

"We're Here to Serve You!"

The early history and growth of Sun City businesses, 1960-1961

(Information compiled from back issues Daily-New Sun – Nov. 2001)

On opening day, January 1, 1960, visitors saw five model homes, a small recreation center and a nine-hole golf course. Across Oakmont Avenue, where the model homes were located, was the beginning of a shopping center, facing Grand Avenue. There was even a grocery store.

At the request of James G. Boswell, II, who was on the Board of Directors for Safeway, they agreed to open a store even though there were no residents. The store was open December 31, 1959 although it officially opened January 13, 1961. What lured Safeway to Sun City? Their lease gave them first refusal on future grocery sites for taking the gamble on the success of this new community. Furthermore, in lieu of rent, the store would give DEVCO a percentage of profits for a number of years.

Sensing the need for a "social spot" a small coffee shop opened on February 5 in the shopping center.

On February 19, the HiWay House Motel (later known as King's Inn) opened for business under the management of Donald Belton. The motel was one of many HiWay Houses owned by Webb. The motel was located on the southeast corner of 107th and Grand Avenues. The increased flow of traffic meant that a service station would be needed. A Union Oil Station opened across the street on the same day as the HiWay house. During the first year of operation, the number of gallons it pumped sent it soaring as one of the top ten stations in the greater Phoenix area.

People were moving in but there was no convenient spot to buy the many little things needed when settling into a new home. This need was met on March 4 when the TG&Y Variety Store opened under the

management of E. K. Fraser. Everything was to be had: picture hooks, nails, paint, hardware, cosmetics, fabrics, sewing supplies...a real variety store.

Shortly after the opening of TG&Y, Otho Greenway opened the Greenway Drug Store on March 18 - complete with a real soda fountain. Mrs. Greenway would fly to the Indian reservation in her own plane several times a year to secure artifacts and jewelry for her end of the store - a gift shop.

The same day the drugstore opened, another shop joined the celebration. The Desert Barber Shop opened, owned and operated by J. Edward Ellis, more popularly known as "Buzz."

The shopping center now had five major stores at the east end -- grocery store, variety store, drug store, coffeeshop and a barber shop. In addition, a small landscape nursery at the far end of the center, met the early landscaping needs.

Sun City became an officially recognized community in the United States Postal Guide on April 4 when a post office opened. It was located next to the drugstore. Rent was \$1.00 a year. The event was commemorated by the issuance of a multi-colored cachet cover.

On July 8, Arizona Public Service opened a Sun City office with John Powers as manager. Residents now had a local contact for their utility bills and problems.

Three years after the founding of Youngtown, Syd Lambert published the Youngtown News. When Sun City opened, he changed the name to the Youngtown News/Sun City Sun. During the summer of 1960, Burt and Ursula Freireich made a \$1,500 down payment to purchase the paper. Their first issue was published July 22. For the first nine months, the Freireich's operated out of their home. In April 1961, they would move into a small

space in the shopping center.

By mid-1960, the shopping center was running out of space. Plans for a 55,000 sq.ft expansion were announced on September 2. This would include an arcade that would separate the shops from a planned medical center. A target date for completion was set for January 1961. New stores would include Peoria Hardware and Tractor Co., Sun Control Blinds and Carpets, First National Bank, Brown's Furniture (from Glendale) and an architectural firm, Francis, Bricker & Rich, AIA.

It took some doing to entice a bank to open in a community with few residents, but the First National Bank was willing to gamble. It opened Nov. 27 in a temporary site until a permanent structure could be completed. The bank was to be located opposite the stores, on the north side of the parking lot. One day later, the Hiway House announced a major addition to include two two-story buildings providing additional motel rooms, 36 guest units and a swimming pool.

If the community was good enough for a bank, there must be something to the Sun City/Youngtown area. On Dec. 5, the Valley National Bank, with Taylor Smith as manager, opened in Youngtown on 111th Ave, one mile south of Grand Avenue and one block East of the Youngtown post office. George Swanson was general manager.

Thomas "Jack" Willett opened the Sun City Travel Bureau on December 1 with temporary offices in the lobby of the HiWay House. Mrs. Elmer Voss was in charge of selling bus tickets. Like the First National Bank, the Bureau would soon move to a permanent location across from it. As an opening special, a \$39.90 group tour was offered to the Rose Bowl Parade. The fare included round trip transportation, two nights at the Wilton Hotel in Long Beach, reviewing stand seats and visits to Movie Land, Disneyland and Knotts Berry Farm!

We come to 1961. By now the shopping center expansion was ready for business and March 2nd saw the opening of Masters Radio and Television with Robert Brown as Manager. This was closely followed, on March 9, by the opening of Maurmann's Jewelry store with Alan Maurmann as owner-manager.

With so many stores open, a Sun City Merchants Association was formed March 17. The first president was Charles Brice of Brice Hardware; vice president, George Swanson of First National Bank; and secretary, Alan Maurmann of Maurmann Jewelry Store. The Board of Directors included Otho Greenway of Greenway Drugs; Frank Brown of Brown's Furniture, and Charles Ricker representing Del Webb (DEVCO).

The shopping now covered 60,000 sq.-ft., plus space for 600 cars. A three-day event, April 6-8, celebrated completion of the expansion. Dee Fisher, official organist at Disneyland played and Walt Ditzen, a nationally syndicated cartoonist, served as master of ceremonies. Ditzen cartoons can still be seen at the Lakeview Bowling Lanes. Gifts and prizes were abundant: a Wurlitzer organ, all expense trips to Las Vegas, free phone calls to anywhere in the world, a Frigidair freezer, Zenith television, Eureka vacuum cleaner, and Sunbeam kitchen appliances. A carnival-like atmosphere prevailed with entertainment, a cake bake contest, food booths, music by the Peoria High School Band and by a local musical group, The Merry Makers. An auction was held with the proceeds going to the El Mirage Child Care Center. Free transportation was provided for Youngtown residents.

April saw the addition of several new businesses: Bedel's Fashions, owned by Madeline Bedell and her brother Thomas P. McDonell; Sun City Deli and Liquors owned by Andrew Hudson; Sun City Frame and Photo Shop with Homer Taylor, owner; along with Al Wilson and the law firm of

Lewis, Roca, Scoville, Beauchamp and Linton. Also appearing on the scene was the Sun City Realty Company with Ed Hasser and LeMar Lunsdtrom as partners. Soon after, the H.T. Germond Insurance Agency also opened.

On June 4 The First National Bank moved into its very own building. The Sun City Women's Club served refreshments, and each visitor received a miniature cactus garden.

The Continental Trailways Bus Company started daily bus service to Phoenix leaving at 9:30 A.M. and returning at 11:40 P.M. Round trips cost \$1.50 and busses left from the west side of the HiWay House. June 28 saw the opening of the First Federal Savings and Loan serving Sun City and Youngtown. Miss Pat Grady was the manager assisted by Mrs. Paul Jones and Mrs. Calvin Sichers.

Sun City was growing by leaps and bounds, and on July 6, 1961, Tom Breen, general manager of DEVCO, announced plans for a second shopping center to be located at 107th and Peoria Avenues. This would have a service station, grocery store, barber shop, beauty parlor, laundramat, and several small specialty shops.

A sign appeared on the empty lot on the southeast corner of Grand & 111th Avenue promised another, major filling station would open in the fall.

Living in a western state one had to wear "western," and July 27 saw the opening of Porter's, a pioneer Phoenix western-wear store next to Brice Hardware. They would feature casual and western sportswear and other western goods such saddles.

A story in the August 10th newspaper reported Youngtown had approved the building of Lundberg-Hansen Mortuary and Chapel on Michigan Avenue, one block, south of Grand Ave.

It was also announced that a Sun City-Youngtown ambulance would provide free service to any Glendale or Phoenix hospital.

Lundberg's officially opened six months later, January 25, 1962.

A third bank appeared on the scene in August - the Valley National Bank at 12026 N. 111th Avenue. Technically in Youngtown, it would serve both communities. This permanent brick structure was built in Mount Vernon architectural style. The Manager, Taylor Smith, held an open house with guided tours, refreshments and souvenirs -- an aerial photo of Sun City, ball point pens and golf tees. Whoever came closest to guessing the number of coins in a plastic vault would receive the equivalent in cash.

Baer's Furniture and Safeway both announced expansion plans on Sept. 21. Baer's would move to larger quarters at the west end of the shopping center. Robert Baer said this would double the present floor space and announced plans to move their drapery, fabrics and workshop to Sun City.

Robert Protti, Safeway manager, said the grocery store would take over the present Baer site as a stock room. The present stock room would be added to the sales area to feature fancy foods from all over the world such as smoked frog legs, rare macadamia nuts, South Sea Island Caviar, cocoa from India, syrup from England, marmalade from Scotland, and a good line of Kosher foods and fancy pickles.

An old-fashioned sweet shop and ice cream parlor opened December 5 with Phil MacConnell, formerly assistant manager at the HiWay House, as manager. Owners were Ed Hessen and LeMarr Lundstrom of the Sun City Real Estate business, and Gordon Koer, former restaurant owner and a Sun City resident. The shop had seating for about seventy people. Sandwiches, pastries, bulk candy and ice cream would be available. Catering was also offered.

Youngtown, five years older than Sun City, was beginning to attract more businesses that could serve both communities. George Beal, owner of

Beals's TV in Glendale, opened a store in November 1961 in a four-unit center located on 111th Avenue near Grand Avenue. The Circle K Market, Youngtown Medical and Denny's Paint store would occupy the other three units.

Earl & Betty McClellan moved their nursery to 111th and Alabama Avenues. The new location provided 2,500 sq.ft. of interior floor space and 5,000 sq.ft. in a lath house. The nursery supplied Sun City's landscaping needs for many years.

Located at 12255 111th Avenue were the Marinette Sanitation and Sunburst Water Companies. They promised the serve combined office would "better serve you."

Toward the end of 1961 Lou Register announced plans for a mobile service that would offer a full range of carpet, drapery and slipcover samples enabling residents to shop at home. Custom-made draperies were available for as little as \$159.00 for the Kenilworth model, and \$199.00 for the Montecello model.

Other early businesses included Berridge Nursery, One Hour Valet, Steven's Beauty Parlor (Mrs. Helen J. Stevens), Sun Control Blinds and Carpet, Twin City Health Center, Homer Lane, electrician and insurance agents, Cash, Sullivan and Cross.

Grocery prices reflected in the local advertising were indicative of the economy during 1960-61. Safeway advertised leg of lamb for 69-cents a pound; chuck roast, 49-cents; Palmolive Soap, four bars for 25 cents; a loaf of bread, 19 cents; margarine, 26 cents; two pound carton of cottage cheese, 39 cents; and a 1/2 gallon of ice cream for 59 cents. The Hiway House offered luncheons from 95 cents, dinners from \$1.60, and an "all you can eat" fish fry on Friday nights for \$1.50.

The March 10, 1961 edition of TIME magazine reported "A survey of

the 448 Sun City residents who applied for Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans showed that the average Sun City resident has a net worth of \$54,658, a yearly income of \$7,878, a bank balance of \$7,160. These startling figures do not include the roughly 60% of Sun Citians who paid cash for their homes."

Shortly thereafter, a large advertisement appeared in the NEWS-SUN to the effect "wise merchants reach for fertile markets."

As of 2001, the incomes were up and the markets still fertile -- or are they?

Compiled by Jane Freeman, Co-author, JUBILEE September, 2001