cautioning that further study is needed, Dr. Joseph Rogers of the Sun Health Research Institute said the drug indomethacin appears to inhibit the destruction of brain cells, which in Alzheimer's patients are attacked by the body's own immune system.

"I don't think it's so much a breakthrough as it is a progression of good research that's been going on over the last several years," Rogers said Wednesday.

"We're on the right track, and this latest trial is very, very encouraging."

Willard Lende also is encouraged. His wife, Birdien, participated in the trial and showed marked improvement while on the drug.

"It seems like when she's off the medication, she deteriorated to a new plateau," said Lende, of Sun City. "While on it, she would still forget her keys once in a while, things like that, but she was holding on."

"That's what we're hoping for, that she can continue to hold on to where she is."

Birdien Lende, in her 80s, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 1988.

"It's a terrible disease," said Willard Lende, who also is in his 80s. "It's like she's in the middle of the quicksand of forgetfulness, and me and her doctors and her friends are all standing on the side unable to do anything."

Currently, there is no drug approved for the specific treatment of Alzheimer's disease. Various medications are used to combat specific effects from Alzheimer's, such as depression.

Rogers, working with Dr. Patrick McGeer of

the University of British Columbia Medical School in Vancouver, published the results of their study this week in the medical journal *Neurology*.

The study is giving hope to patients as well as to those in the scientific community.

Dr. Jo Ann McConnell, senior vice president for medical and scientific affairs at the national Alzheimer's Association in Chicago, said the study is "another important piece in the Alzheimer's jigsaw puzzle."

Alzheimer's disease is characterized by a progressive loss of nerve cells in certain areas of the brain. It strikes people over age 50, and is the leading cause of dementia among the elderly. In its early stages, people forget simple things, such as where they placed their keys. But late stages incapacitate victims, leaving them unable to feed or care for themselves.

More than 4 million Americans suffer from some form of Alzheimer's. More than 100,000 will die from its effects this year.

In the study, 44 people from the Sun City retirement community with mild to moderate symptoms of Alzheimer's were divided into two groups. Twenty-four were given the drug, and 20 were given a placebo, or fake pill. Researchers gave the participants a battery of standard memory tests before, during and after the six-month trial.

The results showed that those who got the placebo showed a nearly 10 percent decline in memory function, while those who got the drug showed a slight improvement, about 2 percent, Rogers said.

Indomethacin is a non-steroid anti-inflammatory drug widely prescribed for arthritis patients. It is equivalent to about 15 aspirin tablets.

Local study encourages Alzheimer's caregivers

By BRITT KENNERLY
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — Those who love or live with an Alzheimer's patient live in anticipation of a cure for the progressive, degenerative disease of the brain.

Local Alzheimer's caregivers also are awaiting more research, and comment, on the use of indomethacin, a drug which controls inflammation in arthritic joints and was used earlier this year in a study of 44 Alzheimer's patients at Sun Health Research Institute in Sun City.

Results of the study are being re-

leased to the public today.

A big part of the rest of their life, caregivers say, is dealing with the frustration of caring for someone with Alzheimer's, the most common form of dementia.

The fact that there's no cure is possibly most frustrating of all.

Marilyn Porter, facilitator of Sun Health's Alzheimer's support group, is eager to see increased attention paid to Alzheimer's.

Porter's mother died of the disease five years ago, at age 83, and the Sun Health employee donated her mother's brain to Sun Health Research Institute. See U.S. should, A5

U.S. should boost Alzheimer's research, group says

—From Alzheimer's Research Institute.

"This research means a great deal to anybody who has taken care of, or cares for, an Alzheimer's patient," she said. "There's no cure. There's no preventative measures out there at all. What Dr. Rogers is doing is really important, especially if this new study comes up with something that may begin to slow the progression of the disease."

Another Northwest Valley resident concerned with research at Sun Health Research Institute is former Peoria mayor Ron Travers,

whose wife, Barbara, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's three years ago.

"I feel that there's been very little progress made over the years," said Travers, a member of Porter's Sun City support group. "My feeling is that we as citizens, and our government, have to do more in terms of contributions for research. We've sent people to the moon several times, but when it comes to Alzheimer's research, we're back in the old poorhouse."

A common feeling among members of his support group, he said, is that the U.S. gov-

ernment should spend at least as much money on Alzheimer's research as it does on AIDS research.

In 1992, the federal government spent approximately \$280 million on Alzheimer's research, or \$1 for every \$320 the disease costs the public, says the Alzheimer's Association. The same report says that federal funds spent on heart disease, cancer and AIDS is four to seven times more.

"Alzheimer's has been around a long time now, and there hasn't been that much of an effort until now to find a

remedy," Travers said.

Travers, 59, said that joining the support group has been very helpful, making it easier for him to cope with the debilitating effects of his wife's slowly progressing illness.

He's also doing things he didn't know he'd be doing 38 years into his marriage, such as learning to tint his wife's hair.

"For the last two years, I've been doing the cooking," he said. "One good plus, though, is that for the most part, she can still take care of herself."

Just as devastating as the medical effects, he said, is the financial drain of caring for an Alzheimer's patient.

The Alzheimer's Association reports that for patients remaining at home, the cost of care averages about \$18,000 annually. Families cover most of those expenses.

"You almost have to be extremely rich or a pauper," Travers said. "If you're in between, you often don't qualify for Medicare. The health insurance industry needs to address that."

Alzheimer's study boosts hope

SC researchers hail discovery

By IAN MITCHELL
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — A commonly prescribed anti-arthritis drug may slow or stop the mental deterioration of Alzheimer's disease, according to a report released today by scientists at Sun Health Research Institute.

Although researchers caution that additional studies are needed, the results of the 44-patient trial may offer hope to the 4 million Americans who suffer from the progressive brain disorder.

In the six-month study, a group of Alzheimer's patients who received indomethacin, a drug which controls inflammation in arthritic joints, per-

The dementia, or mental deterioration, caused by Alzheimer's disease is frequently confused with symptoms of other diseases or signs of aging.

There is no standard test for the disease; doctors diagnose the disease through its symptoms, a study of a patient's medical history and a battery of tests to eliminate other causes of dementia.

Some common symptoms in Alzheimer's patients are:

- Decreased attention span, sometimes as little as five seconds.
- Memory loss, confusion, disorientation and difficulty understanding ideas.
- Difficulty finding words and finishing thoughts.
- Decreased sensitivity to heat or cold.
- Wandering and becoming "lost" even within one's own neighborhood.
- Personality changes such as frustration, depression, and anxiety.

Sources: Alzheimer's Association, Department of Veterans' Affairs, Health Response Ability Systems.

formed better on a battery of memory and mental skills tests than patients with the disease who were given placebos.

A report on the study, conducted

by Sun Health researchers and scientists at the University of British Columbia Medical School, was published in the August issue of Neu-

See Drug used, A5

OVER

OVER

Drug used in test holds FDA approval

—From A1

rology, the official publication of the American Academy of Neurology. The journal was mailed to subscribers Friday.

Joseph Rogers, director of the research institute, said his team's work built upon more than a decade of research which indicates that Alzheimer's disease involves the body's own immune system destroying brain cells.

Scientists conducting autopsies have found abnormal clumps of beta-amyloid, a protein, in the brains of Alzheimer's patients. An earlier study conducted by Sun Health researchers and scientists at the Scripps Clinic and Research Foundation in La Jolla, Calif., found that beta-amyloid could trigger an attack by white blood cells, the soldiers of the immune system.

Rogers said Alzheimer's is similar to rheumatoid arthritis, another disease in which the immune system attacks the body's own cells.

The similarity between the two conditions led Rogers' scientists to research whether drugs used to fight inflammation — proof of the immune system at work — in arthritis patients might also help Alzheimer's patients.

The proposed treatment is a new approach to combating the disease, Rogers said.

"Alzheimer's destroys brain tissue first and foremost," he said. "Other approaches have been largely directed at patching what's left rather than stopping the damage."

About 60 potential study participants were screened by

Scientists at Sun Health Research Institute are looking for about 60 volunteers with Alzheimer's disease to participate in a second trial of indomethacin and a second

anti-inflammatory drug.

Alzheimer's patients interested in participating should discuss the study with a local neurologist.

neurologists and 44 with clear-cut cases of Alzheimer's disease were ultimately selected for last year's study, Rogers said.

The 44 patients were divided into two groups: About half received indomethacin and half a look-alike sugar pill which had no medication. Neither study participants nor researchers knew who was in what group until the study was concluded.

Rogers said 21 percent of the patients taking indomethacin had to drop out of the study because of severe stomach problems, a side effect of the medication.

About 20 percent of the patients taking the placebo pill also dropped out of the study because their condition deteriorated to the point they could no longer cooperate with researchers, Rogers said.

At the end of the six-month trial, the test scores of the 14 Alzheimer's patients remaining in the control group — those who received sugar pills containing no medication — were 10 percent lower than at the beginning of the study.

In contrast, the scores of the 14 Alzheimer's patients receiving indomethacin improved an average of 2 percent on the memory and mental skills tests.

"Those studies have to be expanded and replicated in many centers simply because with all clinical applications

it's necessary to reproduce and triple-check results to be absolutely certain," said Dr. Patrick McGeer, director of the Kinsman Laboratory at the University of British Columbia. McGeer participated in the pre-clinical trial phase of the study.

Two indomethacin patients in the study did not do as well as the rest, although their test scores were higher than the placebo group's average, and two patients who were receiving no medication did not show marked deterioration, Rogers said, adding that such variances were to be expected in a small trial.

"In order to be convincing, you need to do a study with a couple hundred people, not just 40 people," he said.

The results of the Sun Health trial mean that anti-inflammatory drugs may be the new frontier of Alzheimer's research.

But although the immune-system explanation for Alzheimer's does not offer a complete explanation of the malady and is one of several theories about how Alzheimer's disease works, Rogers said it is gaining ground in the medical community.

"It's very gratifying, actually. We have gone from sort of being the Rodney Dangerfield of Alzheimer's research (to now) ... I think

we've finally gotten everybody's attention," he said.

A larger clinical trial of indomethacin and another anti-inflammatory drug is already under way, Rogers added; About 60 volunteers with Alzheimer's disease have stepped forward and 60 more are needed.

Rogers said Cognex, also called THA or tacrine, is the only drug approved by the Food and Drug Administration for Alzheimer's patients, but its effectiveness has not been proven.

Since indomethacin has already received FDA approval as a treatment for arthritis, doctors may prescribe the medication for Alzheimer's patients without any additional regulatory action.

"That decision is in the clinician's hands, after discussing its use with the patient or caregiver," said Dr. Louis Kirby, a neurologist who performed patient screenings for the study. "It's their decision whether it's worth the risk for the potential benefits."

But McGeer said indomethacin needs more testing before seeking FDA approval to label the drug as a treatment for Alzheimer's.

"I certainly wouldn't recommend that physicians start putting their patients on this, just on speculation," he said.

Although prescribing a drug

for an unlabeled use is legal, it is not common practice, he added. "Therefore, a physician would be taking a risk and if something went wrong it would be the physician's fault."

Rogers said the research institute will continue testing the drug and added that researchers at other medical centers have expressed interest in joining the trials.

"The only place right now you can legitimately receive it (indomethacin) as treatment for Alzheimer's disease is at the institute," Rogers said.

Indomethacin and similar drugs may offer a promising approach to treating Alzheimer's, but the experimenters' work is not over, McGeer said.

"There are side effects, and the correct dose has not been worked out and the studies need to be replicated. There are many things that need to be done which will require a lot of specialized clinical testing to determine," McGeer said.

"The best that we can say is that there's hope," he concluded.

The study's results and the possibility of treating the disease with drugs should encourage Alzheimer's patients and their families, Rogers said.

"There is something you can do now," he said. "Before the only thing you can do was go home and weep, because there was no treatment at all for Alzheimer's, none."

Staff writer Britt Kennerly contributed to this story.