

Pastor, wife establish SCW congregation



News-Sun photo by Steven Cherneski

NEW CHURCH — The Rev. Gordon Nelson and his wife, Lois, recently presented their church, Sun City West Assemblies of God, with a small Hammond organ because they feel the role of music is very important.

By P. ATWOOD WILLIAMS
News-Sun staff

SUN CITY WEST — The Rev. Gordon Nelson and his wife, Lois, are helping to establish a new church, for the third time in his 35-year-old ministerial career.

The Nelsons have presented the group with a small Hammond organ because they feel the role of music is very important. This too, they have done before.

"Our 70 members are a very enthusiastic group, and perhaps the greatest of any pastorate we've been in," says Nelson.

For the Assemblies of God, during their "decade of harvest," the goal is to "plant 5,000 new churches, reach and win 5,000,000 persons to Christ and disciple 20,000 persons for ministry."

The Nelsons are very happy to be a part of this movement by establishing the new church as are members of the congregation.

"God has given me the privilege of starting a brand new church," said one of the members, age 93.

The Nelsons have started churches which expanded rapidly in Danville and Granite City, Ill.

The Sun City West group is under the leadership and guidance of the Arizona District Council of the Assemblies of God Home Missions Department. And the Nelsons, grandparents of three children who live with their daughters in Phoenix, identify easily with members of the church.

The Sun City West First Assembly of God meets at 10 a.m. Sunday and 7 p.m. Wednesday in Western Savings Bank, 12580 Beardsley Road.

Nelson earned his ministerial degree at North Central Bible College in Minneapolis and began his career as an evangelist crossing the country. He then spent 20 years as pastor of five churches in Kansas, and

another 15 with three churches in Illinois.

For the past 4 ½ years he was associate pastor of the Sun City Evangel Assembly of God Church.

"I made over 4,000 home or hospital visits during these years," he says.

Lois Nelson was born in Nebraska and met Gordon in Minneapolis where she too attended college. Recently they celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary at Vale, Colo., a gift of their daughters, Jolene Hagerman and Joy Trimble, who are part of a gospel musical group, "Treasure." They have performed throughout the Valley.

Lois is licensed with the Assemblies of God Council also, but has done most of her ministry in teaching. She has taught 14 years in public schools of Kansas and Illinois and been principal and teacher in two Christian schools.

They love music, as do their daughters, and have just pre-

sented their new church members with an organ, as they did years ago while helping to form a new church.

Sunday morning worship is at 10 a.m.; the "Charismatic Hour of Power" is at 7 p.m. Wednesday.

The group began meeting during the spring at Pima Savings, which they soon outgrew.

Once Barendt forgot to pick up the key in time and the group was permitted to use the social hall of the Beth Emeth Jewish congregation for a Sunday service.

"The people in Sun City West could not be nicer to us," he says.

Barendt thinks the church is growing beautifully. He says members continue to give and speaks of the donated organ and a communion set. He opened a building fund this week with donated monies.

DAILY NEWS-SUN

WEDNESDAY, MAY 7, 2003

Church closes in on Crestview purchase

MICHAEL MARESH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

When the Crestview Center in Sun City West went dark in August 2001, businesses were forced to vacate after the utilities were shut off.

The center, built by Del Webb in January 1979 and a popular dining spot with windows overlooking Hillcrest Golf Club, has been dark since.

But it looks like light is on the horizon for the landmark on the northeast corner of Camino del Sol and R.H. Johnson Boulevard.

The First Assembly of God Church has outgrown its home at Beardsley Road and Stardust Boulevard and appears to be closing on the sale, said Sun City West Property Owners and Residents Association Director Bill

Hafeman.

Hafeman, planning and zoning director for PORA, said it is his understanding the church is now in escrow.

PORA President Randy Fuller said the church, located at the intersection of Beardsley Road and Stardust Boulevard, needs a larger meeting place for its congregation.

Fuller said the church wants to remodel the inside of the Crestview building, but has no plans to change its outside appearance.

Fuller said there are only a few things PORA is requesting from the church.

"We specifically mentioned the color of the loading dock and let them know we do not like the color," he said, adding the church has agreed to take care of this issue.

Hafeman said PORA has no objections to First Assembly of God using the property as a church provided a few stipulations are met.

"We want them to keep the property up," he said. "We want them to protect the area."

Hafeman said he plans on speaking with church officials today to determine when escrow will close.

The center has had a long, colorful history in the retirement community.

Crestview in 2000 changed hands in a complicated series of transactions that gave Walgreen Drug Stores the ability to build a store on the corner of R.H. Johnson Boulevard and Camino del Sol, across from the fire station.

The Ken Meade Realty sales office at the intersection was razed for the Walgreen construction in 2001.

PORA seeks First Assembly of God assurances

Pulte Homes won't release Crestview Center deed restrictions until association satisfied

MICHAEL MARESH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

While the work has begun to convert the Crestview Center into the new church site for the First Assembly of God, a few questions remain unanswered.

The Sun City West Property Owners and Residents Association has not yet signed off on the church moving into the Crestview Center, located on the northeast corner of Camino del Sol and R.H. Johnson Boulevard.

PORA Director Bill Hafeman said the church has not received a release from the deed restrictions applicable to the Crestview Center from Pulte Homes. Exhibit C to the grant deed by the then-Del Webb Corp. states that for 20 years after September 1996, the Crestview Center could only be used for a restaurant, bar, retail outlet or hotel. The deed could be changed by the grantor if a prior written consent is given.

Pulte Homes informed Hafeman it will not give its consent to the church until PORA is satisfied the

church will agree to its stipulations. Hafeman said PORA wants a signed statement from the church indicating it will maintain the property while not changing the outside appearance of the building.

Church officials informed PORA they were forced into closing escrow on the property without receiving a release on the deed restrictions. Hafeman said he was told the church had to close escrow by the end of April because a third party made an offer on the property.

Hafeman said he has no objections to the church using the building, as long as he is given assurances the property's appearance will remain unchanged.

"We want a statement in writing that they will maintain the grounds," he added, noting that PORA needs the statement quickly. "We don't want to wait until after the horse is gone that we lock the barn door. We are not objecting to them using the building. We want a statement that we can use."

Director Lefty Ward said PORA is too concerned about a minor issue.

"I do not know what our hang-up is," Ward said. "Sometimes I think we go overboard on some things. I am sure it can be resolved."

Hafeman said PORA just wants some assurances.

"We are only saying give us something," he said.

Calls to First Assembly of God Pastor Ben Leonard for comment were not returned.

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DAILY NEWS-SUN

THURSDAY, AUG. 21, 2003

Church prepares change of address

KATY O'GRADY
DAILY NEWS-SUN

The First Assembly of God in Sun City West is getting ready to move.

The church is relocating to the Crestview center at Camino del Sol and R.H. Johnson Boulevard sometime in September or October, said Associate Pastor Loren Gerdes.

In the meantime, the congregation continues to meet for services at its current location on Beardsley Road and Stardust Boulevard.

"The timing should work out fine, because we're close to being able to move in there except for the offices," Gerdes said.

First Assembly's current building has been for sale for a couple of months and already has seen some attention from prospective buyers.

Growth in the congregation brought the need for a larger facility, and the Crestview center will more than double First Assembly's seating capacity, Gerdes said.

"We're very excited about the move and the potential for serving the community even better," he said.

Questions about deed restrictions on the new location and other concerns on

the part of the Sun City West Property Owners and Residents Association have been answered.

The deed from Del Webb Corp. — since purchased by Pulte — required that until September 2016, the Crestview could only be used for a restaurant, bar, retail outlet or hotel. PORA sent a letter to Pulte asking that the church use be allowed, and Pulte has since granted the exemption, said PORA President Randy Fuller. Gerdes confirmed everything has been cleared for the church to move.

Fuller said First Assembly has "bent over backward" to meet PORA's concerns and make sure the Crestview is maintained in a manner beneficial to the community. For example, church officials reduced the height of speed bumps in front of the facility when residents complained, he said.

"The Crestview hadn't been taken care of aesthetically," Fuller said.

The transition is a good move for both First Assembly and Sun City West, Fuller said.

Katy O'Grady can be reached at 876-2514 or kogrady@aztrib.com.

Church ready for new site

KATY O'GRADY
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Pastor Ben Leonard was playing Hillcrest Golf Course in Sun City West one day when he topped a hill and spotted the vacated Crestview Center.

"I just came around and said, 'God, give me that place. ... It'll make a difference in our retirement community for Jesus Christ,'" Leonard remembered.

On Oct. 1, the Crestview Center and its former Terrace on the Green will set off on a new mission in the community.

The First Assembly of God, located in a former Western Savings and Loan about a mile from Crestview, will move into the refurbished center the first of the month, changing its name to Church on the Green.

A tentative logo for the church features a cornucopia with the words "First Assembly of God" going in one end and "Church on the Green" coming out the other.

The move and expansion from about 6,000 square feet to 33,000 was made possible by the son of church members whom Leonard declined to name. He also wouldn't disclose the cost of the new site, but said the church is moving in with no debt and that the property was "gifted" to the church in May 2003.

"I've never, never in all my ministry — and I've been in ministry since 1965 — I've never had anything like this, even remotely, happen," he said.

Leonard said church members and other Sun City West residents are excited about the move and Crestview's transformation. The Sun City West Property Owners and Residents Association has praised the church for refurbishing the

abandoned center, including cleaning up the landscaping and front entrance.

"The community loves it. They were thrilled, the way we've restored this," Leonard said. "If you look at it now, it's beautiful."

The Crestview had been empty for about a year and a half before the church took it over, Leonard said. In the interim, not only had the landscaping, parking lot and building exterior fallen into disrepair, but the interior was left unclean and in need of major work, from carpet and tile replacement to broken pipes and filthy ceilings and equipment.

IF YOU GO

- **WHO:** Church on the Green, Assembly of God; formerly First Assembly of God in Sun City West
- **WHAT:** Praise and worship service in new location
- **WHEN:** 7 p.m. Oct. 1
- **WHERE:** Church on the Green in the Crestview Center, 19051 R.H. Johnson Blvd.
- **INFO:** Call the church office at 546-6386

The majority of the work is being done by church members. During winter, the congregation grows to more than 300, Leonard said. The new facility seats 500, while the current location at 12580 W. Beardsley Road seats no more than 190, requiring multiple services.

"It really gives us room to grow," Leonard said. "We have been growing and we need space."

The Crestview offers the congregation not only more space but better audiovisual capabilities, a back patio overlooking the golf course, a banquet hall, dining area, hospitality room, prayer room, sitting room and a huge entry.

"We have people right now preparing to take the test with the county food services to run the kitchen, because it's a commercial kitchen," he said.

Leonard said in the future, he'd like to see the church open a bookstore/cafe, possibly offer family-style dining, and maybe rent part of the facility to wedding parties

or others if liability issues can be resolved.

"We want to be able to extend ourselves with those facilities as much as possible to the community," he said.

The church's current building is for sale for \$735,000, and has had bids from a doctor's office, churches and medical complexes, Leonard said. He believes interest in the property will grow with the expected completion of the Stardust Professional Office Park across the street in the spring.

Leonard said he's hoping another church will be able to locate in First Assembly's place.

"This has been very accommodating to us," he said. "It's the only place you can preach, at least in the assemblies, and get a suntan while you're preaching."

The worship area is covered by a glass canopy that lets in plenty of sunlight. First Assembly bought the bank building in 1995 under Pastor Gordon Nelson, who left in January 1998.

Leonard said he had previously worked in Mesa, but was working as a pastor in Illinois in 1998 when he got the call for a Sun City West ministry.

The church got its start with 39 members meeting in a resident's home, and later moved into a room in a strip mall across from its current location, then to the bank's community room before taking over the whole bank. It incorporated in 1992.

The associate pastor is Loren Gerdes.

OVER

"He's one of the most talented musicians I have ever known," Leonard said. "His hands walk up and down that keyboard like he invented it."

The church offices will continue to be in the Beardsley site until drawings and building permits can be obtained and space in the Crestview renovated for offices and classrooms.

The remodeling has brought with it some efforts to reduce cut-through and speeding traffic at the center, which is near Walgreen and the intersection of R.H. Johnson Boulevard and Camino del Sol. A chain blocking access from Star Ridge Drive will remain in place except during services at the fire department's recommendation.

"That was put up because it was a speed zone," Leonard said. "When we were working there, we almost had a couple people hit."

Leonard said some residents were upset about the height of new speed bumps placed in front of the building, and those bumps have been reduced twice to make them more palatable to neighboring residents.

Signs will take about two months to arrive due to permitting issues. Although most will say Church on the Green, at least one will retain the Crestview Center name.

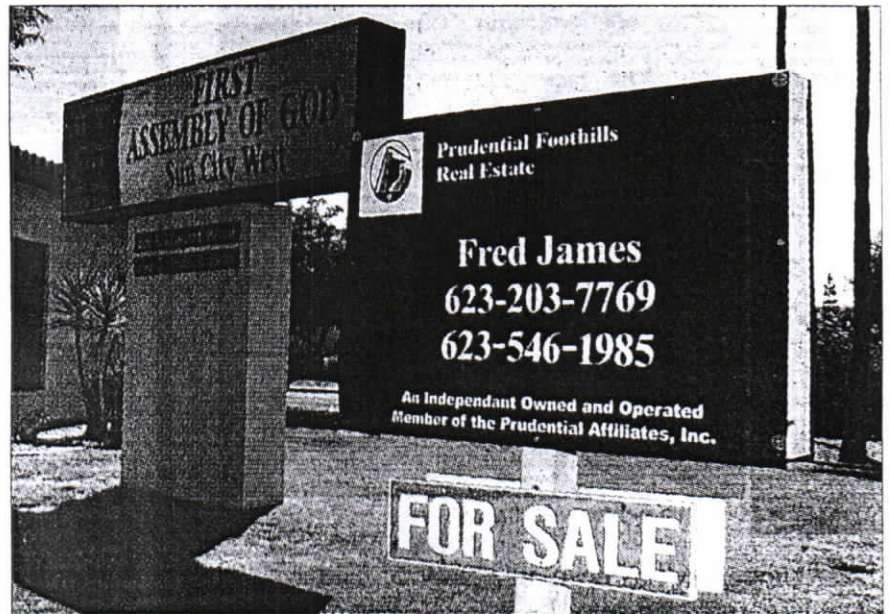
"We want people to know a little bit of the past," Leonard said.

Katy O'Grady can be reached at 876-2514 or kogrady@aztrib.com.



PHOTOS BY JOY LAMBERT-SLAGOWSKI/DAILY NEWS

Above, workers update the exterior of the former Terrace on the Green, new home of Church on the Green — formerly the First Assembly of God in Sun City West. Below, the church has its old building for sale.



MOS

SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT

October 29, 2003

**Church re-opens
at new location**

Church on the Green, formerly First Assembly of God — Sun City West, will celebrate the grand opening of its new facility Nov. 2-9.

The church is now located at 19051 R.H. Johnson Blvd., Sun City West in the building formerly occupied by the Crestview Restaurant.

Celebration services on both Sundays will be 9:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. and will include special presentations. There will be a noon meal Nov. 2 and the 6 p.m. service Nov. 9 will be a musical celebration.

The gospel trio Treasure performs a free concert Nov. 5.

The public is invited to all events. Call 546-6386 for information or to make dinner reservations.

A NEW LOOK FOR THE SCW SKYLINE

A 12-foot high cross now stands mounted on three 45-foot high concrete arches in front of the Church on the Green in "downtown" Sun City West. The monumental task of erecting it on April 13 required the assistance of four or five huge mobile cranes over a nine-hour time period to complete. The project was engineered and constructed with the help of church member and contractor Troy Chastain, duplicated from a similar design constructed at a California church. The cross tower was erected to provide an identity to

the church's location, which stood hidden from notice directly behind the Washington Federal Savings Bank, and adjacent to Walgreen's on the Northeast corner of R H Johnson and Camino del Sol. The tower is visible in all directions, and can be seen to the south from as far away as the parking lot in front of the RCSCW administration building.

