

Cultural arts take form in community

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From Sun City's earliest days, its residents have had a love affair with the arts.

One of the most widely recognized symbol of Sun City's love of culture is the Sun Cities Symphony.

Jennings Butterfield organized the symphony in 1968 after listening to Barry Goldwater speak glowingly of Arizona — and Sun City — on television. The following morning, Butterfield called the Phoenix Chamber of Commerce and discovered Sun City didn't have a symphony orchestra. He moved to the Northwest Valley shortly thereafter.

The Sun City Symphony, comprised of local volunteers, musicians from Luke Air Force Base, Arizona State music students and Phoenix Symphony members, made its debut in Nov. 24, 1968, in the Mountain View Auditorium.

The symphony soon evolved from said-seeker to philanthropist. In 1970, the symphony began awarding scholarships to promising Arizona music students, and the scholarships were expanded in 1978 to the Butterfield Competition for Young Musical Artists.

But music in Sun City pre-dates the symphony. The first musical group was formed 35 years ago as The Merry Makers, a seven-member dance combo that made its debut in the December 1960 "Hard Luck Party." Armed with drums, a piano, a violin, a washboard, a pair of saxophones, a washboard and a garbage can, The Merry Makers constituted Sun City's first orchestra.

And the music scene continued to grow.

Three years later, a spin-off of The Merry Makers, the 10-member Rhythm Ramblers, made its debut. The Ramblers, which played extensively at chuck-wagon dinners and other Del Webb Corp.-sponsored activities, continues to entertain Sun Citians today with its big band sounds.

Other musical groups sharing their talents included the Sun City Six Minus Two, Clancy Wolf's Polka Band and the Music Makers.

Organ clubs, such as the Sun City Organ Club and the Harmony Organ Club, also flourished.

the Harmonettes, the Sun City Organ Club, the Harmony Organ Club, the Dixieland Granddaddies and the Sun City Pops Orchestra.

The Musicians Club also spawned the Sun City Fine Arts Society. Herbert Tutelman, dissatisfied with the lack of a professional chamber music series, formed the society in 1977 with the help of both the Musicians Club and Del Webb. Verda Erman, the state pianist of Turkey, debuted the series on Nov. 29, 1977, in the Mountain View Auditorium.

"I think a lot of people came here having attended concerts as part of their lives and it was important to them," said Quillian Ditto, president of the Chamber Music Society. "There were also performing musicians who came here and found a place to continue performing. Their support helped to make the arts what they are now."

Ditto said the Chamber Music Society, formerly the Sun City Fine Arts Society, attracts up to 600 people for performances of traveling artists.

"We have one of the largest continuous audiences for chamber music anywhere in the country," she said. "That's just astonishing to these artists that come."

Music has not been the only art form to flourish in Sun City.

Beginning with the Town Hall Club in 1961, clubs such as the Lakeview Art Club, the Sundial Club and the Bell Art Club were founded. The annual All Sun City Art Show was started in 1975 in the Mountain View Auditorium, though the show has since moved to the Sundial Auditorium.

In 1977, the Sun City Chapter of the Artists Guild was formed in order to provide professional artists the chance to exhibit in Sun City. The chapter set out on its own four years later, becoming the Vanguard Artists, and opening services to members of organizations such as the Arizona Artists Guild, the American Watercolor Society and the Arizona Watercolor Society.

Some of its work soon was displayed in the Sun Cities Art Museum, founded in 1975 by former City Bank President Rex Staley. Aided by Robert H. Frankel, the assistant director

Sun City supports art

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ings and other art from museum members' private collection debuted the museum's second home, the club-room of the Lincoln Thrift complex.

The Sun Cities Art Museum, which approved article of incorporation in 1980, moved into its permanent home, just west of Sun City on Bell Road, about a decade ago. An addition to that building is under way.

"Part of the reason the arts have grown, I would guess, is many people have had considerable experience with the arts before they moved here," said George Palovich, the museum's curator.

Theater also has been well-represented through Sun City's his-

tory. The Sun City Players debuted in May 1961 with the Sun City Jubilee Minstrel Show and have had at least one production in the Mountain View Auditorium every year since.

By the time Sun City turns 40, the community's musicians, actors and artists may have a new theater in which to showcase their talents.

A group of community leaders and performing arts enthusiasts has launched a campaign to raise \$5 million for a 1,500-seat theater on Recreation Centers of Sun City property. A consultant is managing the campaign, which has raised in excess of \$130,000 to date.



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