

# Fish bowl to fishing hole

## Artificial lakes demand a lot of time, money to bring water to life

By KATHY GILLESPIE  
Outdoor editor

SUN CITY — Dig a hole, fill it with water, throw in a fish or two and presto! the hole becomes a lovely lake, challenging fishermen and filled with a variety of aquatic life.

If that's how you think an artificial lake is born, Jed Smith wants to have a chat with you.

As chairman of fishing for the Sun City Sportsmen's Club for the past 14 years, Smith has heard some strange things in his day concerning one of Sun City's two fishing holes, Viewpoint Lake.

The other lake is Dawn Lake. Both lakes contain 33 acre-feet of water and were built in the mid-1960s. In addition, both are private lakes and can be used only by recreation centers

members or their guests.

Most of the time, Smith said he is amazed at how little people know and understand about maintaining artificial lakes.

He describes Viewpoint Lake as a fishbowl and therein lies the first problem.

"It is not fed by a stream. The water is without nutrients. It's the quality of drinking water really," he said. "There's no way for the nutrients to come in."

And without nutrients to feed the algae and small aquatic life that feed the fish that allows the fish to reproduce and so on, there is no lake.

So, if the water is "barren" when it reaches Viewpoint Lake, what is done so the lake can support life and provide fishermen a challenge?

In two words, a lot.

First, habitat must be introduced into the lake.

"Habitat is very important to the quality of the lake," Smith said. "The algae and amoebas need a place to propagate and feed the fish."

Al Essbach agrees. Essbach was a fisheries biologist with the Arizona Game and Fish Department for 40 years and now owns Bio-Aquatic Consultants.

"Habitat is really necessary for fish and fishermen. Without it, the fish would have no place to set up housekeeping so to speak," Essbach said. "You've got to work with a lake and manage it just like a garden. It requires a lot of work."

Habitat can come in many forms including old tires, rock piles, pine trees, metal drums and artificial habitat.

Smith admits he's taken flak over some of the things he puts in the lake. But he said suspicions about whether Christmas trees will contaminate the water is one of his favorites.

What's an old Christmas tree going to do for the lake is a common query and those who may have seen the tires being

placed in the water may have thought illegal dumping was going on right underneath their pier.

But never fear, lake lovers, those tires and trees are exactly what's needed.

Why? Habitat.

Think for a moment; if you were a fish, especially a small one among the big guys, you would want a place to hide, right? Well, that's one purpose habitat serves — protection.

And, if you were a snail or algae, you'd need something to cling to. That's another function habitat serves. The rock piles, pine trees and tires give the small aquatic life something to attach to and provide spawning grounds.

"It's a dynamic, living, breathing ecosystem," Essbach said.

Thus far, members of the Sun City Sportsmen's Club, with the blessing and financial support of the Recreation Centers, have placed PVC pipe, drums and tires into Viewpoint and are now planning to place rock piles and a new nylon artificial habitat called Fish Hab.

Smith has just placed an order for \$1,500 worth of Fish Hab that will be placed in predetermined spots in the lake. Fish Hab consists of a weighted base and scientifically designed polypropylene filaments.

The bundles come in four-foot and six-foot lengths and will provide cover for small fish. Fish Hab, unlike other artificial habitat, such as Christmas trees, will not deteriorate.

Smith said the addition of the rock piles and Fish Hab will culminate years of improvements and put the lake in top-notch condition.

"The lake is almost as good as we can get it right now with the money we have and the volunteers," he said. "We wouldn't be where we are without the goodness and compassion of the rec centers. Bob Turner has been the driving force behind it."

Keeping the lake in good condition not only assures good fishing but also assures the lake will be a good neighbor.

One type of fish currently stocked in Viewpoint is known as fat-head minnows or mosquito minnows. As the name implies, the fish eats mosquitos and therefore makes life by the lake more pleasant. In addition, fat heads are forage fish for channel catfish.

Essbach said fat heads like rock piles for spawning and therefore that addition to the lake will benefit its neighbors even more.

The major types of fish currently stocked in Viewpoint are channel catfish, big mouth bass, black crappie and blue gills.



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— Jed Smith, Sun City Sportsmen's Club.

OVER



**VIEWPOINT LAKE** — Jed Smith and Ed Lukow fish the depths of Sun City's Viewpoint Lake early

Wednesday. Viewpoint Lake is 14 feet deep at its lowest point and is one of two built in the area

in the mid-1960s. The lake contains channel catfish, bluegill, crappie and big mouth bass.

News-Sun photo by Mollie J. Hoppes

Daily News-Sun, Sun City, Ariz. Tuesday, April 16, 1991 Community A3\*

# Sportsmen's Club wins environmental award

## Work on preserve helps protect fish

By CANDACE S. HUGHES  
Daily News-Sun staff

The Sun City Sportsmen's Club received a National Environmental Achievement award Monday from the managers of the Hassayampa River Preserve for help in protecting five species of rare fish.

Ken Vaichinger, the club's program chairman, received the award from Brian and Holly Richter, managers of the preserve near Wickenburg.

The club was honored for its assistance in converting Palm Lake, a small spring-fed lake in the preserve, into an environment that now holds five species of rare fish.

In a project started about three years ago, the club helped remove bass, catfish and other game fish from the lake and transport them to Sun City where they were put in golf-course lakes.

The larger fish were removed from Palm Lake to protect the rare desert pupfish and gila top minnow which are used in cancer and kidney research.

Volunteer Boy Scouts from Phoenix and Peoria aided preserve employees in draining Palm Lake and carrying out the project.

The Richters and the Nature Conservancy were recognized in 1990 by President George Bush for their efforts in preserving the fish.

The preserve is operated by the Nature Conservancy, a private non-profit organization that buys land for wildlife habitats. The Hassayampa River Preserve follows 5 miles where the Hassayampa River flows above ground and provides water and forage for wildlife.

The river flows below ground

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north and south of the preserve, and the name comes from a Native American word meaning smoothly gliding waters.

A self-guided nature trail along the river bottom has been re-established after a March 1 flood swept through the area knocking down trees, signposts and benches, Brian Richter told the club Monday.

Holly Richter thanked volunteers for their treasure hunts to find items that the river stacked in piles of debris.

The river normally flows at 2 cubic feet per second, and a 13,000 foot per second flow was recorded during the flood, Brian said.

Many visitors chuckle when they see the Hassayampa River because it usually is 3 to 5 feet wide and 6 inches deep, Richter said. But during the flood it was much wider and 13 to 14 feet deep, he said.

Floodwaters bring silt and wash away grasses so that seedlings have a better chance, Holly said.

Among the wildlife observed at the preserve are: hummingbirds, red-tailed hawks, great-horned owls, barn owls, javalina, raccoons, coyotes, bobcats, desert mule deer, great blue herons, vermilion flycatchers and belted kingfishers.

Green-winged teal ducks and

ring-necked ducks and their ducklings also may be seen on Palm Lake.

Spring flowers such as the desert marigold now are blooming at the preserve making it a lovely time to visit, Holly said.

The preserve is also among the few places in Maricopa County to see fall colors similar to those found in the east and north.

In response to a question about another Nature Preserve project, the Richters said that state officials now are studying how to preserve caves found in southeastern Arizona while opening them to the public.

Kartchner Caverns were found by two cavers in the early 1980s and the land was bought by the Nature Conservancy and then transferred to the state of Arizona, Brian said.

The delicate environment of the caves must be preserved while finding a way to open the caverns to the public, he said.

Efforts the Nature Conservancy and volunteers to preserve wildlife habitat are important so that a natural heritage can be passed on to children and grandchildren, Brian said.

About 24 species of plants and animals become extinct every hour due to destruction of habitat, while about one species becomes extinct per year due to natural disasters.

"At this rate, our grandchildren will have fewer than one-half of the plants and animals to enjoy that we have today," Brian said.

The Hassayampa River Preserve is just east of Wickenburg at milepost 114 on U.S. Route 60.

Hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays until May 14. Hours will be 6 a.m. to noon May 15 to Sept. 15.

Thursday, March 5, 1992 Daily News-Sun, Sun City, Ariz.

# Good sports

## SC club provides haven

By JONATHAN DALTON  
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — If it takes place in the great outdoors, the Sun City Sportsman's Club is probably involved.

The Sun City Sportsman's Club was founded as an adjunct to the Sun City Posse and is currently one of the largest sportsman's clubs in the state of Arizona.

As interest dictates, the club organizes quail and javelina-hunting trips. Last Saturday, the group conducted their first fishing derby. The highlight of the fall schedule is the club's annual Buffalo Barbecue.

Ralph Reed, a member for 16 years, said the club also gives back to the wildlife community.

"Any extra fish we have, we'll put in the deep freeze," Reed said. "Then we'll take them to feed the hurt birds and animals at the Adobe Mountain fix-up area."

The club also is an active lobbyist for the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

"We lobby for Game and Fish, and they supply fish for Viewpoint Lake," Reed said. "It's the only public-rec lake here. Your rec card is the permission to fish."

A cause the club has recently undertaken is opposition to LB200, a proposition in the state legislature that would restrict the use of guns, fish hooks and trapping.

Another purpose the Sportsman's Club serves is the firearm qualification of Sheriff Posse members.

"The Posse has its own prac-

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Ralph Reed  
Sun City Sportsman's Club

tice range, and before they can carry a gun, they have to qualify," Reed said. "Some of the men we've qualified are outstanding Posse members."

The club at one time had as many as 600 members, although membership has since declined into the 300s.

Meetings are conducted on the third Monday of every month in the Lakeview Center, 10626 Thunderbird Blvd. There is a featured speaker at each meeting.

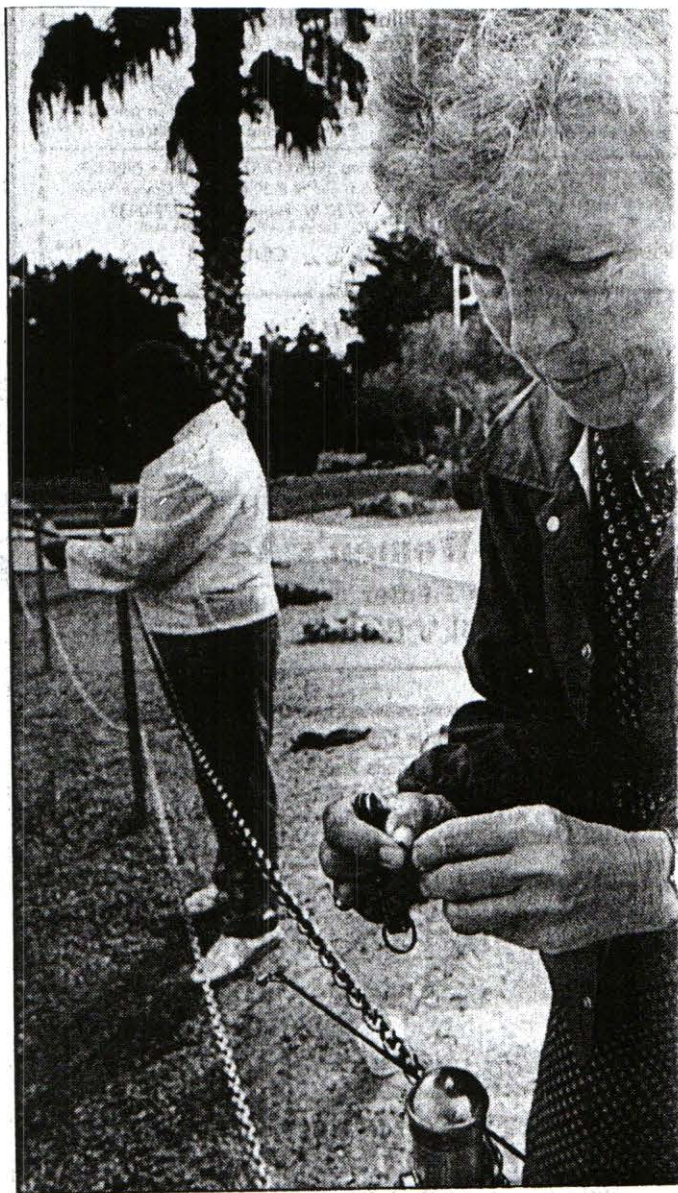
Although many members are also part of the Sheriff's Posse, membership is open to anyone. The annual membership fee of \$12 covers all dues and also entitles the member to a monthly newsletter.

The Sun City club is one of several across the state, Reed said.

"It's a part of the Wildlife branch," Reed said. "There are clubs like this all over the state, but this is one of the largest."

For information, phone 977-3266.

## for outdoorsmen



Stephen Cherne

Jeanne Schlegel prepares her hook during a Sportsman's Club fishing outing at Viewpoint Lake. It is one of the largest sportsman's club in the state.

OVER



Stephen Chernenk

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Bud Bohl fishes from the pier at Viewpoint Lake during the Sun City Sportsman's Club's fishing contest Saturday. The Sun City club also organizes quail- and javelina-trips throughout the year.

trips