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THE ARIZONA CONNECTION:
NEW YORK YANKEES HAD LONG HISTORY IN THE DESERT WHEN OWNER
WAS LEGENDARY PHOENIX-BASED BUILDER DEL WEBB

PHOENIX -- It's not so strange that the New York Yankees will be playing the first game of the World Series in the desert. In fact, the Yankees relationship with Arizona goes back more than five decades when the "pinstripes" were owned by Phoenix business mogul Del Webb.

Webb's ownership role with the Yankees came during one of the team's most fabled eras -- from 1945-65. With dynamic players like Joe DiMaggio, Whitey Ford, Don Larsen, Mickey Mantle and others on the team, plus managers like Casey Stengel, baseball's most storied franchise won the World Series 10 times in the 20-year stretch Webb owned them.

Webb's passion was always baseball, but he also made an extraordinary impact on the nation's landscape. In 1960 Webb opened the first Sun City retirement community and began to revolutionize the concept of retirement with his active adult communities that now stretch from coast to coast.

"I applied the rules of baseball to business," he used to say.

No better statement exemplified the blending of Webb's two worlds. He grew up with a hammer in one hand, a baseball glove on the other. Webb went on to own one of the largest development firms in the country and the best-known baseball team in the world.

"Baseball is a living example of what our national sport will do for us as Americans. It is a great example for everybody in every walk of life..." Webb once said. "It teaches courage; it



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gives you guts. It develops the kind of teamwork and organization on which many businesses and enterprises are founded."

Webb was the majority owner of the Yankees, purchased in 1945 with partners Dan Topping and Larry MacPhail for \$2,850,500. The deal included not only the team, but ownership of Yankee Stadium and all the Yankees farm clubs as well.

Under his ownership, the Yankees were a perennial powerhouse winning 15 American League Pennants and 10 World Series Championships (five of those set the record for consecutive title from 1949 to 1953).

"Del was an ideal owner," once remarked Yankee great Yogi Berra. "He left the business of baseball to the pros, knowing they would make mistakes, but that's the way it is and should be." In addition, Webb gave the general manager free reign to sign the players and the coaches to run the team on the field.

Saturday's first game of the 2001 World Series against the Arizona Diamondbacks won't be the first time the Yanks have played in Phoenix. During his tenure as owner, Webb brought "the Fightingest Club in Baseball" to town for spring training in February 1951 courtesy of then New York Giants owner Horace Stoneham.

Webb and Stoneham "swapped" training sites that year so Webb could show off his team to the supportive hometown crowd while the Giants headed to Florida. It was the only year the Yankees, fresh from their 1950 World Series win, trained here.

Phoenix baseball fans got to see DiMaggio, Berra, Phil Rizzuto, Hank Bauer, Billy Johnson, Allie Reynolds, Bobby Brown and little Billy (The Kid) Martin play and tried hard to make Phoenix the team's permanent spring training camp.

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There were other “firsts” in Webb’s career as owner including the team’s first night game at Yankee Stadium and the debut game of Yankee legends Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris and Berra in the 1950s.

As a young man in Fresno, Calif., Webb learned carpentry as a hobby while pursuing baseball. When his father fell upon some financial trouble, Webb was forced to quit high school and become a carpenter’s apprentice but only worked for companies with a baseball team.

His dreams of playing professional baseball ended at the age of 26 when he contracted typhoid fever. In order to recuperate, Webb moved to Phoenix.

The event proved to be a turning point in his life. Forced to put away his glove, Webb poured all his energy and talents into carpentry. In 1927, he began the Del Webb Company. Despite the ensuing Depression years, the company quickly grew, and by the mid-1930s it had offices in 12 states.

Webb is best known for creating Sun City, an innovative community that was designed exclusively for retirees, which opened near Phoenix in 1960. The event changed forever the way society would view retirement and for this he was recognized on the cover of *Time* magazine.

Webb also built or made improvements to some of baseball’s best-known facilities including Yankee Stadium and Chicago’s Wrigley Field. His firm built the 44,000-seat Anaheim Stadium for the Los Angeles Angels owner Gene Autry in 1966. Webb-built Kauffman Stadium in Kansas City brought baseball to the game’s smallest market, helping the sport reach out to new fans in the 1970s.

Hotel development would provide additional opportunities for the company’s success. He and Howard Hughes would become instrumental in polishing the image of Las Vegas.

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Webb died in 1974. Today, the company Webb founded is the nation's leading builder of active adult communities for people 55 and older and is part of Pulte Homes (NYSE: PHM). Del Webb also operates multi-generational and country club communities in Nevada and Arizona. Four of Del Webb's communities are currently ranked in the top 10 of the best-selling master planned communities in America.