



DAILY NEWS-SUN

John W. Meeker Jr. poses by a Meeker Boulevard street sign in Sun City West in a Daily News-Sun file photo. Meeker, who was instrumental in the planning and construction of Sun City and Sun City West, died Saturday.

Former Webb president John Meeker dies at age 73

VF IC Meeker, John

VISIONARY: Former Webb mail clerk created plans for many of the retirement communities' landmarks

BRUCE ELLISON
DAILY NEWS-SUN

John W. Meeker Jr., the man who oversaw the design and construction of all of Sun City and the beginnings of Sun City West, died Saturday. He was 73.

A one-time caddie to developer Del Webb, Meeker first worked for the Webb company as a mail boy, and rose to be president of Del Webb Development Co., or Devco, the builder of Sun City.

Services are 3:30 p.m. Friday in Paradise Valley.

"He gave Sun City its personality," said Jane Freeman, a 30-year Sun City resident who knew Meeker.

"His first interest was always in the people, in the residents," Freeman said. "He wanted to do what he could to make people happy here and comfortable here."

"He was a man of real vision,"

said Ken Meade, who worked for Meeker for nine years as a real estate sales person before starting his own company.

"The Sundome in Sun City West, Hillcrest Golf Course, which is a real marvel. These are the works of a visionary, for the residents of his community," Meade said.

Meeker's daughter, Suzanne Meeker Jones, said her father was "difficult in many ways," but wanted the best.

He took a great interest in young people, she said, and often acted as a mentor for them, both personally and professionally.

"He was a perfectionist, but he always said you have to care. He

was very modest, and many of the things he did for Sun City were done with very little publicity."

Among those actions were donations of land or other facilities for many community service projects, from the

Lions Club to the Sun Bowl and later the Sundome in Sun City West.

Meeker Boulevard in Sun City West is named for him.

A colleague from Meeker's days in Sun City, R.H. Johnson of Wickenburg, a former president of Del Webb Corp., said

'He gave Sun City its personality.'

Jane Freeman

See friends recall, A7

Friends recall Sun City visionary

FROM A1

Meeker's management talent shone when he took on the construction and planning tasks in Sun City in 1960.

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"I know that for a long time he actually called or stopped by people's houses to see what they liked about them, or what problems they had or what suggestions they might make for improvements."

Freeman said Meeker fought for what he wanted and persisted until he got it.

He persuaded Webb corporate officials to build larger recreation centers — Bell Center, Sun City's largest, is a good example, she said.

In the 1985 book, "Jubilee," written to celebrate Sun City's 25th anniversary, an epilogue chapter is devoted to Meeker.

Few have had more to do with Sun City's success than John Meeker, it begins.

"Few if any major decisions involving Sun City have not rested on his broad shoulders."

When the Webb company became mired in the recession of 1964-65, it was Meeker who led



JIM PAINTER/DAILY NEWS-SUN

John Meeker was involved in many community affairs and promotional events, including Sun City West's first Ladies Professional Golf Association tournament played at Hillcrest Golf Course in 1980. Meeker, right presents a check and trophy to Jan Stephenson, the winner of that tournament. Former Sen. Dennis DeConcini is at left and Jerry Svendsen, who was hired by Meeker in the early 1960s to help promote Sun City, is wearing sunglasses in background.

the way out, moving for the first time to work more directly with residents, rather than simply seeing them as customers.

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He helped out with facilities for the Sun City Symphony and the Sun City Museum of Art, saw that Webb contributed land for the Posse, for Sunshine Service, for churches and more.

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and drugstores, to the community's shopping areas.

"Meeker's influence on Sun City during its critical growth period cannot be overestimated," the book concludes.

John Wesley Meeker Jr. was born in Brownwood, Texas, and had served in the Army Air Corps in World War II. He was president of Del Webb Development Co. from 1965 to 1981.

A member of the Sun City Lions Club, he also served on the board of Rio Salado Community College.

He had battled cancer for

some time, said his daughter. "It was hard at the end, but he left us peacefully."

Meeker, who lived in Phoenix, is survived by his wife, Bonnie; a daughter, Suzanne Meeker Jones; sons Mark Richard Meeker and Scott Andrew Meeker III; a stepson, Randall Richard King; 10 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Service is 3:30 p.m. Friday at Christ Church of the Ascension, 4015 E. Lincoln Drive, Paradise Valley.

Memorials may be sent to Hospice of the Valley, 1510 E. Flower St., Phoenix.

Sun City motivator dies at 73

By Greg Roybal
The Arizona Republic

John W. Meeker Jr., who showed Americans a new way to retire by helping turn 10,000 acres of cotton land into Sun City, died Saturday. He was 73.

Meeker, a tough but fair manager considered by some to be the father of retirement-community planning, started his development career modestly — as a caddie for onetime carpenter Del Webb before World War II.

After he was discharged from the Army Air Corps, Meeker returned to Webb's employ, working his way up the ranks to eventually become president of Del E. Webb Development Co. from 1965 to 1981.

"When John Meeker headed Devco (as the subsidiary was known), he ran it with an iron fist," recalled Bob Bowsby, a land planner and landscape architect who worked under Meeker for 10 years until 1963.

"There were a lot of ideas that happened out there (in Sun City) that were John's ideas."

It was Meeker's idea to build the recreation center at 107th Avenue and to continuously upgrade and expand homes that were built in succeeding sections of Sun City, Bowsby said.

Meeker, Devco executive Owen Childress and Webb partner James G. Boswell II are considered among the most instrumental in creating Sun City, which was unveiled on New Year's Day 1960. It met with immediate success, drawing more than 100,000 people to the grand opening.

The original layout of Sun City was between Grand Avenue to the north and Olive Avenue to the south, between the Agua Fria and New rivers. Today, the retirement community reaches north to Union Hills Drive, and is home to about 45,000 people.

"I give John Meeker credit: He was probably most responsible

for the successful, first Sun City," Bowsby said.

Dave Lutin, who also worked with Meeker and lectured at Arizona State University 10 years ago with him, said Meeker never got the credit he deserved for his part in Sun City and retirement-community planning in general.

"His attitude was, 'Get the job done,'" Lutin said. "You could try and have it done by a nice guy, or you could get the job done. John got the job done."

Lutin remembers a time in the mid-'70s when Del Webb's business dealings started turning sour, and threatened to drag down the whole corporation.

"Del Webb turned to John and said, 'Can you save us?' And John said, 'I can,'" Lutin recalled. "Before, decisions were being made by committee, but John was hard-nosed. It was the only reason things got done."

But he was fair, too, said Mike Britt, who also worked with Meeker.

"As an employee for 20 years," Britt said, "and more importantly

in his dealings with firms, he was always fair, be it with home buyers, people who had bought a home and lived in it for 15 years, subcontractors, and anybody else who was involved.

"I look at him really as the father of planned retirement community concept. Maybe 90 percent of what is being done is because of John Meeker."

Meeker, who was born in Brownwood, Texas, was a member of the Sun City Lions Club and sat on the advisory board of Rio Salado Community College.

Survivors include his wife, Bonnie; daughter, Suzanne Carol Jones; sons, John Wesley III, Mark Richard and Scott Andrew Meeker; stepson, Randall Richard King; 10 grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

Services are at 3:30 p.m. Friday, Christ Church of the Ascension, 4015 E. Lincoln Drive in Paradise Valley.

Contributions can be sent to Hospice of the Valley, 1510 E. Flower St., Phoenix, AZ 85014-5699. Paradise Chapel is handling arrangements.

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Considered by some to be the father of retirement community planning, John W. Meeker Jr. (in a 1978 photo) died Saturday at 73.

John Meeker named streets, designed homes

(John Meeker, now president, was "introduced" via this article from Webb Company writer, Dick Kemp, which was released nationally. The News-Sun printed it in August 1963.)

What's in a name?

Plenty, say disgruntled suburbanites throughout America, living on streets named after letters of the alphabet or states.

It's different in Del Webb Sun City retirement communities, though. One

man picked the titles, long before elected officials or citizen committees ever thought of getting into a street-naming squabble.

There, street signs sport such musical sounding words as Pinehurst, Pebble Beach, Thunderbird and Cherry Hills.

A new resident might even find himself on a street named after a favorite golfer, such as Hogan, Hope or Crosby Drive or Snead Circle.

Pleased residents can thank a 37-year-old one-time amateur golfer



In the years that followed the above article, John Meeker was seen often with Del Webb, as in one of many groundbreaking ceremonies that were part of the development of Sun City.

and caddy, who carried his love for the game from design of Sun City homes around winding golf courses to naming streets after famous golfers and golf courses.

He is John Meeker, who was never presented a college degree in engineering, landscaping, architecture, or interior design, but who now manages a department embracing experts in all these fields.

It was golf that brought Meeker to the Del E. Webb Corporation, builder of communities in Arizona, Florida and California.

By age 14, Meeker had developed a reputation as a very efficient caddy around courses in Phoenix, where he was born and raised. Beginning at 12 on Encanto's public links, by 14 he was working the Phoenix Country Club and carrying clubs for many a famous professional and amateur sportsman.

One golfer who made a practice of asking for caddy Meeker was Del Webb, who in 1941 had not yet purchased the New York Yankees, but who was known widely for his reputation as owner and operator of a top-notch construction company.

By 1944, John was 17, and very eligible for duty in World War II. After serving two years in the Air Force, Meeker joined a returning flood of job seekers his own age.

While deciding between further education or immediate employment, Meeker called on Del Webb. Room was made for an ambitious and bright young man, but the beginning position in 1946—as errand boy—meant starting at the very bottom.

In 1947, Meeker was made a junior accountant, then timekeeper and then office engineer.

A man on the move, he was sent as office manager to Kansas City where Webb builders were constructing a huge veterans hospital, then to San Manuel, Arizona, and on to work on the Sahara and Bagdad hotels in Las Vegas.

Back in Phoenix in 1955, Meeker was introduced into the firm's growing housing department, already responsible for homes in a number of

states and in Arizona, including five subdivisions in Phoenix.

"Here we learned to work with our salesmen—make small changes in home design from time to time to keep the market perked up."

Even now, Meeker's department keeps in close touch with buyers in all four Webb retirement communities. "They keep up a sharp market. Recently we sent out questionnaires to 1,100 residents and received 1,000 back. That's tremendous.

"As a result, the house we're building now is the best we've ever built."

The famous brother architect team of Charles and Arthur Schreiber helped plan early Sun City homes, but Meeker's department now designs all homes. In addition to homes and interior decorating, Webb planners designed Kings Inn motor hotels in Florida and California, and all community facilities in Sun City: Arizona, California and Florida.

Meeker, who carries the title of manager of design and engineering for the large Webb division, says building a home is more complex now than five years ago.

"Then we needed three sheets in a set of plans—now we must produce nine sheets. Reason is, houses are built better—require more instructions to a variety of craftsmen."

Meeker lives in a Webb-built home in Phoenix with his wife and family.

He is still a better-than-average golfer despite little practice, and last June won his division of the Riverside (Calif.) Air Force Base tournament with a 74 gross score.

Playing in the same tournament but in another division was Del Webb, who must have been proud to watch Meeker collect a handsome trophy.

As for John, he's glad he looked up the man whose golf clubs he carried at one time. And Sun Citians who are happy with their home and street name can thank John Meeker if they ever meet him.

They could be living on the corner of Utah and B street, if it weren't for the ex-caddy and his fondness for golf.

John W. Meeker Jr. dies

He was responsible for planning Sun Cities

By JULIE RIDDLE
Independent Newspapers

Time was when Sun City was nothing but 10,000 acres of cotton fields, a lonely stretch of land occupied by whiskey drinkers and carousers, and a place folks tried to avoid at all costs. By 1960, prospective residents, eager to get a look at a new retirement lifestyle, lined the highway between Phoenix and Los Angeles for two miles.

Key in that turnaround was retirement planning pioneer John W. Meeker Jr., who died Feb. 5, at 73.

Perhaps the most vital cog in Del E. Webb's infinitely rolling development wheel, Meeker is considered to be one of the founding fathers of retirement community planning at a time when such a thing seemed ludicrous.

Mr. Meeker, who prior to World War II worked as Mr. Webb's golf caddie, assumed the presidency of Delbert E. Webb Corporation (DEVCO) in 1965, a position he held 16 years.

Faced with lower home sales during the recession of 1964-65, it was Mr. Meeker whom Del Webb himself turned to, asking "Do you think you can turn things around, John?" Meeker did, as sales spiked sharply upward in successive years.

Known for taking business ventures that many considered foolish at the time, Mr. Meeker ignored his critics and built, usually with little backing. After completing the Sun Bowl in 1967, Mr. Meeker attracted names like Lawrence Welk and Pete Fountain to entertain, amazing those who said the location was too remote to bring headliners.

Jerry Svendsen, one of Mr. Meeker's former employees, said Mr. Meeker was a visionary who

carried out the dreams of Del Webb, and eventually, himself.

"All of the major projects and visions do stem back to John Meeker," Mr. Svendsen said. "He was the man with the biggest ideas. He was also a great man because he listened to his people."

In his mission to grow the community, Mr. Meeker's plans worked. In an effort to bring more churches to the area, he offered land at a reasonable cost, provided residents with agricultural plots at no charge and constructed a large compound for parking recreational vehicles.

H. Allen Winter, financial analyst for Webb, once called Mr. Meeker a catalyst who struggled to gain support.

"Mr. Meeker constantly fought to get the money to do those projects. He did a great job. He committed himself to that place and made it happen. He deserves the credit."

Mr. Meeker, according to Sun City Historical Society President Jane Freeman, was also a man of the people who knew what the community needed.

"John Meeker made Sun City what it is," Ms. Freeman said. "He believed in involving himself with the people — he gave us what we wanted before we even-knew what that was. He was able to bring people together as a cohesive unit. It was not just a lot of houses — he was one of us."

His legacy, Ms. Freeman said, is evident.

"He is responsible for the indoor pool at the Sundial Recreation Center, Viewpoint Lake and the Sundome. He put air-conditioning into the houses. He had a lot of foresight — people came first," Ms. Freeman recalled. "He was largely responsible for making the retirement community what it is today. He set the tone," she added.

In tribute to the man instrumental in developing the community, the street now circling the very heart of Sun City West was named Meeker Boulevard, though Mr. Svendsen



**John W.
Meeker Jr.**

■ MEEKER

says that more than a street should have been dedicated to his former boss.

"It is much more than just Meeker Boulevard. Everyone use to look at Del as the father of retirement, but it was Meeker who built that dream, and had little dreams along the way," Mr. Svendsen said.

Mr. Meeker is survived by his wife, Bonnie; daughter, Suzanne

Carol Jones; sons, John Wesley III, Mark Richard and Scott Andrew Meeker; stepson Randall Richard King; 10 grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

See ■ MEEKER, Page 9

Saturday, Feb. 12, and Sunday, Feb. 13, 2000

Family, friends mourn Meeker

MEMORIAL SERVICE:

Webb president
eulogized as builder,
dreamer

JOSH KRIST
DAILY NEWS-SUN

About 150 people filled Christ Church of the Ascension in Paradise Valley Friday for John Wesley Meeker's memorial service.

Meeker is credited with giving Sun City its personality through his personal touch as president of Devco, the Del E. Webb development company.

After organ and harp music at Friday's afternoon service, Meeker's family filed into the church and filled three pews.

"We have gathered here in this church to celebrate the life of John W. Meeker," said the Rev. William North, who noted that Meeker didn't attend the church, but wanted to have his last rites performed there.

"I understand John's relationship with God was mostly personal," he said.

The bright sun came into the church through clear narrow windows. Outside, one could see desert plants like those from the nearby Squaw Peak mountain preserves.

North said that Meeker was a dreamer and a builder. He related the story from Meeker's youth, where the young man was in the woods with his parents and pointed up into a group of trees.

"That's where I want the porch to be," he reportedly said, and built his vacation home thereabouts.

"Whereas to others, there were only branches," said North, in front of a large metal cross hung on the wall behind him.

Meeker was dedicated, loyal, humorous and hard working, among many other things, said North.

"The quest for the perfect city, the habitation of justice and peace, is the great dream of mankind," North said, adding that Meeker's gift was his attempt to build such a city.

"Such cities are not built in the air, they are built by men of honesty and integrity. These are words used to describe John," he said.

"The promise that Christ makes, bought with the faith of our fathers, is that there is a heavenly mansion with many rooms," North said.

The whole congregation then rose to sing "Amazing Grace."

Meeker's family filed out of the church



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Mourners leave Christ Church of the Ascension in Paradise Valley after the service for John Meeker on Friday. **More remembrances of Meeker, Page A3**

behind the reverend, many of them weeping.

There was a reception for family and friends after the service where people were encouraged to share their reflections and stories on Meeker.

Meeker died last Saturday at the age of 73.

A one-time caddie to developer Del Webb, Meeker first worked for the Webb company as a mail boy, and rose to be president of Devco. He oversaw complete construction of Sun City and the beginnings of Sun City West.

Meeker's daughter, Suzanne Meeker Jones, said her father was "difficult in many ways," but wanted the best.

"He was a perfectionist, but he always said you have to care. He was very modest, and many of the things he did for Sun City were done with very little publicity."

Among those actions were donations of land or other facilities for many community service projects, from the Lions Club to the Sun Bowl and later the Sundome in Sun City West.

Meeker Boulevard in Sun City West is named for him.

Meeker remembered for responsiveness, vision

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: His work focused on making retirement community a reality

BRUCE ELLISON
DAILY NEWS-SUN

John W. Meeker, the Del Webb Corp. official who supervised the building of Sun City and the start of Sun City West, this week was remembered by colleagues for his vision of what the communities should be, and his work in fighting to make them fit that vision.

Meeker, who had been president of the Del E. Webb Development Co., from 1965 to 1981, died Saturday at age 73. Service was Friday in Paradise Valley.

Jane Freeman, a 30-year Sun City resident who knew Meeker called him "the man who gave Sun City its personality.

"He brought the character of the community to life, and everything he did here was done with the people, the residents, in mind," she recalled.

"He wanted us to be comfortable and happy."

Among Meeker's projects was publicizing Sun City, and the man he chose to help in that effort was Jerry Svendsen, long retired from Webb and now publisher of "Sun Life" magazine.

"John was a super boss, just super," Svendsen said earlier this week.

"He saw the big ideas, the things that were needed to sell houses in that new thing, the retirement community.



DAILY NEWS-SUN FILE PHOTO

John Meeker, center, participates in a groundbreaking ceremony for the Del E. Webb Development Co. Meeker had a reputation for responsiveness to customers' needs.

"He knew the kinds of recreational facilities and amenities that would appeal to people, and he brought big name entertainers to the Sun Bowl" at a time when nobody thought such folks as Rosemary Clooney and Lawrence Welk would appear at such an outdoor amphitheater.

Svendsen said Meeker also was responsible for constructing Viewpoint Lake and its hilltop gazebo; and for promoting the Lakes Club and other non-Webb activities.

His daughter, Suzanne Meeker Jones, said Meeker also was a mentor, both professionally and personally, to younger Webb

employees.

One of those employees is LeRoy Hanneman, now president and chief executive officer of Del Webb Corp. in Phoenix.

"She is certainly right about the mentoring," Hanneman said.

"John Meeker was an extraordinary teacher and I was fortunate to have worked under him.

"He had a passion for what we were doing (with retirement communities) and he liked to convey that passion to us.

"He was quite an intense individual about it, and he carried that passion for Sun City to work with him every day.

"If you responded, shared it, he would just let it flow.

"He did it for me and he did it for a lot of others folks in the company. I owe a lot to him, as do many others here."

Hanneman, like Svendsen, said Meeker was an extraordinary advocate for customers.

"He had had an unbelievable sense of what was meaningful for them," Hanneman said.

"He knew that, unlike many other home buyers, they didn't need a new home. They weren't being transferred, they could stay right where they were.

"In many cases, buying a Sun

"He understood our customers so well. Right up to the last few months, when I'd take him to see some of our newer projects, he'd always look at them through the customer's eyes."

LeRoy Hanneman, Webb president and CEO

City home meant leaving family and friends and familiar things, and John knew he had to create a compelling environment here to convince people to do that.

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Another former Webb colleague, former president R.H. Johnson, said Meeker often visited with new homebuyers to seek their opinions on what was right with the homes and the community, and what could be improved.

Ken Meade, who started working with Webb as a sales representative and later formed his own realty company, said, "I truly enjoyed working for John."

"He always satisfied the customer," Meade said.

"I recall in particular one customer to whom I'd sold a home, a home with a flat roof.

"The buyer didn't think it was built right, and complained about it.

"So John Meeker went out there one day with a ladder and set it up against the house and climbed up to look it over.

"He decided that the buyer was right, that the roof was wrong, and said he'd have it fixed

in days.

"And you know, he'd go back with that ladder and make sure it was fixed," Meade recalled.

Hanneman, now the Webb president, worked with Meeker in those days.

"I know he made sure it was fixed right, because I had to assure him of that," Hanneman said.

A perfectionist according to his daughter, Meeker wanted everything just so. But he also let his employees try new things, and new ways, Svendsen said.

"He wanted a vital community and I think he knew that the only way to get it was to try something new," Svendsen said. He wasn't afraid of an occasional failure.

Chuck Roach, the Del Webb Corp. vice president who finished the development of Sun City West that Meeker had started, never worked directly for the late executive.

"I'd met him, of course, and I knew his history," Roach said.

"He played a critical and pivotal role in the success of both Sun City and Sun City West.

"He was at the helm from the early years, and he knew the value of what we were building.

"The influence he had on our business was legendary, just legendary," Roach said.

Meeker's departure

Last week's corporate announcement that John Meeker had resigned as Del E. Webb Development Co. president after more than a dozen years in that post surprised many in Sun City.

Perhaps it shouldn't have, given the large number of staff cutbacks in recent months as Devco strived to overcome sizable deficits brought about by a depression which has brought the nation's housing industry to a near-standstill.

But it surprised the News-Sun staff nonetheless, and we suspect that most Sun Citians were struck the same way.

Meeker occupied an unusual position in the Sun City-Sun City West community because his involvement was so personal. He was monarchical in his application of decisions which affected the community, but he was directly involved in the decision-making process.

Perhaps it was a fault that Meeker did little delegation of responsibility in his totalitarian approach to Devco's administration. But this is what brought him close to those affected and to the problems as they saw it.

John Meeker was accessible. Those who wanted to get their messages across to the "top guy" generally got to do so. There's no question that this made his job harder and stretched out his typical work day substantially.

But in his direct approach to "governing" Sun City and Sun City West—and in many respects this is what he did do—he held up high standards for the community and overall kept his staff and the community adhering to those standards.

His concern for the charitable efforts mounted by citizen volunteers was reflected, generally unknown to the public, in such behind-the-scenes support as \$1-a-year rentals in Devco offices. The matter of rents has been brought home sharply to

9-14-81
many non-profit public service organizations lately because of the sale of many office buildings by financially hard-pressed Devco; new owners have brought rentals into line with reality, thus creating chaos out of carefully constructed budgets.

On balance, Meeker's tenure as Devco's boss here must be assessed as a major plus for the community. We think that the vast majority of the local citizenry will join us in wishing him well in his future endeavors.

Meeker resigns from DevCo

A change in top executives in the Del E. Webb Development Co. was announced Wednesday with the

resignation of John W. Meeker as president of the subsidiary of Del E. Webb Corp.



John Meeker



Joseph Aubin

9/11/81
Named to succeed Meeker is Joseph S. Aubin, executive vice president who also will be acting general manager of DevCo.

According to Jerry Svendsen, vice president for public relations, Meeker resigned to pursue other business interests. Meeker was unavailable for comment.

Aubin, a native of Arizona and a 30-year veteran with DevCo, joined the company as an accountant. He has held various executive positions in the Webb organization, including project manager of the Sun City, Calif., development from 1965 to 1970.

DevCo, currently developing Sun City West, is 51 percent owned by the Del E. Webb Corp. and 49 percent by J. G. Boswell Co. DevCo is the builder of the Sun City retirement community.

Friends recall Sun City visionary

From A1

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JIM PAINTER/DAILY NEWS-SUN

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'He gave Sun City its personality.'

Jane Freeman

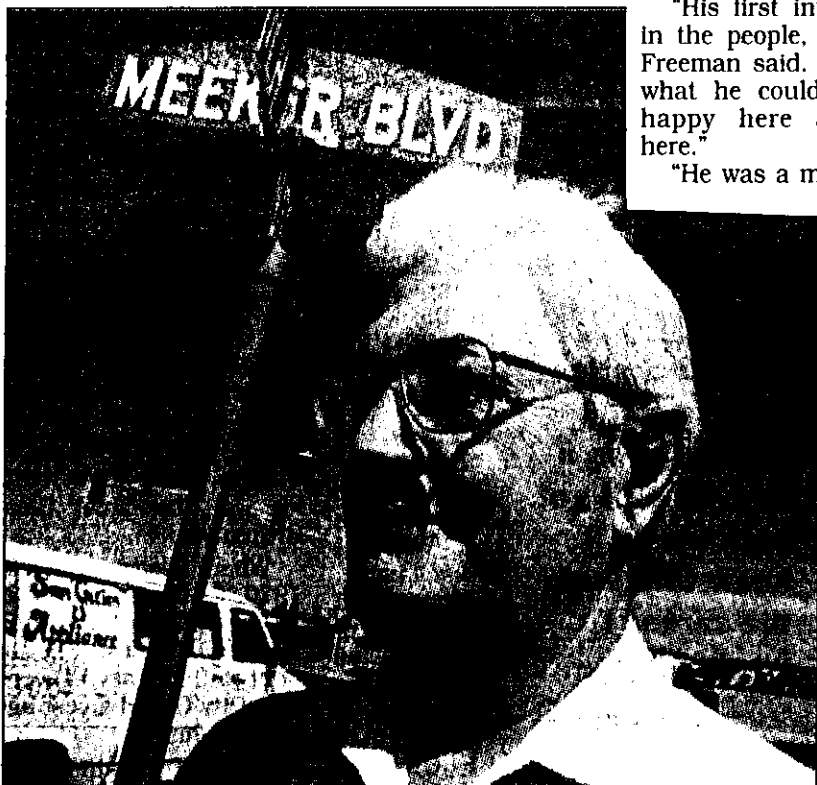
Among those actions were donations of land or other facilities for many community service projects, from the

Lions Club to the Sun Bowl and later the Sundome in Sun City West.

Meeker Boulevard in Sun City West is named for him.

A colleague from Meeker's days in Sun City, R.H. Johnson of Wickenburg, a former president of Del Webb Corp., said

See Friends recall, A7



DAILY NEWS-SUN

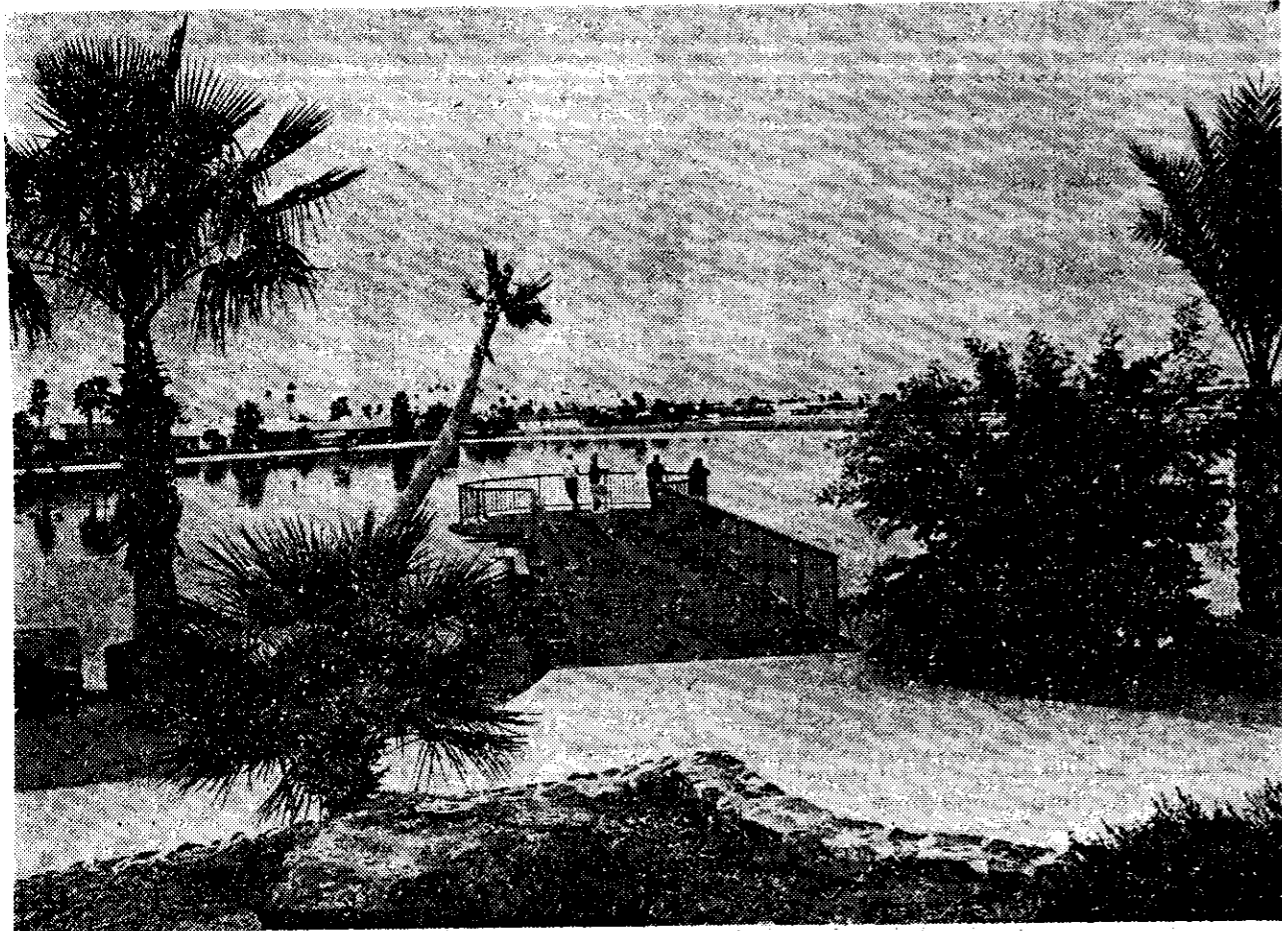
John W. Meeker Jr. poses by a Meeker Boulevard street sign in Sun City West in a Daily News-Sun file photo. Meeker, who was instrumental in the planning and construction of Sun City and Sun City West, died Saturday.

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Successor to Del Webb pushing plans for enlarging Sun City

The Arizona Republic

Jan. 10, 1975



This tranquil lake is located at the foot of View Point Hill in Sun City. It is a community focal point.

SUN CITY — John Meeker, now president of the Del E. Webb Development Co., may well be termed a "pioneer."

He has been involved in the design of houses, golf courses and subdivisions here since the inception of Sun City.

Meeker was a youth, caddying at the Phoenix Country Club, when he first met Del E. Webb who later became the developer of Sun City. Meeker began regular employment with Webb (who died last year) in 1946 as a mail boy, and by 1959 had become the original manager of operations in the development of Sun City. He has been involved with the community ever since.

"Sun City has developed beyond our expectations," Meeker said here this week. "It is difficult to comprehend a development the size of Sun City."

Statistics are overwhelming.

Consider that Sun City as now developed and including the new area north of Bell Road, covers 9,000 acres. Total construction in homes and apartments by the Webb Co. since inception of Sun City amounts to \$490 million, Meeker said.

In addition there are \$50 million in commercial and other types of construction mostly built by the Webb Co.

Company officials place Sun City's assessed valuation at \$90 million.

They estimate that Sun Citians will pay \$6.8 million in real and personal property taxes to the state and county in fiscal 1974-75. However, officials point out, this represents only about 44 per cent of the total identifiable revenue that local residents are producing for the state and county in taxes.

Sun Citians also make substantial contributions in spendable income. Savings in Sun City banks and savings and loan firms are in excess of \$500 million, according to reports.

The Webb Co. is now pushing construction north of Bell Road, Meeker said. Development includes a \$5 million Bell Recreation Center with a 10,250 sq. ft. library, 16-lane bowling alley, a 650-seat social hall plus outdoor pool and tennis courts. Arts and craft shops will be located in a village setting. A third country club and golf course are also planned for Sun City.

Of added import, too, Meeker announced, is a semi-regional shopping center anchored with a major department store planned for south of Bell Road at 99th Avenue.

But planning goes further than development north of Bell.

"We are proceeding with planning for 12,000 acres of land west of the present



John Meeker

Sun City for a retirement center, Meeker reported. "First part of the new area to be developed will be north of Grand Avenue. Development of Sun City West, as it will be called, will depend on sale of the remaining area in Sun City. We probably will move into the area in about three years."

Meeker paid tribute to the contribution of various leaders who have evolved in Sun City. "They have helped make Sun City what it is today," he said.

John Meeker named streets, designed homes

(John Meeker, now president, was "introduced" via this article from Webb Company writer, Dick Kemp, which was released nationally. The News-Sun printed it in August 1963.)

What's in a name?

Plenty, say disgruntled suburbanites throughout America, living on streets named after letters of the alphabet or states.

It's different in Del Webb Sun City retirement communities, though. One

man picked the titles, long before elected officials or citizen committees ever thought of getting into a street-naming squabble.

There, street signs sport such musical sounding words as Pinehurst, Pebble Beach, Thunderbird and Cherry Hills.

A new resident might even find himself on a street named after a favorite golfer, such as Hogan, Hope or Crosby Drive or Snead Circle.

Pleased residents can thank a 37-year-old one-time amateur golfer



In the years that followed the above article, John Meeker was seen often with Del Webb, as in one of many groundbreaking ceremonies that were part of the development of Sun City.

and caddy, who carried his love for the game from design of Sun City homes around winding golf courses to naming streets after famous golfers and golf courses.

He is John Meeker, who was never presented a college degree in engineering, landscaping, architecture, or interior design, but who now manages a department embracing experts in all these fields.

It was golf that brought Meeker to the Del E. Webb Corporation, builder of communities in Arizona, Florida and California.

By age 14, Meeker had developed a reputation as a very efficient caddy around courses in Phoenix, where he was born and raised. Beginning at 12 on Encanto's public links, by 14 he was working the Phoenix Country Club and carrying clubs for many a famous professional and amateur sportsman.

One golfer who made a practice of asking for caddy Meeker was Del Webb, who in 1941 had not yet purchased the New York Yankees, but who was known widely for his reputation as owner and operator of a top-notch construction company.

By 1944, John was 17, and very eligible for duty in World War II. After serving two years in the Air Force, Meeker joined a returning flood of job seekers his own age.

While deciding between further education or immediate employment, Meeker called on Del Webb. Room was made for an ambitious and bright young man, but the beginning position in 1946—as errand boy—meant starting at the very bottom.

In 1947, Meeker was made a junior accountant, then timekeeper and then office engineer.

A man on the move, he was sent as office manager to Kansas City where Webb builders were constructing a huge veterans hospital, then to San Manuel, Arizona, and on to work on the Sahara and Bagdad hotels in Las Vegas.

Back in Phoenix in 1955, Meeker was introduced into the firm's growing housing department, already responsible for homes in a number of

states and in Arizona, including five subdivisions in Phoenix.

"Here we learned to work with our salesmen—make small changes in home design from time to time to keep the market perked up."

Even now, Meeker's department keeps in close touch with buyers in all four Webb retirement communities. "They keep up a sharp market. Recently we sent out questionnaires to 1,100 residents and received 1,000 back. That's tremendous.

"As a result, the house we're building now is the best we've ever built."

The famous brother architect team of Charles and Arthur Schreiber helped plan early Sun City homes, but Meeker's department now designs all homes. In addition to homes and interior decorating, Webb planners designed Kings Inn motor hotels in Florida and California, and all community facilities in Sun City: Arizona, California and Florida.

Meeker, who carries the title of manager of design and engineering for the large Webb division, says building a home is more complex now than five years ago.

"Then we needed three sheets in a set of plans—now we must produce nine sheets. Reason is, houses are built better—require more instructions to a variety of craftsmen."

Meeker lives in a Webb-built home in Phoenix with his wife and family.

He is still a better-than-average golfer despite little practice, and last June won his division of the Riverside (Calif.) Air Force Base tournament with a 74 gross score.

Playing in the same tournament but in another division was Del Webb, who must have been proud to watch Meeker collect a handsome trophy.

As for John, he's glad he looked up the man whose golf clubs he carried at one time. And Sun Citians who are happy with their home and street name can thank John Meeker if they ever meet him.

They could be living on the corner of Utah and B street, if it weren't for the ex-caddy and his fondness for golf.