



The Sundome Center for the Performing Arts hosted such acts as Lawrence Welk, Bob Hope and Rosemary Clooney.

The Sundome – Gone but not Forgotten

Mention the “Sundome” and it brings a smile of recognition to the faces of long-time residents, and a questioning look to recent newcomers. The Sundome Center for the Performing Arts played a major role in the entertainment life of Sun City West for more than 30 years.

As part of our 40th anniversary celebration, we partnered with the Sun Cities Area Del Webb Historical Society and asked Don Tuffs, who managed the Sundome in its early years, to share his experiences at 10 a.m. April 4 in the Lecture Hall at R.H. Johnson Rec Center. The community is invited.

As vice president of marketing for the Webb Corp, Don tried to convince John Meeker to build two smaller auditoriums of different sizes, but Meeker’s mind was made up. The Sun Bowl that he had built in Sun City regularly played to crowds of upwards of 7,000 residents, and he wanted to put that number indoors in air-conditioned comfort in his new



Don Tuffs

community of Sun City West. Construction of a building of that size was an enormous challenge for the Webb

Corp. as the interior was nearly the size of two football fields, side-by-side.

Don had booked performers for the Sun Bowl, and took over the role of managing the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts upon its completion. He has many amusing, behind-the-scenes stories to share about his experiences with the entertainers.

Don also oversaw the transition of the Sundome to Arizona State University ownership in 1984, and will explain the reasons for it. ASU managed the facility for 20 years before stage limitations made it difficult to book the latest Broadway shows.

THEN AND NOW: THE SUNDOME



ARIZONA REPUBLIC

THEN: The Sundome was built for \$8.6 million and opened in Sun City West in 1980.

THE REPUBLIC

NOW: The Sundome stood in Sun City West for more than 30 years until it was torn down in 2013 to make way for a Fry's Food Store at the location.



VF saw Sundome available Republic 5/16/2015

On tour

Guide points out Sundome features, whims of stars

By Connie Cone Sexton
Phoenix Gazette

SUN CITY WEST — It's 10 o'clock on a Thursday morning and Warren Norman is center stage giving a command performance at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts.

His smooth, gentle voice flows out to the 7,000-plus seats below him. He's playing to an empty auditorium.

But this is no rehearsal. His audience — all five members — are standing behind him, watching and listening to Norman in his role as tour guide.

With his guidance, the group turns their heads upward to spot a crystal ball suspended from the ceiling.

"We can drop that seven feet and it will throw a thousand stars around. That makes a show very exciting," Norman says.

His love for the Sundome and all its nooks and crannies is apparent as he ushers the tour from the lobby, down the aisle, up on the stage and behind to the dressing rooms. He even throws open the back door so you can see where the trucks pull up.

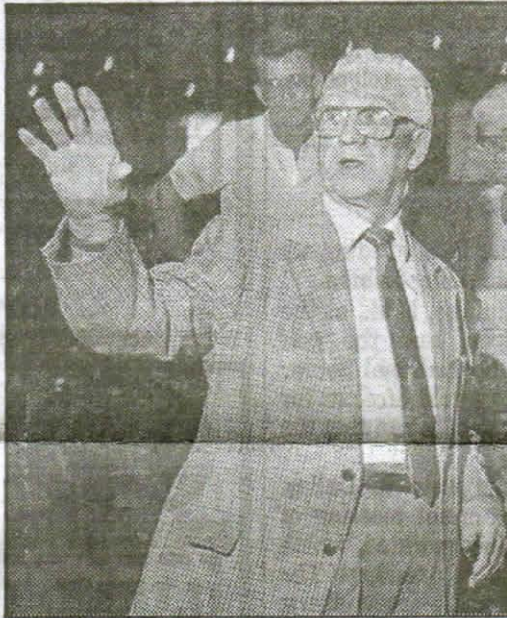
Norman's delivery isn't hurried. He's happy to have his spiel interrupted to answer a question and often interjects an anecdote or two as he winds his way through the 108,000-square-foot complex.

The Sun City West resident's first glimpse of the Sundome was in 1979. He and his wife, Margaret, came out to inspect the community and wandered over to where construction was in progress on the Sundome.

"I had seen a lot of mining work, so I was interested in watching them dig for the auditorium. There is about a 17-foot grade to the dance floor from the lobby. We walked through the superintendent's sidewalk and watched the work. We decided right then we wanted to be a part of all this," he says.

The Sundome opened Sept. 13, 1980, with a show by Lawrence Welk and his entourage. Norman and his wife were right there, too, having recently settled in their new home.

A tour of the Sundome begins in the lobby. "This land was a sheep-raising desert," he says directing his arm out through the automated glass doors. "The first thing they



Warren Norman is an enthusiastic tour guide at the Sundome.

had to do was get the sheep out of here."

That was in 1978. But eight years before that, a Sun City artist named Alfred Kabica started work on a canvas; a project designed to showcase his ideas on evolution.

Several years later, Kabica completed a 75-foot-long, brightly colored canvas, which he titled "From Evolution through Progress ... to Where?" It was finished but had no place to hang. Del Webb officials gave it a home. You can see it today, stretching across the main lobby, above the doors leading to the auditorium.

The work has fascinated many visitors, including Norman.

"You can see here, where it (the evolution process) starts with the 'Big Bang,'" he says pointing to the left end of the canvas where a Kabica painted the Earth and a swirl of white. Kabica moves on to the beginning of man, to the industrial revolution, to the Holocaust, to modern technology.

"Here, it looks as if, from what I think he has painted, is the atom bomb," Norman says, nodding to a star-pointed shape in the colors

of red, orange and yellow. "It wipes out man, but then there are elements of people, maybe Martians."

At the end, there is another new Earth, another swirl of white and another beginning, Norman says.

"A lot of people don't see this when they come here," he adds. With a crowded lobby, some also miss the posters showcasing past and present stars in the room's 110-yard-long expanse.

From the lobby, a tour moves to sample the continental design seating. "There is a 40-inch space between the rows," Norman says, giving his audience a chance to rest.

For the hearing impaired, there are wires under the seat for those with telephone-type induction hearing aids. Such devices can receive audio signals from a closed-circuit broadcasting antenna buried in the theater's floor.

A limited number of hearing aids also are loaned out for use during the performance. "Just give them a credit card and we'll give you one. Just be sure to remember to bring it back to the box office or we'll keep your card," Norman says.

He's quick to point out the Sundome won't carry rock 'n' roll. "We try to keep it to about 78 decibels. That's about the sound of your refrigerator starting up or a diesel truck going by," he says.

Among the popular acts at the Sundome are Bob Hope and Red Skelton. "I've never seen a more human being in my life," Norman says of Skelton. "You have some stars who say 'Pick me up at the airport in a limo' and we do. But he tells us 'Just pick me up in a car or station wagon.'"

The Sundome gets the usual requests from stars for certain things. Certain soft drinks or kinds of snacks.

"The stars are very nice. They don't demand too much. One guy asked for Luden's Cough Drops because he had quit smoking and wanted the menthol. So we got a big glass jar and filled it," the tour guide says.

"One couple wanted a rug in their respective dressing rooms. And Del Webb had spent lots of money on expensive tile. But we

See ■ Sundome, Page B

VFSCU
Sundome

Phx Gazette
Aug 17, 1988

■ Sundome

put the rug (wall-to-wall) in. I don't know if they've ever noticed it," Norman says.

"But so many of the stars are so nice. Those who keep coming back, they're almost a part of my life," he says.

Some stars also are choosy about where the audience sits.

Harry Blackstone Jr. was nice enough to fill in one year when fellow magician Doug Henning had to cancel his Sundome booking because of a television commitment.

"But Blackstone said, 'Don't seat people in Section 1 or Section

6. They can see my illusions,'" Norman says.

Some stars won't keep to the stage. "Al Hirt and his band went back and forth in the aisles," he says.

Up on the stage, Norman taps his foot against the floor when one of his followers asks about the black top.

"Battleship decking," Norman explains. Layers of plywood that give and allow for dancing.

There may be dancing, but there's no smoking allowed on stage, except for three performers

Phoenix Gazette
Wed Aug. 17, 1988

Sundome Association spreads funds among arts community

MITCHELL VANTREASE
DAILY NEWS-SUN

With the help of a \$200,000 grant from the Sundome Performing Arts Association, Theater Works intends to expand its youth program "Youth Works."

The Dysart Education Foundation will provide additional funding for arts programs in its schools through a \$200,000 grant, while the Sun City Brass band plans to buy some instruments for the group with a \$30,000 grant rather than borrow more money.

The SPAA presented approximately \$2.9 million in grants to 25 organizations Tuesday at Briarwood Country Club in Sun City West to local arts organizations. Known as "Grants for the Arts," the money ranged from \$16,000 to \$200,000.

This is the final charitable act of the group, which raised money for the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in Sun City West. In 2008, the facility closed after Maricopa County returned it to Arizona State University.

Kathy Jones, president of SPAA, said the process to select the organizations "was a labor of love and long process, but we wanted to do it right."

There were 50 grant applicants. Each of the organizations, particularly those not based in the area, agreed to perform in the Northwest Valley.

"The closing of the Sundome left a huge void for performing arts in the area," Jones said. "This money will help these groups build a solid foundation and stand on in the future."

Jack Lytle, CEO of Theater Works in Peoria, said he's proud to be a grant recipient of SPAA.

"This just takes your breath away, and so special for the kids who will benefit from it," Lytle said.

Robyn Allen, Theater Works artistic director, said the group was discussing "kick starting" the youth program when it applied for the grant.

"In the midst of that, we had this opportunity to apply for this grant, and this is everything that we could have dreamed of," she said. "This



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Kathy Jones, SPAA president, presents a \$200,000 grant to Robyn Allen, artistic director, Bob Root, Theater Works board member, and Jack Lytle, Theater Works CEO, Tuesday at Briarwood Country Club in Sun City West.

Sundome
Performing Arts Association

Grants
for the Arts

1. Theater Works	\$200,000
2. Dysart Education Foundation	\$200,000
3. Friends of the R.H. Johnson Library	\$150,000
4. Wickenburg Children's Cultural Org.	\$125,000
5. Del E. Webb Center for the Performing Arts	\$125,000
6. Ballet Arizona	100,000
7. Deer Valley Education Foundation	100,000
8. Nadaburg Elementary PTSA	100,000
9. Phoenix Chorale	100,000
10. Phoenix Symphony	100,000
11. West Valley Chorale	100,000
12. West Valley Symphony	100,000
13. Phoenix Opera	77,300
14. Sun City Concert Band Society	75,300
15. Salt River Brass	75,100
16. Japanese Friendship Garden of Phoenix	67,500
17. Dysart Community Center	50,000
18. Sonoran Sounds Women's Chorale	50,000
19. Arizona Winds Concert Band	40,000
20. Friends of Music Committee	36,500
21. Northwest Black History Committee	30,000
22. Sun City Desert Brass Band	30,000
23. Desert Aires Barbershop Chorus of the Sun Cities	26,700
24. Chamber Music West	25,000
25. Greater Phoenix Chapter, Barbershop Chorus	16,000

DAILY NEWS-SUN

continues to help us raise the stakes, which is what we continually do every season."

The Northwest Black History Committee received a \$30,000 grant, which will help with its annual three-day music festival and black history celebration in Old Town Peoria.

Innette Sweetheart, a member of the NBHC, said they would have downsized next year's event had they not received a grant.

"There still would've been a festival but maybe smaller," she said. "This will really help us spread the word for next year."

Sandi Hicks, president of the Deer Valley School District board of directors, said she's very pleased the district's foundation will receive a \$100,000 grant.

The SPAA grant is expected to help put piano labs in the schools and expose music to students in the fifth-grade and under.

"It's going to have a long-lasting impact," said Hicks. "So many schools right now are having their budgets cut and usually the arts are the first to go."

Ken Goodenburger, director of the West Valley Chorale, said with a tough economy it's hard for any arts organization to survive and any little bit helps. His group received a \$100,000.

"Our dollars (for programs) are stretched sometimes," he said. "This helps us tremendously."

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B4 TUESDAY, JULY 16, 2013

Sundome demolition marks end of era

Sun City West arts center was loved by many since '80

By Lesley Wright

The Republic | azcentral.com

Workers pulled asbestos out of gashes in the Sundome's walls last week and prepared for the heavy machinery that will knock down the rest of the building.

The Sundome Center for the Performing Arts, designed by architects for the Del E. Webb Development Co. as a marketing tool to sell houses in Sun City West, will be gone by the end of the summer.

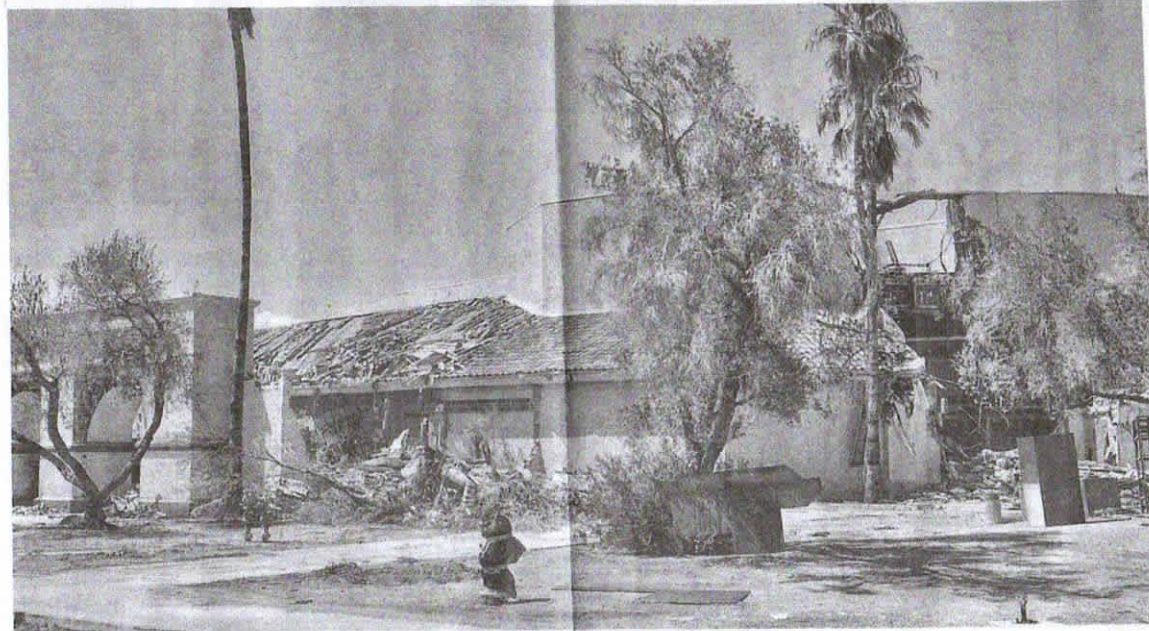
Fry's Food Stores will anchor a new shopping center to be built on the site next year.

Final demolition should begin soon, said George Farnell, who is supervising the work.

For weeks, crews have been salvaging parts of the 33-year-old venue that will be saved, reused or recycled.

One of the five excavators that will take down the walls arrived just before the Fourth of July. According to the contractor's schedule, an army of trucks is expected to haul out debris and clear the site by September.

The Sundome has sat, abandoned, on R.H. Johnson Boulevard since 2009, when owner Arizona State University turned off the power for the last time. Once the largest single-



A shopping center will rise on the Sun City West site that was long occupied by the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts, which will be gone by the end of the summer. KIM ANTONIOU/RECREATION CENTERS OF SUN CITY WEST

floor theater in the nation, the Sundome was meant to attract residents to the new retirement community of Sun City West.

It was beloved for more than two decades until financial issues forced it to close.

Residents have driven by or stopped to watch the construction work through a chain-link fence. For many, the demolition marks the end of an era.

Perhaps some of the patrons who loved it best were the Sun City West residents who staged a variety show there every year. They raised \$1.3 million for Sun

Health hospitals with the event over the years.

Recently, they said goodbye the best way they knew how.

A group of about 40 Rhythm Tappers dressed in their favorite costumes, gathered in front of the entry gates and lifted champagne glasses of ginger ale to their favorite theater.

Pat Telford, who moved to Sun City West 18 years ago, said the dance troupe had given her a new life.

Telford had spent her working years as a business teacher. By the time she retired, her chil-

dren were grown and she and her husband decided to move west.

Telford joined the Rhythm Tappers during the first year of her retirement and began performing in the annual variety show at the Sundome.

"I was sort of lost, and I found a new home with the dancing," Telford said.

Jeanne Tarr, who directed the variety show for 16 years, until the Sundome closed, said the variety show still performs at Sun City West's Stardust Theater. With just about 300

seats, the Stardust is too small to work as a fundraiser. At the Sundome, with seating for more than 7,000, the show could raise a lot of money.

Some of the performing spirit in the community seemed to ebb after the Sundome closed, Tarr said.

"It's really sad, but those are memories they can't take away," Tarr said.

Executives with Fry's are aware of the Sundome's legendary status in metro Phoenix. They drew audiences across the Valley to see Bob Hope, Little Richard, Bob Dylan and other icons.

"We don't want to walk away from what people remember," said Jon Flora, president of Fry's Food Stores.

Some of the Sundome's iconic entry gates will be reused on the Fry's site, and the architectural firm will replicate the arched look.

Some residents have objected to the new store, saying the large size will draw people from outside Sun City West and create too much traffic.

Others are happy to see something new replacing the abandoned hulk of a building that was the center of the community.

Katy O'Grady, spokeswoman for the Recreation Centers of Sun City West board, said that the aging building was starting to turn off prospective home owners.

"There were cars for sale in the parking lot," she said. "It's becoming a problem. But I think everyone is sad to see it go."

keep some parts of the theater — the iron gates around the facade, the Sundome mosaic. The grocery store will replicate the arched architecture.

The store may display some of the Sundome's pictures of its most lustrous performers, which include comedians Bob Hope and Tim Conway and a range of singers from Rosemary Clooney to Bob Dylan.

"We're trying to make sure we incorporate as much as we can from the existing building so there is a remembrance," said Jon Flora, president of Fry's Food.

The demolition of the performing-arts center has been foreshadowed for years.

After decades of financial losses and repeated attempts to make it a viable performance space, its white-elephant status was sealed in 2009 when its then-owner, Arizona State University, turned off the lights for the last time.

Rumors of the dome's demise became reality last year, when Scottsdale-based developer Brown Grace 6 Investments LLC bought the 16-acre site from ASU for \$2 million. The firm obtained a demolition permit from Maricopa County last month.

The Sundome's fate has stirred nostalgia in some and relief in others.

"We weren't able to use it," said Karen Honeycutt, director of real-estate operations for ASU. "I think the proposed development will be good for the area."

Others cherish romantic memories of concerts, plays or lectures that included former President Gerald Ford and former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt.

Darl Bachmann, who co-owns Ford's World Travel agency in the Sun Cities, said the Sundome brings back memories of growing up in the area when his father opened the agency 45 years ago.

When a client sponsored a perfor-

The Sundome (circa 1982) will be replaced by a grocery store.
REPUBLIC FILE PHOTO



FINAL CURTAIN FOR SUNDOME

By Lesley Wright | The Republic | azcentral.com

Don Tuffs will never forget the first performer who ever took the stage at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts.

Lawrence Welk, along with his full entourage of dancers and musicians, played for more than 7,000 people on a September night in 1980. Each fan had paid up to \$7 to sit in what was then the newest and largest single-story performing-arts center in the United States, tucked in the brand-new retirement community of Sun City West.

"It was terrific," said Tuffs, the first manager of the Sundome, who had worked for Del E. Webb Development Co. since 1971. "The exciting thing is that people were getting to see the entire

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Lawrence Welk show. All the acts had their costumes. They had everything you would see on the television show. There were many standing ovations."

A few weeks ago, Tuffs slipped into the abandoned shell of the theater and his heart ached.

Stripped long ago of its lights, sound system and portraits of former stars, the theater was dusty and clammy. Otherwise, it looked much as it did that heady night 33 years ago, he said.

Soon, the dome that symbolized decades of music and memories for many Valley residents will be replaced by a grocery store.

"It was disheartening to know it's coming down," Tuffs said.

The Sundome, designed by architects for the Del E. Webb Development Co. as a marketing tool to sell houses in Sun City West, will be gone by the end of the summer.

Demolition workers are expected to start salvaging the seats and other memorabilia this month.

Bulldozers will then knock down the exterior of the building and strip the mammoth parking lot to prepare for new asphalt.

mance by Harry Belafonte in the 1980s, Bachmann got a chance to meet the "King of Calypso" and watch him perform.

"It was one of the most entertaining shows I've ever been to," Bachmann said. "He sang 'Day-O' ('Banana Boat Song'). People just ate it up. They sang along and really enjoyed it."

The theater, Bachmann added, "wasn't like anything else in the Valley as far as I know. It was unique."

A joke at the time was that patrons with tickets in the back seats should bring binoculars, although Bachmann said a telescope would have been more appropriate.

Hundreds of metro Phoenix high-school students crossed the stage to receive their diplomas at the Sundome, and others remember trying to get autographs from luminaries such as comedian Bob Newhart and Garrison Keillor, who hosts NPR's "Prairie Home Companion."

A.J. Flick, a Tucson resident who was a young reporter for a Sun City newspaper in 1985, interviewed pop singer Tony Orlando and almost scored a date with him, she said.

"In the green room, Tony — wearing a terrycloth robe, he looked HOT back then — greeted me and my friend and we chatted," she said. "Just as the fans were coming in the room, Tony grabbed my hand and kept holding."

Flick jumped at the chance when Orlando asked her out to dinner, until an assistant reminded the star that he had to leave for Reno.

"We never had that dinner," Flick

said. "But I interviewed him years later and he was just as sweet."

Decades of red ink

Those star-studded nights during the dome's early years helped sell thousands of houses in Sun City West. But financially, it rarely broke even.

Designed in 1978 primarily as a concert hall, it never quite worked as a theater that could attract lucrative Broadway touring companies and pull in audiences from around the Valley.

Broadway touring shows are sought after because they are booked for just a few performances, so they can fill 1,500- to 3,000-seat theaters and charge higher prices for tickets.

The combination of an inconvenient location, increasing competition and its struggle to reach younger consumers constantly kept the Sundome in the red.

The dome's sheer size, 7,169 seats, was too large for a performing-arts center, said David Baile, president of the New York-based International Society for the Performing Arts, a group that represents theater managers, producers and artists around the world.

"That's a lot of seats to fill," Baile said. "In general, a lot of people build facilities with the idea that if you build it, they will come. But you have to look at your market."

In Sun City West, there were not enough retirees to keep the Sundome full on a regular basis. When managers tried to lure younger people who lived outside the age-restricted community, they turned off the local audiences, former

managers said.

"They put on shows for younger people, but the younger people didn't seem to want to come into a retirement community," Tuffs said.

Legendary promoter Danny Zelisko, who has booked concerts in the Valley since 1974, said the Sundome could have been a smash — if it had been in the East Valley. For fans living in Mesa or Tempe in the days of few freeways, a drive to Sun City West could mean a drive of 90 minutes or more.

When the Sundome opened in 1980, Zelisko was booking shows for performers such as Olivia Newton John, Neil Diamond and Billy Joel at ASU Gammage, Celebrity Theatre, Veterans Memorial Coliseum, Mesa Amphitheatre and clubs around the Valley.

But rarely in the Sundome.

"It was what we people from Chicago call a real schlep," Zelisko said. "It was almost like being in Flagstaff. It was one of those places that just fell off the grid."

Zelisko recalled booking Natalie Cole at the Sundome years ago, but found that labor, security and other costs for the huge hall were expensive.

"It's always difficult to sell groups on playing buildings that no one else plays," Zelisko said. "When you are risking your own dollars, you want to bring people to places where they are happy to go. The very thought of driving out there was enough to not make me want to go."

Part of the problem was that seats on the outer edge did not have a view of the full stage. Patrons would fill in the mid-

See SUNDOME, Page A7

dle section and then ticket sales would fall off, he added. A theater with similar limitations is at Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino in Las Vegas, which is housed in the former Aladdin. But, Zelisko said, with its location on the Strip, that theater is still in business.

But for residents of the Sun Cities and performers in the area, watching shows at the Sundome could be a dream.

Philanthropist Louisa Kellam had been a professional violinist in St. Louis before retiring to Sun City West with her husband.

One of her favorite events was the annual variety show at the Sundome, a fundraiser for Sun Health. Hundreds of residents would audition and perform to full houses each fall, raising up to \$100,000 for local hospitals.

Kellam said the backstage area was cramped but fun during these shows. The 150-person choir that sang at the benefit would have to line up against the walls to let other performers reach the stage. But audiences loved it.

"You walked out on stage and you knew your colleagues backstage were rooting for you and the audience was rooting for you, too," she said. "I would play 'Danny Boy' and 'Fiddler on the Roof,' and there were many dance numbers and many songs."

Kellam and her husband tried with others to raise enough money to renovate the backstage, but it would have cost too much, she said.

As it was, the theater could handle individual performers such as Tony Bennett or Henry Mancini, but lacked a backstage area big enough for the sets of a major production, such as "Phantom of the Opera" or "Miss Saigon."

Falling curtain

ASU officials grappled with those same problems in 1984, when the Webb company deeded the Sundome to the university.

The center, which cost \$8.6 million to build, immediately started draining ASU's public-events budget.

Between the cost of booking acts, property taxes and electricity bills, the university had a Sundome-related deficit of \$273,000 within two years. This piled up, despite a \$200,000 annual payment that Del E. Webb made through 1988, just to cover losses.

In 1995, ASU asked the Sundome's affiliated association to try to raise \$5 million for renovations, only to discover that anywhere from \$14 million to \$20 million would be needed to make the venue profitable.

The university tried to put it on the market over the years but could not find any suitable buyers. One bidder in 2004

put the value of the land down at less than \$7 million.

The economic downturn, which cratered property values, made it difficult to determine what the land was worth.

"Honestly, it was just the economy," Honeycutt said. "It seemed like every six months there was a different opinion of the value."

The university sold it to Maricopa County in 2005 for \$10. The county hired a professional theatrical-management firm to run it for 10 years and changed its name to the Maricopa County Events Center. The management firm, part of the Nederlander Organization, which runs theaters on Broadway and across the country, opted out of the contract after two seasons. The county gave the Sundome back to ASU.

Even before the county took over, Sundome managers were having a hard time filling seats.

They resorted to "piping and draping," said Smokey Renehan, who managed the theater from 1994 until 2005. Drapes would be hung over pipes to hide blocks of empty seats so the venue would appear to be more full and intimate.

The major touring companies were going to newer Valley theaters or renovated venues such as Gammage, which had large backstage areas for elaborate sets.

The Sundome staged "Oklahoma," "Annie Get Your Gun" and other old favorites but could not host productions such as "Miss Saigon," which could have attracted a younger audience.

Renehan fondly remembered meeting many famous acts, including rock 'n' roll legend Little Richard. By the time he performed at the Sundome in 1999, Little Richard was slowed by age but was "the sweetest, most gentle man," she added.

When Nederlander couldn't make it work, the Sundome was probably doomed, Renehan said.

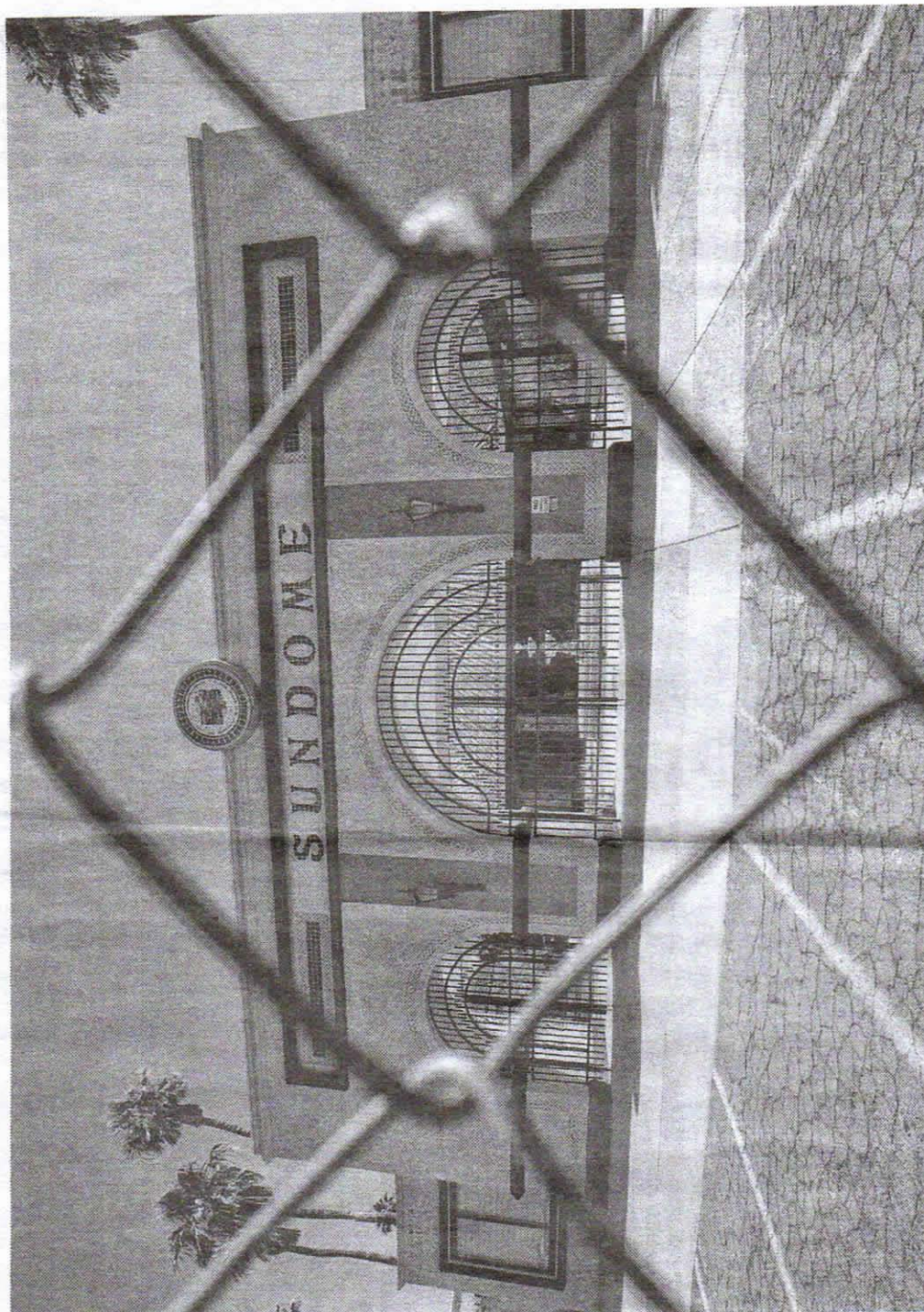
"They had the wherewithal to bring in the higher-dollar acts, but the higher-dollar acts wouldn't touch the community," she said. "I don't think they had one profitable season."

When some neighbors see the fenced-off dome, they are angry that Sun City West did not experiment with other uses to find a formula that might have kept the Sundome alive. They fear that new businesses intended to surround the new Fry's store will bring in too much traffic.

"We enjoyed many performances at the Sundome," said Sun City West resident Jerry Nicholson. "Our nice, quiet retirement community will now become just another typical rat-race city."

But Katy O'Grady, Sun City West's general-services officer, said many residents are glad to see the Sundome finally go.

"It's become an eyesore," she said. "People are eager to see something new, something that will be kept up."



The Sundome, which attracted such name performers as Harry Belafonte, Tony Bennett, Rosemary Clooney, Little Richard and Bob Dylan, was heralded at its opening in 1980 but soon started operating in the red. ANGELA PIAZZA/THE REPUBLIC

SUNDOME TIMELINE

1980: The 7,169-seat venue opens in Sun City West.

1984: Del E. Webb Development Co. "gifts" the Sundome to ASU for \$1.

2004: ASU puts the Sundome up for sale, citing a deficit.

2005: Maricopa County purchases the Sundome from ASU for \$10.

2006: The Sundome name changes to the Maricopa County Events Center.

2009: Sundome ownership reverts back to ASU, which "decommissions" the center and disconnects the power.

2012: ASU accepts a \$2 million cash bid from Scottsdale-based developer Brown Grace 6 Investments LLC for the property.

2013: Brown Grace 6 Investments LLC obtains a demolition permit from Maricopa County in May.

Acts from the glory days:

1983

Chuck Mangione, Peter Nero, Diahann Carroll

1984

Tammy Wynette, Tony Bennett, Joel Grey, The Dave Brubeck Quartet

1985

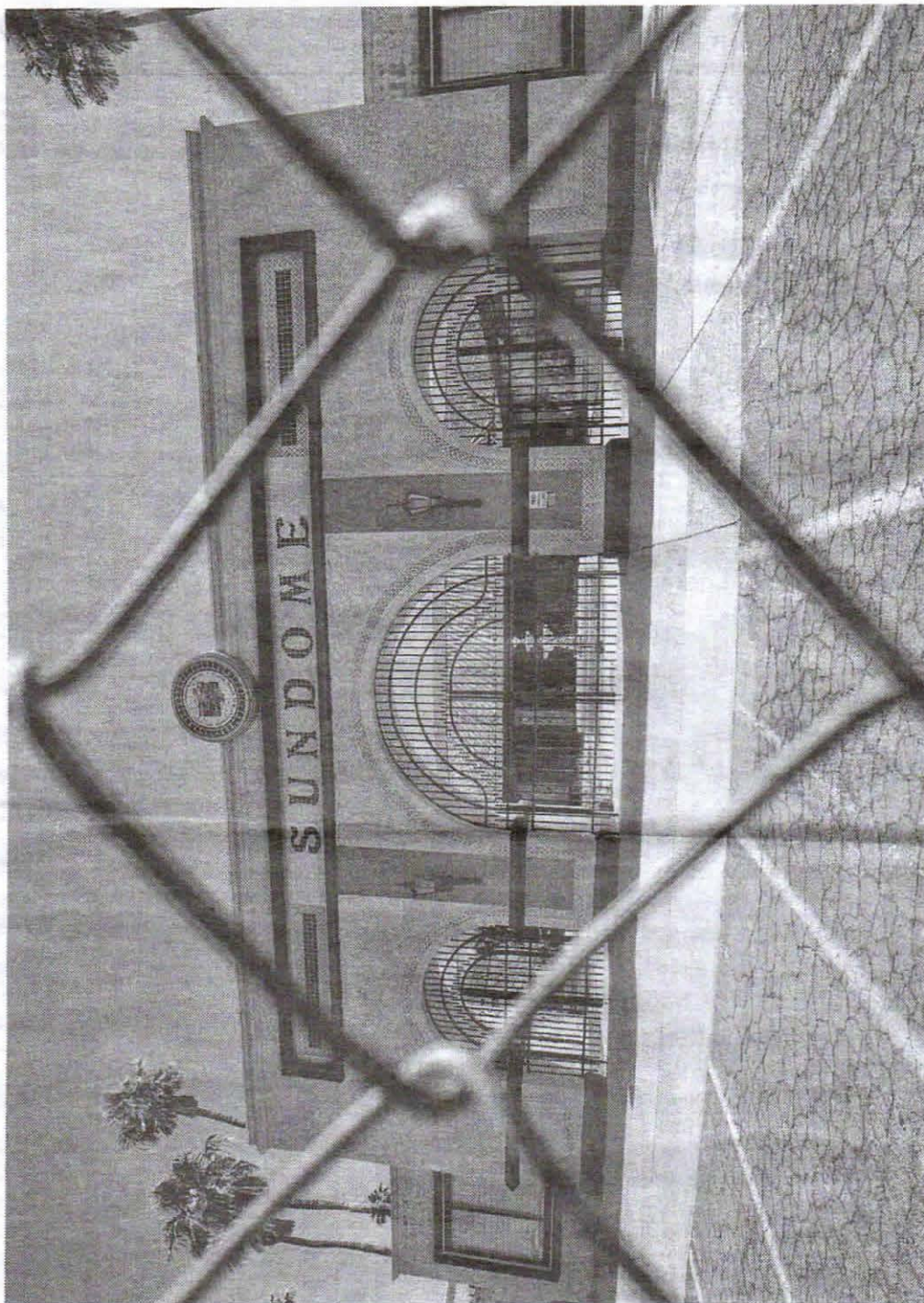
"Fiesta Grande" ballet, Henry Mancini

1997

Big Band Salute to the Music That Won World War II, Marcel Marceau, jazz clarinetist Pete Fountain, stars of "The Lawrence Welk Show"

1998

America, Glen Campbell



The Sundome, which attracted such name performers as Harry Belafonte, Tony Bennett, Rosemary Clooney, Little Richard and Bob Dylan, was heralded at its opening in 1980 but soon started operating in the red. ANGELA PIAZZA/THE REPUBLIC

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2013: Brown Grace 6 Investments LLC obtains a demolition permit from Maricopa County in May.

Acts from the glory days:

1983

Chuck Mangione, Peter Nero, Diahann Carroll

1984

Tammy Wynette, Tony Bennett, Joel Grey, The Dave Brubeck Quartet

1985

"Fiesta Grande" ballet, Henry Mancini

1997

Big Band Salute to the Music That Won World War II, Marcel Marceau, jazz clarinetist Pete Fountain, stars of "The Lawrence Welk Show"

1998

America, Glen Campbell

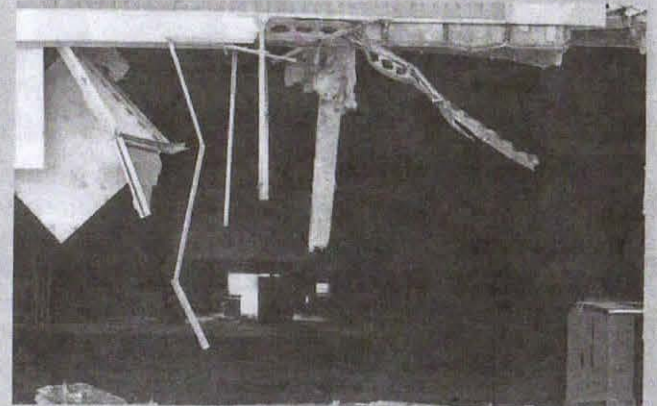
CURTAIN FALLS ON SUNDOME

The lights have been off at the Sundome for four years, and the razing of the 7,169-seat venue has commenced.

GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT, Page 3



The tearing down of the Sundome likely will last all summer. The Fry's Food Store to be built there is to open in May or June of next year.



Construction workers Ricky Galindo (left) and Angel Valenzuela work on fencing at the Sundome demolition site. A Fry's Food Store will rise in its place. PHOTOS BY NICK OZA/THE REPUBLIC

Sundome will vanish, but memories remain

By Lesley Wright

The Republic | azcentral.com

Workers pulled asbestos out of gashes in the Sundome's walls this week and prepared for the heavy machinery that will knock down the rest of the building.

The Sundome Center for the Performing Arts, designed by architects for the Del E. Webb Development Co. as a marketing tool to sell houses in Sun City West, will be gone by the end of the summer.

Fry's Food Stores will anchor a new shopping center to be built on the site next year.

Final demolition should begin soon and could last throughout the summer, said George Farnell, who is supervising the work.

For weeks, crews have been salvaging parts of the 33-year-old venue that will be saved, reused or recycled.

The theater seats were stripped over the past several weeks, leaving a sloping concrete floor nearly the size of two football fields. The floor is littered with clumps of stucco, scattered nails and some seats that missed the recycling truck.

Construction debris is piled high along the edges of the circular lobby, now open to the hot sun. The floors are still partially covered with the patterned blue carpet. Some copper-colored chandeliers, not valuable enough to salvage, still hang from the ceiling.

One of the five excavators that will take down the walls arrived just before the Fourth of July holiday.

According to the contractor's schedule, an army of trucks is expected to haul out debris and clear the site by September. That will leave a level field for work to begin on a 100,000-square-foot Fry's grocery store.



A Fry's grocery store will rise on the site long occupied by the Sundome, which is being demolished. PHOTOS BY KIM ANTONIOU/RECREATION CENTERS OF SUN CITY WEST



Fry's officials say their new store will replicate the Sundome's arched look.

SUNDOME TIMELINE

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- 2014:** Fry's Food Stores plan to open a 100,000-square-foot grocery store in May or June.

A gathering place

Executives with Fry's are aware of the Sundome's legendary status in metro Phoenix. It drew audiences across the Valley to see Bob Hope, Little Richard, Bob Dylan and other iconic performers. "We don't want to walk away from what people remember," said Jon Flora, president of Fry's Food Stores.

Some of the Sundome's iron entry gates will be reused on the Fry's site, and the architecture will replicate the arched look. At the same time, the grocery company wants the store to have features for the retirees who will use it. For example, The new parking lot will have 20 spaces reserved for golf carts. Shoppers will find seating inside and out and will be able to buy gourmet coffee and restaurant food.

"We want it to be a destination point,"

Flora said. "We study long and hard when we do any new store. It will be a neighborhood store, but a store that people will want to drive to and see. I'm excited about it. It's a good niche for that area."

Some residents have objected to the new store, saying that its large size will draw people from outside of Sun City West and add too much traffic to the streets.

Others are happy to see something new replacing the abandoned hulk of a building in the center of the community.

Katy O'Grady, spokeswoman for the Recreation Centers board, the governing body for the community, said that the aging building was starting to turn off prospective homeowners.

"There were cars for sale in the parking lot," she said. "It was becoming a problem. But I think everyone is sad to see it go."

tion marks the end of an era. Perhaps some of the patrons who loved it best were the Sun City West residents who staged a variety show there every year. They raised \$1.3 million for Sun Health hospitals with the event over the years.

Recently, they said goodbye the best way they knew how.

A group of about 40 Rhythm Tappers last week dressed in their favorite costumes, gathered in front of the entry gates and lifted champagne glasses of ginger ale to their favorite theater.

Pat Telford, who moved to Sun City West 18 years ago, said the dance troupe had given her a new life.

Telford had spent her working years as a business teacher. She put on a suit every day and drove out to the suburban high school where she taught. By the time she retired, her children were grown and she and her husband decided to move west.

Telford expected to spend her days playing cards. Instead she joined the Rhythm Tappers during the first year of her retirement and began performing with the annual variety show at the Sundome.

"I was sort of lost, and I found a new home with the dancing," said Telford, who put on her favorite blue costume with feathered headress for the farewell toast.

Jeanne Tarr, who directed the variety show for 16 years, until the Sundome

Beloved farewell

The Sundome has sat, abandoned, on R.H. Johnson Boulevard since 2009, when owner Arizona State University turned off the power for the last time. Once the largest single-floor theater in the nation, the Sundome was meant to attract residents to the new retirement community of Sun City West. It was beloved for more than two decades until financial issues forced it to close. Residents have driven by or stopped to watch the construction work through a chain-link fence. For many, the demolition marks the end of an era.

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closed, said the variety show still performs at Sun City West's Stardust Theater, a much smaller venue. With just about 300 seats, the Stardust is too small to work as a fundraiser. At the Sundome, with seating for more than 7,000, the show could raise a lot of money for Sun Health.

Some of the performing spirit in the community seemed to ebb away after the Sundome closed, Tarr said.

"It's really sad, but those are memories they can't take away," Tarr said. "It was just a wonderful thing."

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Going down in history

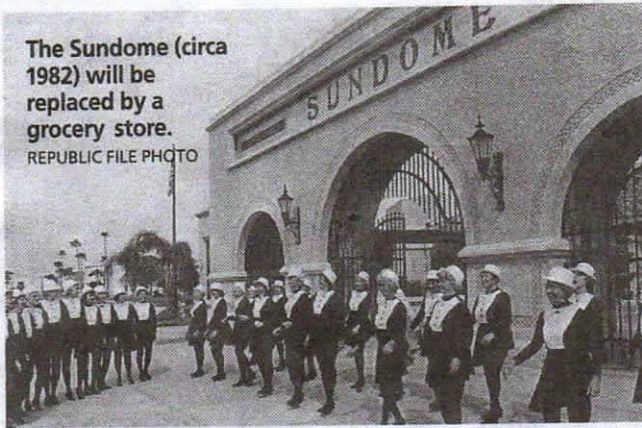
A crew with M&P Venture Partners of Phoenix uses excavators to remove pieces of the Sundome's southern exterior wall July 1. Inset: Doherty Inc.'s Richard Miranda removes wrought-iron bars to be preserved for future use. Demolition of the long-shuttered performing arts center began in earnest last week. The structure will make way for a new shopping center, scheduled to open in 2014.

Independent Newspapers/Jeff Grant

Performing-arts center to be razed

The Sundome (circa 1982) will be replaced by a grocery store.

REPUBLIC FILE PHOTO



FINAL CURTAIN FOR SUNDOME

By Lesley Wright | The Republic | azcentral.com

Don Tuffs will never forget the first performer who ever took the stage at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts.

Lawrence Welk, along with his full entourage of dancers and musicians, played for more than 7,000 people on a September night in 1980. Each fan had paid up to \$7 to sit in what was then the newest and largest single-story performing-arts center in the United States, tucked in the brand-new retirement community of Sun City West.

"It was terrific," said Tuffs, the first manager of the Sundome, who had worked for Del E. Webb Development Co. since 1971. "The exciting thing is that people were getting to see the entire

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Sundome

Continued from Page A6

dle section and then ticket sales would fall off, he added. A theater with similar limitations is at Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino in Las Vegas, which is housed in the former Aladdin. But, Zelisko said, with its location on the Strip, that theater is still in business.

But for residents of the Sun Cities and performers in the area, watching shows at the Sundome could be a dream.

Philanthropist Louisa Kellam had been a professional violinist in St. Louis before retiring to Sun City West with her husband.

One of her favorite events was the annual variety show at the Sundome, a fundraiser for Sun Health. Hundreds of residents would audition and perform to full houses each fall, raising up to \$100,000 for local hospitals.

Kellam said the backstage area was cramped but fun during these shows. The 150-person choir that sang at the benefit would have to line up against the walls to let other performers reach the stage. But audiences loved it.

"You walked out on stage and you knew your colleagues backstage were rooting for you and the audience was rooting for you, too," she said. "I would play 'Danny Boy' and 'Fiddler on the Roof,' and there were many dance numbers and many songs."

Kellam and her husband tried with others to raise enough money to renovate the backstage, but it would have cost too much, she said.

As it was, the theater could handle individual performers such as Tony Bennett or Henry Mancini, but lacked a backstage area big enough for the sets of a major production, such as "Phantom of the Opera" or "Miss Saigon."

Falling curtain

ASU officials grappled with those same problems in 1984, when the Webb company deeded the Sundome to the university.

The center, which cost \$8.6 million to build, immediately started draining ASU's public-events budget.

Between the cost of booking acts, property taxes and electricity bills, the university had a Sundome-related deficit of \$273,000 within two years. This piled up, despite a \$200,000 annual payment that Del E. Webb made through 1988, just to cover losses.

In 1995, ASU asked the Sundome's affiliated association to try to raise \$5 million for renovations, only to discover that anywhere from \$14 million to \$20 million would be needed to make the venue profitable.

The university tried to put it on the market over the years but could not find any suitable buyers. One bidder in 2004

offered \$50,000. A recent appraisal had put the value of the land alone at more than \$7 million.

The economic downturn, which cratered property values, made it difficult to determine what the land was worth.

"Honestly, it was just the economy," Honeycutt said. "It seemed like every six months there was a different opinion of the value."

The university sold it to Maricopa County in 2005 for \$10. The county hired a professional theatrical-management firm to run it for 10 years and changed its name to the Maricopa County Events Center. The management firm, part of the Nederlander Organization, which runs theaters on Broadway and across the country, opted out of the contract after two seasons. The county gave the Sundome back to ASU.

Even before the county took over, Sundome managers were having a hard time filling seats.

They resorted to "piping and draping," said Smokey Renehan, who managed the theater from 1994 until 2005. Drapes would be hung over pipes to hide blocks of empty seats so the venue would appear to be more full and intimate.

The major touring companies were going to newer Valley theaters or renovated venues such as Gammage, which had large backstage areas for elaborate sets.

The Sundome staged "Oklahoma," "Annie Get Your Gun" and other old favorites but could not host productions such as "Miss Saigon," which could have attracted a younger audience.

Renehan fondly remembered meeting many famous acts, including rock 'n' roll legend Little Richard. By the time he performed at the Sundome in 1999, Little Richard was slowed by age but was "the sweetest, most gentle man," she added.

When Nederlander couldn't make it work, the Sundome was probably doomed, Renehan said.

"They had the wherewithal to bring in the higher-dollar acts, but the higher-dollar acts wouldn't touch the community," she said. "I don't think they had one profitable season."

When some neighbors see the fenced-off dome, they are angry that Sun City West did not experiment with other uses to find a formula that might have kept the Sundome alive. They fear that new businesses intended to surround the new Fry's store will bring in too much traffic.

"We enjoyed many performances at the Sundome," said Sun City West resident Jerry Nicholson. "Our nice, quiet retirement community will now become just another typical rat-race city."

But Katy O'Grady, Sun City West's general-services officer, said many residents are glad to see the Sundome finally go.

"It's become an eyesore," she said. "People are eager to see something new, something that will be kept up."



Warren Norman shows visitors the view that performers have of the Sundome.

Michael Chow, *Phoenix Gazette*

On tour

Guide points out Sundome features, whims of stars

By Connie Cone Sexton
Phoenix Gazette

SUN CITY WEST — It's 10 o'clock on a Thursday morning and Warren Norman is center stage giving a command performance at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts.

His smooth, gentle voice flows out to the 7,000-plus seats below him. He's playing to an empty auditorium.

But this is no rehearsal. His audience — all five members — are standing behind him, watching and listening to Norman in his role as tour guide.

With his guidance, the group turns their heads upward to spot a crystal ball suspended from the ceiling.

"We can drop that seven feet and it will throw a thousand stars around. That makes a show very exciting," Norman says.

His love for the Sundome and all its nooks and crannies is apparent as he ushers the tour from the lobby, down the aisle, up on the stage and behind to the dressing rooms. He even throws open the back door so you can see where the trucks pull up.

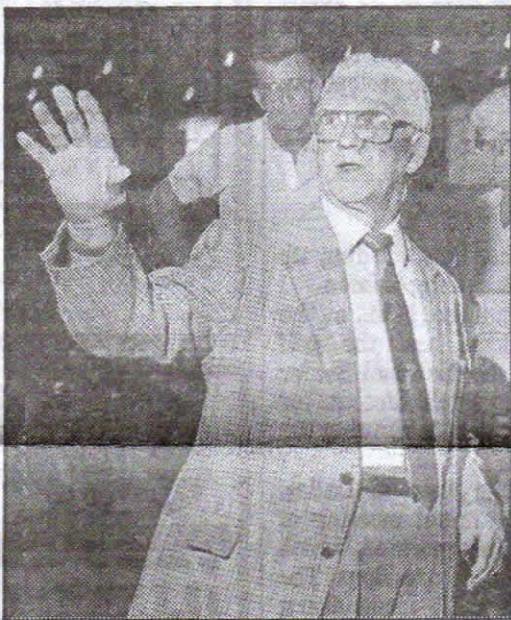
Norman's delivery isn't hurried. He's happy to have his spiel interrupted to answer a question and often interjects an anecdote or two as he winds his way through the 108,000-square-foot complex.

The Sun City West resident's first glimpse of the Sundome was in 1979. He and his wife, Margaret, came out to inspect the community and wandered over to where construction was in progress on the Sundome.

"I had seen a lot of mining work, so I was interested in watching them dig for the auditorium. There is about a 17-foot grade to the dance floor from the lobby. We walked through the superintendent's sidewalk and watched the work. We decided right then we wanted to be a part of all this," he says.

The Sundome opened Sept. 13, 1980, with a show by Lawrence Welk and his entourage. Norman and his wife were right there, too, having recently settled in their new home.

A tour of the Sundome begins in the lobby. "This land was a sheep-raising desert," he says directing his arm out through the automated glass doors. "The first thing they



Warren Norman is an enthusiastic tour guide at the Sundome.

had to do was get the sheep out of here."

That was in 1978. But eight years before that, a Sun City artist named Alfred Kabica started work on a canvas; a project designed to showcase his ideas on evolution.

Several years later, Kabica completed a 75-foot-long, brightly colored canvas, which he titled "From Evolution through Progress ... to Where?" It was finished but had no place to hang. Del Webb officials gave it a home. You can see it today, stretching across the main lobby, above the doors leading to the auditorium.

The work has fascinated many visitors, including Norman.

"You can see here, where it (the evolution process) starts with the 'Big Bang,'" he says pointing to the left end of the canvas where a Kabica painted the Earth and a swirl of white. Kabica moves on to the beginning of man, to the industrial revolution, to the Holocaust, to modern technology.

"Here, it looks as if, from what I think he has painted, is the atom bomb," Norman says, nodding to a star-pointed shape in the colors

of red, orange and yellow. "It wipes out man but then there are elements of people, maybe Martians."

At the end, there is another new Earth another swirl of white and another beginning, Norman says.

"A lot of people don't see this when they come here," he adds. With a crowded lobby some also miss the posters showcasing past and present stars in the room's 110-yard-long expanse.

From the lobby, a tour moves to sample the continental design seating. "There is a 40-inch space between the rows," Norman says, giving his audience a chance to rest.

For the hearing impaired, there are wires under the seat for those with telephone-type induction hearing aids. Such devices can receive audio signals from a closed-circuit broadcasting antenna buried in the theater's floor.

A limited number of hearing aids also are loaned out for use during the performance. "Just give them a credit card and we'll give you one. Just be sure to remember to bring it back to the box office or we'll keep your card," Norman says.

He's quick to point out the Sundome won't carry rock 'n' roll. "We try to keep it to about 78 decibels. That's about the sound of your refrigerator starting up or a diesel truck going by," he says.

Among the popular acts at the Sundome are Bob Hope and Red Skelton. "I've never seen a more human being in my life," Norman says of Skelton. "You have some stars who say 'Pick me up at the airport in a limo' and we do. But he tells us 'Just pick me up in a car or station wagon.'"

The Sundome gets the usual requests from stars for certain things. Certain soft drinks or kinds of snacks.

"The stars are very nice. They don't demand too much. One guy asked for Luden's Cough Drops because he had quit smoking and wanted the menthol. So we got a big glass jar and filled it," the tour guide says.

"One couple wanted a rug in their respective dressing rooms. And Del Webb had spent lots of money on expensive tile. But we

See ■ Sundome, Page B

BRIEFS

Flagpole gets new home

One of the 30-foot flagpoles flanking the main entrance of the Sundome is now at Stardust Golf Course at Sun City West.

The Sundome Center for the Performing Arts, designed by architects for the Del E. Webb Development Co. as a marketing tool to sell houses in Sun City West, will be gone by the end of the summer.

Fry's Food Stores will anchor a new shopping center to be built on the site next year.

Rainbow Demolition, the company in charge of razing the Sundome gave the Recreation Centers of Sun City West permission to remove and reuse the pole, said Russ Boston, facilities maintenance operation supervisor.

"We are happy to rescue one of the Sundome flagpoles for use at the Stardust Golf Course," said Mike Whiting, general manager. "It not only will serve to display the American flag, but also it will help to preserve a bit of Sun City West history."

It took less than 15 minutes for a hydraulic truck lift to hoist the the 1,100-pound pole and place it into a 43-inch-

deep hole at the golf course at 12702 Stardust Blvd., in Sun City West.

A light will be installed on the corner of the pro-shop building to illuminate the flag, Boston said.

Few takers for Sundome seats

By Jeff Grant
Independent Newspapers

Ed Cirillo poked around in the darkened theater.

Illuminated only by flashlights, and accompanied by a representative of one of the companies supporting the redevelopment of the Sundome property, Mr. Cirillo knew what he was looking for.

Mementos of the performing arts center that once hosted some of the biggest names in entertainment are disappearing from the building at 19403 R.H. Johnson Blvd.

After more than 30 years, the last five as a darkened remnant of its heyday, the Sundome is coming down within the next few weeks. The 100,000-square foot venue will be replaced by a shopping center anchored by a Fry's supermarket and featuring small shops and stores, a bank, gas station and medical offices. There may be a restaurant as well.

Much of the memorabilia is being scooped up by Kroeger, Inc., the par-

Seats

Continued From Page 1

ent company of Fry's, which plans to incorporate elements of the current structure, including its wrought-iron gates, Sundome insignia, and tile signs that once directed audience members to their places in the 7,134 seat theater, billed as the largest of its kind at the time – with all seats on a single floor.

But developers are having trouble shedding the building's seats.

"They're kind of tough to use for most people. They're mostly designed for a slanted floor. It's not easy to find a use," said Mike Pearlstein, vice president of W.M. Grace Co., Inc. The Phoenix developer teamed with Brown Group, Inc., Scottsdale to form Brown Grace 6, the corporation overseeing the Sundome Crossing project.

"We've reached out to a lot of groups. We had one say, 'We want them.' But there's a difference between wanting them and taking them. We did find an auditorium in Flagstaff that took a bunch of them," he continued.

There is no charge for the seats or any other item within the Sundome. But most of the more desirable items already spoken for, the seats are the one of the few remaining pieces of equipment that can be had in abundance.

Mr. Cirillo knew he would want some of them.

The president of the board of trustees for the Sun Cities Area Historical Society wanted about a half dozen for the Sun Cities Museum, which the society operates at 10801



Independent Newspapers/Jeff Grant
Ed Cirillo holds up a seating chart from the Sundome that he was able to salvage May 13 from the building with the aid of developers of the commercial project that will replace the onetime performing arts venue.

Oakmont Drive in Sun City. The seats will go into a small area within the museum – the first home ever built in Sun City – where visitors can view videos of Sun City and Del E. Webb Corp. history and culture.

"It takes people back to the beginnings of Sun City," he said.

Although he and other historical society officials knew the Sundome's end was coming – Brown Grace 6 announced in early

2012 it had purchased the property from owner Arizona State University and planned to develop it as a commercial site – he found himself scrambling when word got out of the developer's timetable for bringing down the building.

The original June 1 target date is still the goal, Mr. Cirillo noted, and Kroeger already had arranged to salvage its material.

"We were concerned. We were looking out to see that everything just didn't get destroyed," he said.

Finally, Mr. Cirillo got in touch with W.M. Grace, which sent a representative to the site May 13. Mr. Cirillo was accompanied by Don Tuffs, the society's board of trustees vice president. In addition to the chairs, Mr. Cirillo was able to secure a placard with a floor seating chart.

The Recreation Centers of Sun City West also has obtained some items. General Services Officer Katy O'Grady said the RCSCW got some of the light poles from the parking lot. "They had some spares that matched ours in our parking lot. We asked for them, since they are impossible to come by and we still use them," she explained.

Meanwhile, plans for the demolition are moving forward.

While Brown Grace 6 principle Todd Kjar said the some procedural issues remain, the project likely will get under way close to the target date.

Contrary to some rumors, the building will not be imploded, but will be brought down with heavy construction equipment. A crew is expected to be on hand to wet down the debris, minimizing effects from dust.

Further details on the work are expected in the coming weeks.

Sundome sale questions linger with weeds

MITCHELL VANTREASE

DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City West officials really want to know what will be built on the Sundome property, but for now they'll settle for its owner — Arizona State University — to pull some weeds.

"The whole lot is full of weeds, and I don't understand why ASU hasn't taken care of it," said Bill Hansen, president of the Sun City West Property Owners and Residents Association.

In March, Arizona State University accepted an offer from Scottsdale-based developers, Brown Group Inc., to buy the Sundome for \$2 million. ASU has been attempting to unload the once-successful venue for years, and the sale to the Brown Group is still pending. The Scottsdale firm, which has built a number of shopping retail centers in the West Valley, including Surprise Marketplace, Surprise Towne Center and Arrowhead Crossing in Peoria, has been quiet about its plans for the land.

The Daily News-Sun on Monday contacted Todd Kjar, a representative with Brown Group Inc., for an update on



While the Sundome in Sun City West has remained vacant, weeds have taken root in the parking lot.

the property. After an initial contact, Kjar didn't return follow-up phone calls.

Katy O'Grady, a spokeswoman for the Recreation

Centers of Sun City West, said RCSCW officials, too, remain in the dark about the property's future.

"We really would like to see

the Sundome maintained but we're also eager to find out what's going on with it.

SEE WEEDS, A

O'Grady said.

Scott Isham, a representative for District 4 Maricopa County Supervisor Max Wilson, said county officials haven't heard from the developers since a meeting with them in March.

"Not since our meeting have they reached out to us, but we definitely encouraged them to let the community know their plans once they had them," Isham said.

Once an entertainment venue for world-renowned performers, the Sundome slowly saw its audiences decline as more theaters and arts centers sprung up Valleywide.

In 2005, the Arizona Board of Regents authorized ASU to transfer the property at 19403 R.H. Johnson Blvd., to Maricopa County for the purpose of continued operation of the Sundome as a performing arts center.

That effort failed, and the county returned it to ASU.

Hansen said he hasn't fielded many questions from residents about the impending sale but finds it hard to believe a retail center could go in the Sundome's place.

"I feel that it's a stretch to place a grocery store or something of that stature there, when you have a slanted hill," said Hansen. "But we're all waiting to see what happens next."

Mitchell Vantrease can be reached at 876-2526 or mvantrease@yourwestvalley.com.

NICK COTE/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sundome land developer talks traffic with county

MITCHELL VANTREASE

DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City West residents should know in a couple of weeks when construction of a shopping center on the Sundome property will begin.

Todd Kjar, a representative of developers Brown Group Inc. in Scottsdale, said Wednesday he is working with Maricopa County on a few issues, including traffic flow, before making an announcement on further plans for the Sundome Crossing development. He said that announcement is not far off.

Last year, Brown Group Inc. bought the Sundome from Arizona State University for \$2 million. ASU had been trying to sell the once-successful venue for years.

The Scottsdale firm has built a number of shopping retail centers in the West Valley,



DAILY NEWS-SUN FILE PHOTO

The property developers of the site of the former Sundome in Sun City West are talking about flattening out the surface of the parking lot which will be used for a grocery store and other tenants.

Related stories
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including Surprise Marketplace, Surprise Towne Center and Arrowhead Crossing in Peoria.

The anchor of the development in Sun City West will be a Fry's. The grocery store will be joined by other tenants such as shops, restaurants, a bank and various other services, according to the developers.

SEE PROPERTY, A5

Thursday, March 21, 2013

www.yourwestvalley.com

DAILY NEWS-SUN

PROPERTY

FROM A1

"We're in negotiations now with numerous tenants," Kjar said.

But most importantly, he said, the developers are working with Maricopa County on traffic flow in and out of the shopping center, which they know is a concern of residents.

"It's absolutely critical and a huge focus for us," Kjar said. "That's been our prime focus because it needs to really work for our us, our tenants and customers."

In addition, he said work needs to be done on the parking lot, which is slanted.

"The site will be balanced because that's important for shoppers and their carts," he said.

Recreation Centers of Sun City West General Manager Mike Whiting said he's pleased to see things moving along with the development.

"We're excited to see things progressing and have been waiting a long time to see things happen on the property," Whiting said. "It seems like the developers are being responsive to the community's concerns, and we look forward to a new compatible use for that location, so it just doesn't become a blight area anymore."

Terry Hamman, RCSCW governing board president, agreed with Whiting.

"I never had the opportunity to reap the benefits of Sundome, so it's been an eyesore to me," he said. "But I'm sure the developers have done their homework, and it will be successful. They've worked closely with our citizens

to make sure they're happy on what comes in."

Bill Hansen, president of the Sun City West Property Owners and Residents Association board, said his biggest concern has always been traffic.

Hansen said PORA has expressed concerns to MCDOT, the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office and Posse about traffic flow in the area.

"We've asked for a turning lane on R.H. Johnson Boulevard going into the development as well as a stop light," he said.

Still, he understands why the Sundome property must be put to another use.

"There is a sentimental attachment to the Sundome, but the community support wasn't sufficient to support it and that's just the reality of the times," Hansen said.

County examines Sundome deal

MITCHELL VANTREASE

DAILY NEWS-SUN

Maricopa County Supervisor Max Wilson will meet this week with a Scottsdale investment group to learn about its plans for the former Sundome, which the company has offered to purchase for \$2 million.

Scott Isham, a spokesman for Wilson, said they're meeting with the buyers "right away to get to know them and find out what they want to do with Sundome."

Isham said the meeting must take place before the company, Brown Grace 6 Investments, submits plans to the county planning and zoning board.

"When we heard about the potential deal, we decided to set something up because we don't know much about them, so this was our opportunity to do so," Isham said. Wilson's supervisory district includes Sun City West.

On Friday, Arizona State University accepted the offer from the developers

after years of attempts by ASU to turn the Sundome into a successful entertainment venue.

According to an item on the Arizona Board of Regents Friday agenda: "The buyer intends to redevelop the property as a community shopping center with the land to be balanced and graded to allow for a convenient and accessible shopping center."

SEE SUNDOME, A5

SUNDOME

FROM A1

the item states.

"We're glad to see something positive is happening with the property," said Katy O'Grady, general services officer for the Recreation Centers of Sun City West. "Its future has been an unknown for several years, so having it settled will be reassuring for the community. And it's nice to know the sale will be bringing in what sounds like compatible uses for the community, especially since it's such a central location."

The development will add 150,000 square feet of retail services to the Sun City West shopping area, and will constitute the first new major commercial development within the community in nearly 30 years.

Once an entertainment venue for world-renowned performers, the Sundome slowly saw its audiences decline as more and more theaters and arts centers sprung up Valleywide.

In 2005, the Board of Regents authorized ASU to transfer the property, 19403 R. H. Johnson Blvd., to Maricopa County for the purpose of continued operation of the Sundome as a performing arts center.

The transfer documents stipulated that ownership would revert to the regents in the event that the county elected to discontinue use of the facility as a performing arts center. The property reverted to ASU when that occurred in 2009.



Arizona State University has accepted a \$2 million offer for the Sundome in Sun City West. A developer wants to build a shopping center at the site. CARLOS CHAVEZ/THE REPUBLIC

Sundome likely to be razed if sale is done

By Amy B Wang

The Republic | azcentral.com

Arizona State University has accepted a \$2 million cash bid for the Sundome, a once-prominent performing-arts center in Sun City West that has sat vacant since 2009.

The potential buyer, Scottsdale-based Brown Grace 6 Investments, LLC, plans to demolish the theater and replace it with a shopping center anchored by a grocery store, according to proposals.

The bid came as a surprise to ASU, which since 2009 has tried to find a buyer, community partner or city willing to take on the struggling, 7,030-seat venue.

For years, the Sundome, which in its heyday attracted acts like Bob Hope and Bob Dylan, seemed doomed to remain empty, the victim of faded relevance and a dismal real-estate market.

"We've kind of quietly tried to market it for a number of years now," said Steven Nielsen, assistant vice president of University Real Estate Development. "Then, quite truthfully, out of the blue we received a proposal."

Del Webb gave the Sundome to ASU for \$1 in 1984 and the university tried to sell it 20 years later. Maricopa County tried to run it starting in 2005, but gave it back to ASU in 2009.

ASU decommissioned the theater that year, turning off the power.

The university's real-estate office realized just how far the Sundome's value had sunk in 2009 when a request for proposals came back with one offer to buy the property for \$50,000. Then, appraisals had put the value of the land

alone at \$7.2 million.

The land was appraised again in late 2011 and is now valued at about \$4.5 million. The cost of demolishing the Sundome and preparing the land for redevelopment is estimated to be around \$2.6 million, for an adjusted "as is" land value of about \$1.9 million.

At press time, a representative of Brown Grace 6 Investments LLC could not be reached. According to university documents, the developer intends to add about 150,000 square feet of shops.

University officials hope to close on the sale by the end of the year. If the transaction goes through, the developer almost certainly will demolish the theater, Nielsen said.

"Unfortunately, the building is functionally obsolete," he said.

Years ago, Sun City West residents seemed divided on what should be done with the property. Community board members expressed fear that ASU might sell the land off for a strip mall; many wanted to keep the structure, if only to preserve some of the culture it once represented.

Now, they seem grateful that there is any movement at all.

"Obviously, it was a landmark ... but we're just happy to see something be done with it," said Katy O'Grady, spokeswoman for Sun City West. "It's been sitting there for a long time not in the best of shape."

Republic reporter Lesley Wright contributed to this article.

Traffic fears drive Sundome petition effort

MITCHELL VANTREASE
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Jerry Nicholson wants to avoid a potentially "volatile" traffic situation from developing near the Sundome, and he is asking Sun City West residents to join his effort to block a Fry's from being built on the site of the defunct entertainment venue.

"I don't believe that we need another grocery store in our community," Nicholson said Friday afternoon in the Safeway parking lot where he collected petition signatures of

those opposed to the Fry's development. "And it will attract more people here and cause big traffic problems."

Nicholson began the petition drive last week and has collected more than 100 signatures.

"This shopping center wouldn't be just for us but people from the outside would be here, too," he said. "We have a lot of slow drivers and golf cars, so this would be volatile."

Nicholson said he hopes the petition will encourage Brown



JAROD OPPERMAN/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Jerry Salamun of Sun City West signs a petition to find another option for the Sundome in Sun City West while Pat Stephens discusses her opinion of its fate. Friday

Grace 6, the Scottsdale-based developers, to change its plans.

"Maybe we can get some senior housing zoned for the area instead," he said.

In August, Brown Grace 6 announced that Fry's would be the anchor for the shopping center, which will include

SEE PETITIONS, A5

PETITIONS

FROM A1

other businesses.

The developers will be working with the Maricopa County Department of Transportation to add new lights and lanes for the expected traffic.

But Nicholson and others don't believe that will be enough.

Ruth Bookout, a Sun City West resident, signed the petition.

"We already have two stores within a block of each other, Safeway and Bashas', then there are two stores right outside in Surprise," Bookout said.

Sun City West resident Pat Stephens said she's also concerned

about the traffic.

"I'm just not sure how the cars and traffic will factor into everything and if it will be safe," Stephens said.

Jerry Salamun, another resident, also signed the petition.

"I just don't think it's appropriate and believe that someone should do something about it, either the county or the recreation centers," he said.

Mike Whiting, general manager of

the Recreation Centers of Sun City West, said the RCSCW is a neutral party to the proposed development.

"Owner members have the right to circulate the petition," he said. "But the Recreation Centers of Sun City West does not own the Sundome property or have any financial interest in the proposed development of the Sundome property, which is strictly a commercial venture."

VF-SCW-
SUNDOME
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12-10-12



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Norm Crosby

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The Ink Spots

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Drumline students practice during Kim Wall's music class at Dysart High School. The Sundome Performing Arts Association distributed \$2.1 million in grants to 25 organizations in 2010. Music programs in the Dysart district have benefited. PHOTOS BY DEIRDRE HAMILL/THE REPUBLIC

Sundome grants keep on giving

Arts, cultural groups are big beneficiaries

By Amy B Wang
The Republic | azcentral.com

Nearly two years after a major Northwest Valley arts organization disbanded, its legacy keeps influencing the arts and music scene.

The Sundome Performing Arts Association was founded to raise money for what was once known as the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts, which closed in 2008.

In May 2010, the association shuttered — but not before distributing the \$2.1 million it had left over to 25 arts and cultural organizations.

Some received \$16,000 and others as much as \$200,000. Today, those grants continue to serve as the lifeblood for many of those groups.

In the past two years, the money has funded dozens of performances, concerts, productions and exhibitions.

The music program at Dysart High School "is definitely being rejuvenated," band teacher Kim Wall said. The Dysart Education Foundation, which serves the Dysart Unified School District, received \$200,000, one of the largest chunks of money. The district purchased instruments, equipment and supplies for its performing-arts programs at the district's four high schools.

A large part of that money will be used toward starting Dysart's first dedicated arts academy, a school within a school at Desert Moon Elementary that will open in 2012-13.



Arnold Moreno (left) and Andy Varlotta practice during music class at Dysart High.

Dysart High School received nearly \$50,000 through the Sonoran Sounds Women's Chorale, which purchased new choral music and a Yamaha grand piano for the school with Sundome funds it had received.

"We are so, so fortunate," Wall said. The Phoenix Chorale, which received a \$100,000 grant, has since been able to put on a series of concerts each year in the Northwest Valley, an area it had previously considered "artistically underserved."

"It's just really provided a lot of stability and support for that series," said Joel Rinsema, executive director of the Grammy Award-winning choral group. "We had already performed one season

there, but really it was because of the funding that we could think into the future and really put down roots in the Northwest Valley."

The Northwest Black History Committee of Peoria used its \$30,000 grant to fund the group's annual multicultural music festival and Black History celebration. The festival included more than 200 artists performing dance, theater, poetry and music.

"It was a big help," said Ervin Cwright, the group's chair. "We would have done it (even without the grant), but it would not have been to the degree. It would have been very, very sad, because with the economy the way it was, it was difficult to get any corporate sponsors."

Republic reporter Sonu Munshi contributed to this article.

TOP SUNDOME GRANTS

The top grant recipients from the Sundome Performing Arts Association.

Theater Works, Peoria, \$200,000.

Expanded children's theater training program Youth Works, giving area youth exposure to real-world theater. In April, the theater will host a week's worth of performances of "Sakura no Ne" by the Japanese Friendship Garden of Phoenix, another Sundome grant recipient. Theater Works has been working with the group to involve area school districts in the production.

Dysart Education Foundation, Surprise, \$200,000.

Purchased equipment and supplies for four high school performing-arts programs in the Dysart Unified School District, as well as for the district's first dedicated arts academy, to open as a "school within a school" at Desert Moon Elementary in 2012-13.

Some items purchased include the rights for the musical "Guys and Dolls," dance uniforms, arts materials, and iPads and iPods for the music program at Cimarron Springs Elementary.

Friends of the R.H. Johnson Library, Sun City West, \$150,000.

Brought Ballet Under the Stars to Sun City West for two years. Provided for shows like "Mark Twain: An Autobiography" and a J.A. Jance program titled "Breakfast & Books." Funded renovations to the Stardust Theater, including lighting system repairs, new front curtains, an electric curtain pull and some new sound equipment.

There are still sufficient funds available from this grant to continue providing more diverse entertainment to the West Valley; and to do some further improvements to the Stardust Theater.

Wickenburg Children's Cultural Organization, Wickenburg, \$125,000.

Some of the grant has been used to fund a summer music workshop for those interested in learning how to play a musical instrument. The ultimate goal is to form a youth symphony in the Wickenburg area. The group has set aside a portion of money to support a traveling music teacher for elementary schools in the Wickenburg area and to cover the costs of rehearsal space. The position remains unfilled.

Monday, February 20, 2012

www.yourwestvalley.com

SUNDOME**FROM A1**

the item states.

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In 2005, the Board of Regents authorized ASU to transfer the property, 19403 R. H. Johnson Blvd., to Maricopa County for the purpose of continued operation of the Sundome as a performing arts center.

The transfer documents stipulated that ownership would revert to the regents in the event that the county elected to discontinue use of the facility as a performing arts center. The property reverted to ASU when that occurred in 2009.

Sundome sale looms

STAFF REPORT

A Scottsdale investment group wants to pay \$2 million to Arizona State University for the former Sundome in Sun City West, demolish the theater and build a retail shopping center anchored by a grocery store.

ASU, which has been attempting to unload the Sundome for years after failing to make a go of it as an entertainment venue, has accepted an offer from Brown Grace 6 Investments.

"The buyer intends to redevelop the property as a community shopping center with the land to be balanced and graded to allow for a convenient and accessible shopping center, pedestrian and automotive traffic, and modern buildings with convenient and attractive service amenities," according to an item on the Arizona Board of Regents Friday agenda.

"The center will be anchored by a major grocery store designed with a lifestyle concept offering services and departments customized to the needs of Sun City West residents."

SEE SUNDOME, A5

PLAY BALL



DAVE MARTINEZ/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Business leaders and community members gather at Surprise Stadium for a luncheon to kick off the 2012 spring training season. This is the 10th season Surprise has been a member of the Cactus League. **Story on Page A6.**

Sundome suitors remain mum

MITCHELL VANTREASE
DAILY NEWS-SUN

West Valley and Sun City West residents might be familiar with the work of the developers who want to purchase the Sundome.

The Brown Group Inc., a Scottsdale-based company, has built Surprise Marketplace, Surprise Towne Center and Arrowhead Crossing in Peoria. Some of the stores in the retail centers include Fry's, Target, The Home Depot and Bed, Bath & Beyond.

SEE PURCHASE, A5

PURCHASE

FROM A1

The developers met with Maricopa County Supervisor Max Wilson of District 4 recently to discuss some initial plans for the area.

Wilson said he was impressed with the developers, who he said have a good history in the Valley. He added they didn't reveal too many plans about the Sundome property, which will become a retail development, but a "grocery store of some sorts could be in the works."

The Brown Group Inc. has been in business for 25 years, building a number of retail developments in Arizona, New Mexico and California.

Todd Kjar, a representative for Brown Group Inc., declined to comment on project details and the sale of the Sundome as the deal is still pending.

Even though he doesn't want to see the Sundome demolished, Wilson said he understands something must be done with the building. Wilson said he also asked company representatives about the sloped parking lot area at the Sundome and how they would alter it to better accommodate residents.

"The Sundome is not an easy issue, because its history is in our hearts, and it is hard for us to let it go, but we have to move on," he said.

Once an entertainment venue for world-renowned performers, the Sundome slowly saw its audiences decline as more theaters and arts centers sprung up Valleywide.

In 2005, the Arizona Board of Regents authorized Arizona State University to transfer the property at 19403 R.H. Johnson Blvd., to Maricopa County for the purpose of continued operation of the Sundome as a performing arts center.

Two weeks ago, ASU accepted the offer from the developers for \$2 million after years of attempts by ASU to return the Sundome to a successful entertainment venue. The sale is still pending.

According to an item on the Arizona Board of Regents agenda for its meeting Friday: "The buyer intends to redevelop the property as a community shopping center, with the land to be balanced and graded to allow for a convenient and accessible shopping center."

The agenda item also stated the center's services and departments will be "customized to the needs of Sun City West residents."

Wilson said he encouraged the developers to meet with Recreation Centers of Sun City West

and Property Owners and Residents Association staff as well.

RCSCW General Manager Mike Whiting said he's pleased to know the company has experience with regional development.

"It sounds like it'll be compatible with the area, which is great," Whiting said. "I think residents are just eager to know the specifics of what the stores might be. But as far as the recreation centers is concerned, we're just happy to know it's an established developer who'll be working the project."

Bill Hansen, PORA president, said he's interested in meeting with the developers.

"I hope they will create something that has the community's interest at heart," he said.

Mitchell Vantrease can be reached at 623-876-2526 or mvantrease@yourwestvalley.com.

26 OPINIONS

Z20 FRIDAY, MARCH 2, 2012

NORTHWEST VALLEY REPUBLIC

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Laura McBride, 602-444-6929VISIT OUR BLOG: Go to blogs.azcentral.com
and then to Plugged In - West Valley

OUR VIEW

Sad but true: Sundome's time has passed

Birt Kellam spent much of the late 1990s raising funds to restore the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts.

The Sun City West resident now likely will see the venue razed.

Arizona State University, owner of the once-prominent entertainment site, has accepted a \$2 million cash bid for the Sundome, vacant since 2009. The potential buyer plans to demolish the theater and replace it with a shopping center anchored by a grocery store, according to proposals.

"The Sundome was one of the reasons we moved out here," Kellam said. "It was such a wonderful venue, but it's a tough business to be in."

Built by Del E. Webb Corp. in 1980, the Sundome in its heyday packed the house with performers like Bob Hope, Pearl Bailey, Lawrence Welk and Harvey Korman and Tim Conway. By the



ASU has sold the Sundome, which likely will be razed to make way for a shopping center. CARLOS CHAVEZ/ THE REPUBLIC

late 1990s, it was evident that the aging building, given to ASU by Webb, needed refurbishing. It lacked adequate restroom facilities and didn't have the proper back and side stage design to attract Broadway-style plays and larger stage shows.

The estimated cost for the updates

was \$5 million, but a dedicated group of Sun City West residents, led by Kellam, met the fund-raising challenge.

"We had saved the Sundome," he said.

The group had \$5.4 million pledged. Some of that was from a ticket surcharge to be added by ASU for performances, and \$1 million was from an anonymous donor.

The renovation fell through when new bids to do the work came in at twice the amount projected. Defeated, the group offered the money back to the donors, many of whom refused the refund, Kellam said. The remaining funds were distributed over the years to performing-arts troupes and schools.

The Sundome limped along for a few more years, with Maricopa County stepping in to operate it for a while before returning it to ASU. The rising costs of maintaining the facility was too

much for the university, and it turned off the electricity in 2009.

The entertainment industry, especially area arts-and-culture venues, was hit hard in the recession as job losses and furloughs cut into discretionary income. Those artists who did tour selected smaller venues.

A dynamic arts-and-culture scene is the thread to a vibrant community. As the economy recovers, we'll be watching to see how West Valley venues fare.

Kellam now sits on the board of Peoria's Arizona Broadway Theatre, among other community involvement. He is dedicated to the arts and wants to see them thrive in the region but admits that there really isn't an alternate use for the 7,100-seat Sundome.

Nevertheless, he finds it difficult to watch the once popular venue's demise.

"We certainly were pleased to have it while we did," he said.

ARIZONA NEWS

ASU gets \$2 mil offer for empty Sun City West venue

Arizona State University has accepted a \$2 million cash bid for the Sundome, a once-prominent performing-arts center in Sun City West that has sat vacant since 2009.

The potential buyer, Scottsdale-based Brown Grace 6 Investments LLC, plans to demolish the theater and replace it with a retail shopping center anchored by a grocery store,

according to proposals.

The bid came as a surprise to ASU, which since 2009 has tried to find a buyer, community partner or city willing to take on the struggling 7,030-seat venue.

"We're just happy to see something be done with it," said Katy O'Grady, spokesperson for Sun City West. "It's been sitting there for a

long time, not in the best of shape."

According to university documents, the developer intends to add about 150,000 square feet of retail shops, including a major grocery store. University officials hope to close on the sale by the end of the year.

— Amy B Wang

ON THIS DATE IN ARIZONA HISTORY

In 1907, Al Sieber, U.S. Army scout and guide, was killed by a falling boulder during construction of the road north of Roosevelt Dam.

In 1927, a grand jury barred 13 "art" magazines from Tucson newsstands.

AIR QUALITY: Maricopa County shifts its air-quality approach, focusing on education for polluters instead of penalties. **B3**

Lotterv

2/19/12
AZREP



Arizona State University has accepted a \$2 million offer for the Sundome in Sun City West. A developer wants to build a shopping center at the site. CARLOS CHAVEZ/THE REPUBLIC

Sundome likely to be razed if sale is done

By Amy B Wang

The Republic | azcentral.com

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"We've kind of quietly tried to market it for a number of years now," said Steven Nielsen, assistant vice president of University Real Estate Development. "Then, quite truthfully, out of the blue we received a proposal."

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University officials hope to close on the sale by the end of the year. If the transaction goes through, the developer almost certainly will demolish the theater, Nielsen said.

"Unfortunately, the building is functionally obsolete," he said.

Years ago, Sun City West residents seemed divided on what should be done with the property. Community board members expressed fear that ASU might sell the land off for a strip mall; many wanted to keep the structure, if only to preserve some of the culture it once represented.

Now, they seem grateful that there is any movement at all.

"Obviously, it was a landmark ... but we're just happy to see something be done with it," said Katy O'Grady, spokeswoman for Sun City West. "It's been sitting there for a long time not in the best of shape."

Republic reporter Lesley Wright contributed to this article.

SUN CITY WEST INDEPENDENT

Vol. 50, No. 39

Wednesday, September 22, 2010

www.newszap.com

VF SCW SUNDOME

INDEPENDENT SEPTEMBER 23, 2010

Sundome: RCSCW considers involvement

Board to discuss ideas
for facility at Thursday's
meeting

By Julie Anne Maurer

Independent Newspapers

The vacant Sundome has been the topic of conversation for the last year, and now the Recreation Centers of Sun City West Governing Board is joining the trend.

The board discussed the building at its Sept. 10 workshop, and will make a decision on RCSCW's involvement in the building's future at its general meeting this week.

According to rec center spokeswoman Katy O'Grady, manager Mike Whiting presented the board with several options for the Sundome issue.

"He did not recommend any particular option since it will be up to the board to decide, but based on the information received it seems financial hurdles would make two of the options improbable," Ms. O'Grady stated in an e-mail. "Mike did indicate he wouldn't recommend No. 5, which is to do nothing."

The options included purchasing the Sundome as an investment, purchasing and redeveloping the Sundome, working with ASU on the sale and future use of the property, forming a 501(c)(3) independent of the rec centers to purchase and redevelop the property or do nothing.

"We heard from former Maricopa County Events Center General Manager Dan Wohleen, who operated it under Nederlander," Ms. O'Grady stated. "He said the annual average operating expenses when Nederlander was operating it were more than \$530,000 a year, and that doesn't include a large increase in the water rates that hit at the time Nederlander departed."

The building was operated for several years by Maricopa County, but in 2008 they turned the reins back over to ASU. ASU put



The Sundome has been empty for more than a year. Recreation Centers of Sun City West officials are considering getting involved in the building's future.

the property on the market for sale or lease, but no takers emerged, so the university pulled it off the market and shuttered the building indefinitely. ASU brought the option before the state board of regents in May to possibly auction the facility, but pulled the item off the agenda at the last minute citing the need to do "due diligence."

Officials from the university have not made any comments on the facility since, but noted they would provide the Independent with an update when any progress on the facilities future is made.

Mr. Wohleen gave the board an estimate that the repair and upgrades needed to bring in high quality acts would cost at least \$9.5 million.

If you go

Recreation Centers of Sun City West Governing Board meeting

9 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 23

R.H. Johnson Social Hall, 19803 R.H. Johnson Blvd.

"That would include a new stage house, new HVAC, ceiling realignment, extending the stage, new dressing rooms and offices, new administration building and box office,

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Sundome

Continued From Page 1

new lighting, new concession area, loading dock repairs, parking lot repairs and several other needed items," Ms. O'Grady stated.

ASU removed most of the equipment when it shuttered the building, which could contribute to even greater repair costs.

Ms. O'Grady noted the property was appraised at \$11.5 million.

"If the Rec Centers were to even consider options one or two, it would mean residents would have to vote and approve a special assessment, ranging from \$232 per resident to \$357 per resident," Ms. O'Grady stated. "Residents have never approved a special

assessment in this community's history, so those two options don't seem financially viable."

Board president Dave Moeller wants residents to know that the purchase of the Sundome was not likely.

"We're really not interested in purchasing the Sundome, it would not be economically feasible," Mr. Moeller said.

He noted they only were discussing the issue because several residents called to say the rec centers should purchase it, so the wanted to at least show they looked into the matter.

"It's our responsibility to look at everything," Mr. Moeller said.

Several residents told the Independent they would not support a special assess-

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Sundome

Continued From Page 7

ment or the rec centers involvement.

"I don't know why this question keeps coming up. The Sundome is a shell at this time, and can be re-purposed to some use other than as an entertainment venue, but it would cost multiple millions to do so - money we don't have," stated resident Thomas Bell in an e-mail. "At this time, there's no stated purpose for the building, and it would be foolish to buy it on the assumption that the Rec Centers would figure out something to do with it later."

Resident John Baie agreed.

"RCSCW should stay out of any involvement with the Sundome. The Sundome proved too much, financially, for Maricopa County and the contractor who tried to run the venue. Surely it would prove too much for RCSCW, as well," Mr. Baie stated in an e-mail. "I would not support a special assessment by RCSCW to pay for the purchase and renovation of the Sundome. These are tough economic times, and RCSCW rec fees are going up too much as it is."

Resident Jerry Besson also spoke out against the organizations financial involvement.

"It too costly a venture, and what practical use would come of it?" he asked.

Resident Phil Carlson noted in an e-mail he was against the rec centers purchasing the property because it would be too costly.

"If the county and private enterprise

Contacting board members

Nine members sit on the Recreation Centers of Sun City West Governing Board.

- Dave Moeller, gbpres@rcscw.com
- Ed Van Cott, gbhr@rcscw.com
- Terry Hamman, gbbowling@rcscw.com
- Scott Ellis, gbbudget@rcscw.com
- Pat Canfield, gbclubs@rcscw.com
- Lake Westphal, gbproperties@rcscw.com
- Paul Piper, gbgolf@rcscw.com
- Jack Steiner, gbpr@rcscw.com
- John Ronan, gblegal@rcscw.com

couldn't figure out a way to make it pay to operate it how can we expect the rec center to operate it when they can't even make up their mind on what to charge to play golf on our golf courses?" Mr. Carlson asked. "Tear it down and build something smaller with shops and a few restaurants."

Mr. Moeller noted the board would probably have some involvement in working with ASU to help find a viable and appropriate tenant or owner for the Sundome.

"It's in our best interest to be involved," Mr. Moeller said. "We want to make sure we maintain the quality of the community and its facilities."

The board meets 9 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 23 in the R.H. Johnson Social Hall, 19803 R.H. Johnson Blvd.

News Editor Julie Anne Maurer can be reached at jmaurer@newszap.com or 445-2805.

Chances likely for Sundome to stay vacant

By Lesley Wright

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

The Sundome in Sun City West narrowly escaped being auctioned off in a spring fire sale.

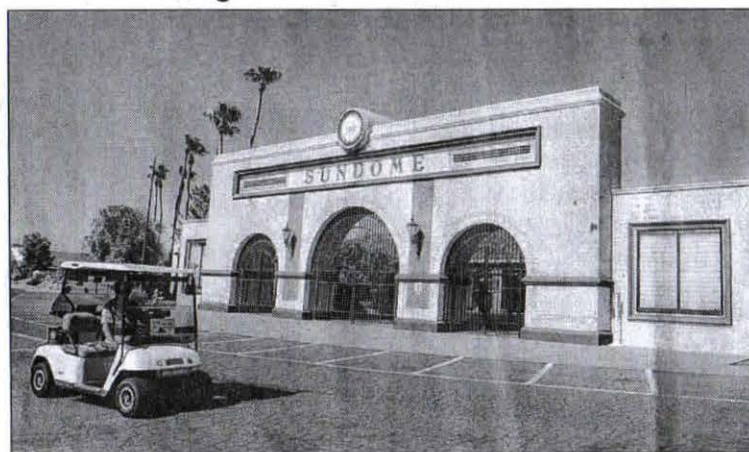
But prospects remain dim for the 7,030-seat theater that once presented Bob Hope, Lawrence Welk and Bob Dylan.

SUN CITY WEST Studies commissioned by Arizona State

University, which owns the Sundome, and Sun City West reached the same conclusion — the cost of renovating the theater would be excessive and no reasonable buyer wants to purchase it.

The building likely will sit there, surrounded by its 863-car parking lot, for the indefinite future.

"We have very little leverage," said David Moeller, president of Sun City West's governing board. "It's really just a matter of working with ASU to ensure



CARLOS CHAVEZ/THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Some Sun City West residents would like to help resurrect the Sundome. Others say they wouldn't want to pay a special fee to save the theater.

that whatever use goes there is compatible with the community. That's our primary concern."

Some residents told board members in September that the community could resurrect the theater. Sun City West could buy it or find a non-profit willing to try doing what three companies had failed to do — produce profitable shows.

Other homeowners said they would not pay a special assessment fee that could cost \$357 per resident to save the ailing giant on R.H. Johnson Boulevard.

Resident Shirley McDonald said she would not support a fee, but neither does she want the Sundome torn down. Galleries or other artistic commercial ventures could fill the hall, she

"It's really just a matter of working with ASU to ensure that whatever use goes there is compatible with the community."

David Moeller

President of Sun City West's governing board

suggested.

"We need to keep some culture here," she said.

The Sundome was a hit when the Del E. Webb Development Co. built the project in 1980. Northwest Valley residents packed the place, despite the fact that seats on the edges of the auditorium had no view of the stage.

Eydie Gorme and Tim Conway performed there. Nederlander Concerts, one of the Sundome's last production companies, staged the Broadway hits "Chicago" and "Rent," but the center could not compete with state-of-the-art performance complexes built in more convenient locations.

"Three companies have tried and failed," Moeller said. "It's

the location. It's the economy. Our citizens are limited on how much they are willing to pay for a ticket. People on the outside do not see this as a place to come see entertainment."

Del Webb gave the Sundome to ASU for \$1 in 1984 and the university tried to sell it 20 years later. Maricopa County tried to run it starting in 2005, but gave it back to ASU in 2009.

The university "decommissioned" the theater last year, turning off the power.

The university's real-estate office realized just how far the Sundome's value had sunk in 2009 when a request for proposals came back with one offer to buy the property for \$50,000.

Appraisals put the value of the land alone at \$7.2 million.

Sundome: A work in progress

By Julie Anne Maurer
Independent Newspapers

Two weeks ago, the Sundome had more activity than its had in months.

Four cars were parked in front of the facility, and people were inside the building.

According to Al Chatelle, who is spearheading a campaign to keep the facility a venue, he and several others were out perusing the property.

He noted he, along with a furniture store owner, Rep. Judy Burges and Karen Honeycutt from Arizona State University Real Estate were inside the facility.

"The owner of Direct Buy (furniture) came out to see if there was something he could use the facility for in his sales, but when he got in there he too saw that it was too beautiful to be anything other than a venue," Mr. Chatelle said.

He noted that though the facility has been empty for months, it was still in excellent condition.

"It was wonderful. It was beautiful," Mr. Chatelle said. "We wanted to see if this theater was still workable and found its best use is to continue to operate as an entertainment facility."

The venue has been empty for more than a year. It was operated for a few years by Maricopa County, which returned it to ASU's responsibility in 2008.

ASU put the facility on the market for buyers or a leasee, but none emerged, and the university removed equipment from the venue last summer and took it off the market.

In the spring of this year, weeds penetrated cracks in the parking lot, and residents bombarded the university with complaints of its eyesore. Several residents grabbed their gardening gear and lent a hand to the cause.

See Sundome — Page 7

Sundome

Continued From Page 2

After the Independent pursued the matter, Ms. Honeycutt reported she was sending a landscaper to maintain the facility.

The possible auction of the Sundome appeared on the Arizona Board of Regents agenda in June, but it was mysteriously removed from the agenda on the day of the meeting.

Ms. Honeycutt gave no reason other than they were doing their "due diligence."

The item is not on the August Board of Regents agenda.

Mr. Chatelle his is working with a promoter who might be interested in putting on productions in the facility, and leasing it from ASU.

"So we do have encouraging info that a promoter is interested in it if we can deal with the Board of Regents that spend \$200,000 per year to maintain it," Mr. Chatelle said. "Time will tell is the state will see the full benefit in taxes it could receive over the long term and the overall good it would be for home values of Sun City West and the surrounding communities."

He said he would continue to push the issue with state officials, especially now that the governor formed a tourism task force.

"I believe that a 7,000-seat facility...is also an asset to the Arizona tourism economy," Mr. Chatelle said.

He noted the promoter would be out this month to peruse the property.

Ms. Honeycutt, though Mr. Chatelle said she was out at the property with him last week, is keeping mum on Sundome updates.

"I have no other information at this time, but I will let you know when we do," Ms. Honeycutt stated in an e-mail.

The Recreation Centers of Sun City West Governing Board is also keeping a close eye on what is going on with the facility.

"The important thing for residents to know that the rec centers have no authority over what happens with the Sundome," said board member John Ronin, who also serves on the board's legal affairs committee. Rec Center officials previously noted that the organization would not be purchasing the facility, because it would cost too much to buy, maintain and refurbish.

Sundome Association spreads funds among arts community

MITCHELL VANTREASE
DAILY NEWS-SUN

With the help of a \$200,000 grant from the Sundome Performing Arts Association, Theater Works intends to expand its youth program "Youth Works."

The Dysart Education Foundation will provide additional funding for arts programs in its schools through a \$200,000 grant, while the Sun City Brass band plans to buy some instruments for the group with a \$30,000 grant rather than borrow more money.

The SPAA presented approximately \$2.9 million in grants to 25 organizations Tuesday at Briarwood Country Club in Sun City West to local arts organizations. Known as "Grants for the Arts," the money ranged from \$16,000 to \$200,000.

This is the final charitable act of the group, which raised money for the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in Sun City West. In 2008, the facility closed after Maricopa County returned it to Arizona State University.

Kathy Jones, president of SPAA, said the process to select the organizations "was a labor of love and long process, but we wanted to do it right."

There were 50 grant applicants. Each of the organizations, particularly those not based in the area, agreed to perform in the Northwest Valley.

"The closing of the Sundome left a huge void for performing arts in the area," Jones said. "This money will help these groups build a solid foundation and stand on in the future."

Jack Lytle, CEO of Theater Works in Peoria, said he's proud to be a grant recipient of SPAA.

"This just takes your breath away, and so special for the kids who will benefit from it," Lytle said.

Robyn Allen, Theater Works artistic director, said the group was discussing "kick starting" the youth program when it applied for the grant.

"In the midst of that, we had this opportunity to apply for this grant, and this is everything that we could have dreamed of," she said. "This



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Kathy Jones, SPAA president, presents a \$200,000 grant to Robyn Allen, artistic director, Bob Root, Theater Works board member, and Jack Lytle, Theater Works CEO, Tuesday at Briarwood Country Club in Sun City West.

Sundome Performing Arts Association Grants	
1. Theater Works	\$200,000
2. Dysart Education Foundation	\$200,000
3. Friends of the R.H. Johnson Library	\$150,000
4. Wickenburg Children's Cultural Org.	\$125,000
5. Del E. Webb Center for the Performing Arts	\$125,000
6. Ballet Arizona	100,000
7. Deer Valley Education Foundation	100,000
8. Nadaburg Elementary PTSA	100,000
9. Phoenix Chorale	100,000
10. Phoenix Symphony	100,000
11. West Valley Chorale	100,000
12. West Valley Symphony	100,000
13. Phoenix Opera	77,300
14. Sun City Concert Band Society	75,300
15. Salt River Brass	75,100
16. Japanese Friendship Garden of Phoenix	67,500
17. Dysart Community Center	50,000
18. Sonoran Sounds Women's Chorale	50,000
19. Arizona Winds Concert Band	40,000
20. Friends of Music Committee	36,500
21. Northwest Black History Committee	30,000
22. Sun City Desert Brass Band	30,000
23. Desert Aires Barbershop Chorus of the Sun Cities	26,700
24. Chamber Music West	25,000
25. Greater Phoenix Chapter, Barbershop Chorus	16,000

DAILY NEWS-SUN

continues to help us raise the stakes, which is what we continually do every season."

The Northwest Black History Committee received a \$30,000 grant, which will help with its annual three-day music festival and black history celebration in Old Town Peoria.

Innette Sweetheart, a member of the NBHC, said they would have downsized next year's event had they not received a grant.

"There still would've been a festival but may be smaller," she said. "This will really help us spread the word for next year."

Sandi Hicks, president of the Deer Valley School District board of directors, said she's very pleased the district's foundation will receive a \$100,000 grant.

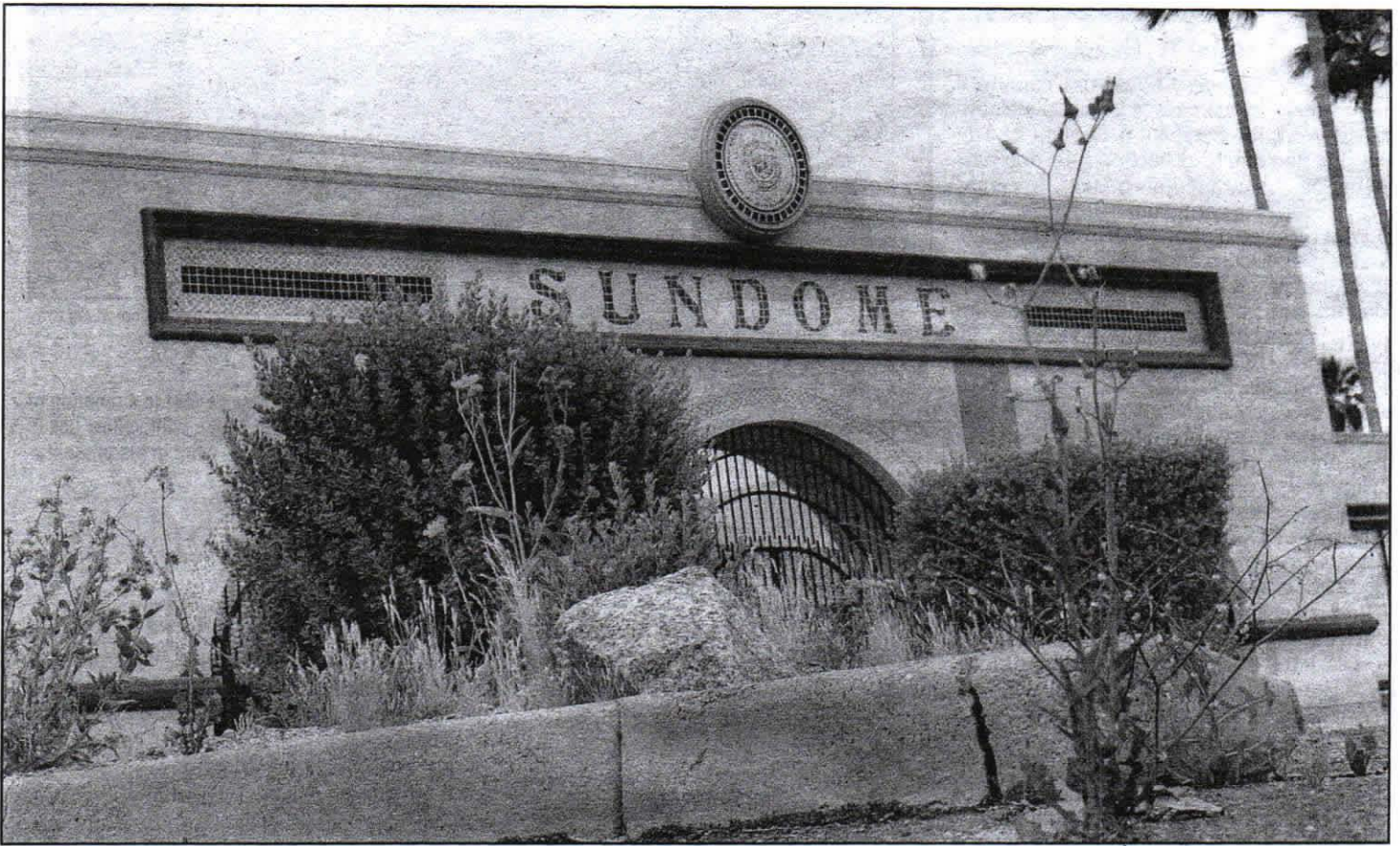
The SPAA grant is expected to help put piano labs in the schools and expose music to students in the fifth-grade and under.

"It's going to have a long-lasting impact," said Hicks. "So many schools right now are having their budgets cut and usually the arts are the first to go."

Ken Goodenburger, director of the West Valley Chorale, said with a tough economy it's hard for any arts organization to survive and any little bit helps. His group received a \$100,000.

"Our dollars (for programs) are stretched sometimes," he said. "This helps us tremendously."

Mitchell Vantrease can be reached at 876-2526 or e-mail mvantrease@yourwestvalley.com.



The Sundome parking lot is filled with cracks and weeds as the once-active venue now sits empty awaiting its fate. ASU might sell the property on auction within the next few months.

ASU makes move to auction Sundome

By Julie Anne Maurer
Independent Newspapers

The venue that once hosted famous performers and sat thousands of Northwest Valley residents may hit the auction block by summer's end.

The Arizona Board of Regents was set to decide June 10 if Arizona State University could put the Sundome, 19403 R.H. Johnson Blvd., up for auction and accept less than the appraised value for the venue, but the item was pulled off the agenda immediately before the meeting.

"No reason was given," said board spokeswoman Emily Palumbo.

ASU director of real estate Karen Honeycutt did not return request for comment on the agenda change before the Independent's press deadline.

Prior to the item being pulled, she was optimistic about the agenda item.

"The Sundome would be up for sale via auction because Arizona Board of Regents policy requires an auction for sale of real

property," stated ASU director of real estate Karen Honeycutt in an e-mail. "The Sundome is no longer in use by ASU, which is the primary reason for the sale. Previous efforts to lease, sell, or re-use the Sundome have not succeeded."

She noted she did not yet know the minimum bid amount.

"The bid has not been set yet, not sure what the range will be," Ms. Honeycutt stated. "If the board approves, the auction would take place this summer as soon as practically possible."

Maricopa County operated the venue for a couple of years, but in 2008, it was returned to the responsibility of ASU.

ASU sent out requests in March 2009, for proposals for a buyer or leasee for the venue, but none emerged. ASU removed the equipment from the building in the summer of 2009 and took it off the market, pending better days for the real estate industry.

In the spring of this year, weeds popped through cracks in the Sundome parking lot,

and an article in the Independent prompted many residents to call the university to complain. Other residents pitched in and tackled some of the weeds themselves.

A week later, Ms. Honeycutt called the Independent to report that she was sending a landscaping crew to clean up the property.

A month later, the venue sale was on the board of regents' agenda.

Ms. Honeycutt declined to note how many residents called her about the Sundome.

"We've received several calls of various kinds and interest over the past year and a half," Ms. Honeycutt stated. "I do not know the number of calls."

The Recreation Centers of Sun City West have no jurisdiction over the Sundome property, but officials note they will keep a close eye on what happens with the venue.

"We're very interested in what's to become of the Sundome, since they are right next door to us and a major property in the community," RCSCW spokeswoman Katy

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Sundome

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O'Grady stated in an e-mail. "We are particularly interested in the operational issues of whatever kind of business or development might go in there, and how it might impact the parking situation and traffic, for example. We'll be watching this process with the Board of Regents to see how it develops."

Sun City West residents are also waiting to hear what will happen to their venue.

"I know there are many residents of SCW who are vitally interested in the Sundome and its future," stated resident Pat McGarvey stated in an e-mail.

She noted she hopes the venue will retain an entertainment purpose.

"My first choice for a business would be another entertainment center. However, I am keenly aware that the musical and theatrical tastes of Sun City West and Surprise, Peoria and Glendale and Phoenix are vastly different. Nederlander proved that. When you're used to Rogers and Hammerstein, you walk out on 'Rent.'" Ms. McGarvey stated. "The kind of business I envision would be an Entertainment Complex that could offer not only single performers, but expand to orchestras, bands, shows, plays, choirs, speakers, etc. The building could be refurbished to have a large and small theater to accommodate the audience it requires."

Residents Bob and Diane Cheney want to see a cinema in the community.

"We believe that the only thing missing from Sun City West, Arizona, is movie theaters. Currently, we have to go to Surprise or Peoria (some 20-30 minutes away)," the couple stated in an e-mail. "The other thing we do when we go to movies is to eat a meal or at least have a happy hour. If a movie complex and combination restaurant/bar were included, it would be more attractive."

They noted tastes have changed in the community.

"We believe that the Sundome presented many programs we were not interested in. We don't care as much about plays and musicals as we do about movies," the Cheney's stated.

Resident Pat Leopard also suggested movies, but on a larger scale.

"I think we all understand that the Sun-

dome is going to have to undergo huge renovations and it is going to be very expensive for anyone who buys it. One of the suggestions that has been brought up is an IMAX theater and/or a theater that could also be used as an IMAX," Ms. Leopard stated. "With our economy in the shape it is in, most of us have cut down on our shopping - but still enjoy a good movie - especially in air-conditioning!"

She added that whatever goes onto the property will impact the community.

"The traffic on RHJ is already crazy with people cutting across to avoid Grand and Bell. Our 35 mph speed limit is a joke - most go at least 45. If something goes in that would encourage the consumption of alcohol, that would be even more of a concern," Ms. Leopard stated. "The Sundome is a beautiful facility - unique in Arizona and probably in the US. It is perfect for something for the arts."

Resident Dave Murphy noted the building will probably have to be torn down.

"I hate tearing down any sound structures, but I don't see any other way to use the building with its sloping floors," Mr. Murphy stated in an e-mail. "I would like to see it torn down and the property combined with the adjoining open property for condos. Beautiful views, great location and it would increase our tax base."

Resident Tom Metzger agreed that condos would be a viable option.

"I suspect the most viable use would be a condo or apartment complex - if there is a need. It would probably require the Sundome to be replaced (not saved)," Mr. Metzger stated. "The view would be great and close to all businesses. Maybe the ground floor could have the 'Meeting Place' that is the current drive of the (rec centers) - however, I do question the need for this."

He also noted RCSCW could purchase the property and sell it to the Native Americans for a future casino.

"Maybe they could even save the building and just modify the inside to suit casino needs," Mr. Metzger stated. "This would negate the need to bus our people to casinos, maybe provide a tax base to support PORA and keep some money in town."

Resident John Larson noted he has very strong feelings about the Sundome.

"Not only because we watched them

Sundome

Continued From Page 19

build it, but because we enjoyed spectacular entertainment there for many years. Shows like Lawrence Welk, Fred Waring's chorus, a few big bands, etc., filled, or almost filled it," Mr. Larson stated. "The biggest mistake was for Del Webb to give it to ASU, probably to get it off the tax roles."

He noted he made a comment about the venue at a RCSCW board meeting recently.

"I brought up the subject and suggested they should consider organizing a local board or committee to study and investigate what might be done with it, either as a theater or housing for some other activity," Mr. Larson stated. "For instance, this happened right after they appropriated \$40,000 to build a shack for the library for the purpose of storing books donated for sale, and so I suggested somewhat humorously they save that money and put the books in the Sundome lobby!"

He noted he did not want to see the building removed.

"The worst thing that could happen

See Sundome — Page 20

CURTAIN CALL

SPAA offers grants totaling \$2M

ERIN TURNER
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Some Northwest Valley performing arts groups may actually benefit from the closure of the Sundome Performing Arts Center at the end of the month.

The Sundome Performing Arts Association announced Thursday that it will take the more than \$2 million in funds it had raised to benefit the Sundome and donate it in the form of financial grants to nonprofit organizations for the support of performing arts.

"We're looking for performing arts groups that would actually

SEE SPAA, A5



DAILY NEWS-SUN FILE PHOTO

The Sundome Performing Arts Association is giving more than \$2 million in funds raised to benefit the Sundome to Northwest Valley performing arts groups. SPAA has raised millions of dollars in its 25-year history as the fund-raiser for the venue in Sun City West.

SPAA

FROM A1

benefit Northwest Maricopa County," said SPAA President Kathy Jones. "That's where most of the donations were received from and that is the target group that we're trying to give it back to."

Tom Taggart, a SPAA board member, said he hopes the grant money will be especially beneficial for schools in the Northwest Valley.

"We sent out letters to various nonprofits asking them to respond with a letter of interest if they'd like to apply for a grant, (and) we sent the letter to the five school districts in the West Valley," he said. "Each one has a nonprofit organization in connection with the school district. We would hope those organizations would apply for a grant to help the high school's music departments and arts departments so they

could use the funds for music or special programs. There are some 25 or 26 high schools involved, and we hope those organizations would apply for grants."

Jones said groups eligible for the grants must be nonprofit, 501 3c organizations.

"They must add to the art culture, (and) they must directly impact the Northwest Valley," she said.

Since its inception in 1985, SPAA has helped raise "several millions of dollars" toward repairs and renovation projects at the Sundome, Taggart said. The more than \$2 million the group has remaining was raised to pay for a stage renovation, which never took place.

"The donors to the stage renovation were able to get their donations back if they wanted but if they didn't want, those are the funds we have remaining now that we decided to give back to the community," he said.

In the nearly 25 years back-

ing the Sundome, SPAA has had several hundred members but now that the Sundome will be permanently closed, the organization has an uncertain future.

"We have not made any final decisions as to what we'll do. We're not actively raising funds, but we have not come to any conclusions as to what role SPAA will play," Jones said.

The grants will be limited to \$100,000 for each program or project, but consideration will be given to making larger grants after all applications have been received.

A firm deadline for the submittal of letters of interest is Aug. 28.

Letters of interest may be sent to the Sundome Performing Arts Association, PO Box 5603, Sun City West, 85376. Applications will be mailed out upon receipt of letters of interest. For information, contact Kathy Jones, SPAA president, at 623-546-7818 or 602-370-0920.

An Arizona State University official says plans are to sell the 7,034-seat theater when market conditions improve.

TOM TINGLE/
THE REPUBLIC

Former Sundome's lights out, ASU wants to sell it

By Cecilia Chan

THE REPUBLIC | AZCENTRAL.COM

In its heyday, the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts packed the house with performers such as Harvey Korman and Tim Conway.

Today, the Sundome, renamed the Maricopa County Events Center, is more like a white elephant. The vacant building sits alongside a major thoroughfare in the retirement community of Sun City West. The lights are out, with Arizona State University, which owns the building, turning off utilities months ago.

"All indications are it's history," said Larry Woods, president of the Property Owners and Residents Association board of directors, an advocacy group for Sun City West residents. "As of the first of July they really turned off the switch, if you will. They were supporting it in the past with minimal electricity."

Karen Honeycutt, director of

“As of the first of July they really turned off the switch, if you will. They were supporting it in the past with minimal electricity.”

Larry Woods

Sun City West Property Owners and Residents Association president

ASU real-estate operations, said plans are to sell the 7,034-seat theater when market conditions improve.

The 16-acre property was appraised in February with an estimated land value of \$7.2 million, Honeycutt said.

"If the building were reopened and used as an entertainment facility, the value would increase to about \$11 million. The land and building together equals \$11 million," she said.

Honeycutt said the university in April issued a request for bid-

ders to buy or lease the property. No acceptable offers materialized.

She said university representatives also met with the Sundome Performing Arts Association, PORA and various theater groups to discuss possible uses for the building but "no viable, affordable uses were identified."

Honeycutt said it costs ASU about \$5,000 a month to maintain the vacant building. That figure doesn't include deferred maintenance and repair expenses. The university "is deactivating" the theater building, she said.

Woods said that although the theater landscaping is being maintained, he still has concerns.

"It's an eyesore for the community, sitting there empty," Woods said. "We worked with ASU to make sure if they are going to walk away from it that it looks halfway decent. One thing we don't want is for them to put a fence around it."

Sundome group to award arts grants

The Sundome Performing Arts Association has created a grant program to support performing arts in the Northwest Valley. The association will award up to \$100,000 for each program or project.

— Sherry Anne Rubiano/
The Republic/azcentral.com

BACKGROUND

The Sundome Performing Arts Association was the major fundraising support organization for the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in Sun City West. The theater has been shuttered since December, so association funds that had been reserved for stage improvements will be used to fund the grant program. The association has about \$2 million to hand out.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE

Non-profit organizations and schools are eligible to apply for a grant. The program must directly impact the Northwest Valley. Grants could fund a variety of projects, including concerts, plays, a children's summer program for singers, or a school music library.

HOW TO APPLY

Interested organizations must send a letter of interest to Sundome Performing Arts Association, P.O. Box 5603, Sun City West, AZ 85376. The deadline is Aug. 28. The letters must state how much money the organization is requesting and what the grant will fund. The association's board will review the letters. Those that qualify will be asked to submit a formal application.

MORE INFORMATION

Call SPAA president Kathy Jones at 623-546-7818 or 602-370-0920.

Maricopa County Events Center Timeline

1980: Developer Del Webb builds the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts on R.H. Johnson Boulevard in Sun City West.

1984: Del Webb donates the theater to Arizona State University for \$1 with the provision it remains a performing-arts facility.

2004: ASU announces it will sell the theater because it can no longer subsidize the venue.

2005: Maricopa County purchases the facility for \$10 from Arizona State University.

2005: Maricopa County contracts with the Nederlander Organization of Los Angeles to manage, book and promote the Maricopa County Events Center, formerly Sundome.

2008: Maricopa County agrees to release Nederlander from its 10-year contract, effective Dec. 31, recognizing it could not ask the company to continue pumping money into a theater with a low return.

2009: Theater reverts to ASU ownership.

County set to return \$2M to SPAA

MITCHELL VANTREASE

DAILY NEWS-SUN

Maricopa County is expected to return \$2.1 million to the Sundome Performing Arts Association now that the Maricopa County Events Center in Sun City West will be turned over to Arizona State University.

Karen Stewart, Maricopa County Events Operations manager, said the money is sitting in an escrow account, collecting interest. The county is talk-

ing with the association's lawyers to have the funds transferred.

Stewart said the money was intended to help make improvements to the events center, formerly known as the Sundome, when the county acquired it in 2005 and partnered with Nederlander Concerts in an effort to revive the faltering entertainment venue.

Last week, however, Maricopa County decided it would return the theater to ASU after announcing it

Take our poll at
www.yourwestvalley.com.



would end its three-year relationship with Nederlander, which was to pay for the bulk of improvements in an effort to lure major Broadway productions. Stewart said the project would have cost an estimated \$12 million to complete.

But the county and Nederlander said today's economy made it impossible to do the work.

"In these hard economic times, it just didn't work out. It's rough for everyone financially right now," Stewart said.

ASU Vice President of Public Affairs Virgil Renzouli said ASU is considering options for the building, but even-

SEE SPAA, A5

SPAA: Group to determine disbursement of funds

FROM A1

tually plans to sell the theater.

When it closes at the end of this year, the venue will mark the end of performances by world-renowned acts, Broadway and local shows and high school graduations.

Kathy Jones, president of SPAA, which

was established to raise funds for the Sundome, said it's unfortunate the center must close its doors.

"We were extremely disappointed when ASU left, then hopeful when Nederlander picked it up again but it just didn't work out," she said.

Jones said SPAA conducted a capital fundraising campaign in the

late 1990s for the Sundome and raised approximately \$5 million. But due to the withdrawal of pledges and stock market fluctuation, the association ended up with \$2.1 million.

When ASU announced it was turning the events center over to Maricopa County, Jones said, the funds were then transferred to the county.

The association expects to have the funds returned within next 30 to 90 days. Officials will be looking for ways to use the money for other local 501c3 organizations that benefit the performing arts in the West Valley.

"It will go toward the arts because that's what the purpose was for," Jones said.

Small piece of Sundome history

Fund-raising bricks provide
some memories for donors

ERIN TURNER
DAILY NEWS-SUN

A Sun City West landmark is slowly being taken apart, shipped away and boarded up.

And while the fate of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts — once an entertainment pillar in the community and soon to be another empty edifice — saddens supporter Lillian Werenne, the longtime Sun City West resident was curious about something else. Bricks.

"I've been waiting here thinking they're going to tear this place down and what are they going to do with the bricks," she wondered.

The commemorative bricks Werenne is referring to were purchased more than a decade ago in an effort to raise funds for the Sundome. The hundreds of resulting engraved and specialized bricks were put on display surrounding the large fountain in the atrium just in front of the venue.

And while everyone seems to be in a rush to

SEE BRICKS, A5

Don Stone, the Sundome building engineer, says the bricks around the fountain in the courtyard of the Sundome will be returned to the people that purchased them as a fund-raiser for the Sundome.



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

BRICKS

FROM A1

get the Sundome boarded up, Werenne said she wants the two bricks she purchased — one honoring the memory of her companion who passed away 15 years ago and one for herself.

"I'd like to have them. I'd rather they be there and the Sundome would be open (but) that's not the case," she said. "Still, I don't want them to be destroyed. I figured we gave them and it's memorializing (someone). I would prefer that it just didn't get thrown away or broken up."

Sundome officials said they would accommodate the request.

Don Stone, building engineer at the Sundome, said he will likely schedule a day where residents or family members may come collect their com-

memorative bricks. He'll even dig them up.

"It's like a jigsaw puzzle. They're not cemented in or anything so they won't be too hard to get out. A couple screwdrivers and they'll pop right out," he said. "If we get the word out and schedule a day for (people) to come get them, I can come out and get them out for people."

Werenne recalled fond memories of the entertainment venue said she was grateful to have the opportunity to get a piece of history back.

"I used to walk around to look at the bricks and not even go to a show," she said. "I think it would be just rotten to bulldoze this and find nothing there. They had wonderful things at the Sundome. It's too bad it's gone by the wayside."

Stone suggested people contact his boss, Karen Honeycutt, who is the associate director of real estate services at Arizona State University for further arrangements with the bricks. Honeycutt can be reached at 480-965-6700.

'It's sad. This place was something'

Long-time Sundome employee mourns demise of venue

ERIN TURNER
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Once the center of entertainment in the Northwest Valley, now the latest victim to poor attendance and lost revenue, the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts will soon be officially closed — boarded up windows and all. Don Stone, building engineer at the Sun City West venue since 1992, said the center will likely be completely hollowed out and vacant by the end of August at the latest. Workers removed appliances and other items from the Sundome Thursday. Aside

Entertainers on the stage of the Sundome delivered hundreds of unforgettable moments to audiences, but for many, some of the most cherished memories can be found outside the entertainment venue in Sun City West. Find out more in Saturday's Daily News-Sun.

from the rows of empty seats, little else remains at the nation's largest single-story amphitheater.

"At the end of this month, or the

SEE SUNDOME, A5



MOLLIE J. HOPPE/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Don Stone, Sundome building engineer, stands where the soundboard was located at the performing arts venue in Sun City West. ASU workers are moving all the equipment to storage or to other departments where it can be used since the Sundome will be shuttered soon.

SUNDOME

FROM A1

beginning of next month we're going to disconnect the utilities and we're going to board it up and it's going to rot," Stone said. "I think they're gunning for July 31 but in reality I don't think they're going to hit that date because we still have things (to take down)."

Stone said he was saddened such a staple of the community has ended its run.

"I hate to see everything just get mowed over and forgotten. I'd hate to see it get the wrecking ball. That'd be terrible," he said.

The Sundome's storied history began in 1980, when the venue was built as part of Del Webb's grand plan for the Sun Cities. It was donated to Arizona State University in 1984 as part of its centennial campaign.

Seating 7,160, the Sundome began with a bang. Through the years it's been the stage for such world-renowned stars as Lawrence Welk, Bob Hope and George Burns. Later years brought in acts such as John Denver, Glen Campbell and Bob Dylan.

But as the Valley grew and more entertainment venues sprang up, the Sundome's fortunes flagged.

The last-ditch effort by Maricopa County to pump life into the venue — most recently called the Maricopa County Events Center — ended alongside an agreement with a private theater company Dec. 31, 2008.

Maricopa County returned the Sun City West entertainment center to ASU after conceding to financial struggles.

ASU had managed the facility prior to the 2005 arrangement between the county and Nederlander Concerts.

Stone has worked at the Sundome since 1992. He has more than a relocated job and cutback hours to think about as a result of the closure. He enjoyed his time in the community and has personal pride invested in the facility.

"If Sun City West at least had a civic center or something we could put some of this stuff in it, along with a picture of the building, before it's gone. I think that would be an excellent display," he said.

Stone recalled some of the fun times and "great shows" at the venue, as well.

In addition to the entertain-

ment aspect the Sundome provided, Stone said other community events, like high school graduations will suffer.

"Last May, I worked over 90 hours two of the weeks and over 80 hours two of the weeks because of graduations," he said. "I graduated so many kids out of this place. I have no idea where the schools are going to have them now. This place was perfect for graduations."

If he had his way, the man who made sure things ran smoothly at the Sundome for the last 17 years said the entertainment center would be renovated and re-opened.

"I'd like to see Bill Gates or (Warren) Buffet take it over and build it into some kind of stage house and open the place back up with a little more glitz and advertising. This place never had adequate advertising before. ASU didn't push this place. They didn't advertise it. I don't think that is fair (and) it was definitely one of the problems."

Still, Stone accepts the fate, albeit begrudgingly.

"It's sad," he said. "This place was something."

Erin Turner may be reached at 623-876-2522 or eturner@yourwestvalley.com.



PHOTO COMPOSITE BY ASHLEY LOWERY/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Fred Kabica, father of Evelyn Havlik of Sun City, painted this mural from 1970-1974. The mural hung in the Sundome from 1980 until Thursday when it was removed and given to Havlik.

Visionary work of art removed from Sundome wall

ERIN TURNER
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Grace Havlik's father, Alfred Kabica, was a dreamer whose prophetic ideas and deepest concerns were best conveyed in his works of art.

Perhaps his most well-known piece hung for nearly three decades over the lobby of the Sundome in Sun City West. But Thursday, workers began the extrication process for the 75-foot by 6-foot mural as the former entertainment venue is shut down.

Havlik, a Sun City resident living in her parents' former home, is grateful to retain the masterpiece and hopeful she can find another location where its legacy may continue.

"It makes my family very happy because this mural is very important to us as a family," she said.

The mural was painted on one continuous piece of canvas and took four years to create, from 1970 to 1974. It came to adorn the Sundome lobby as a product of Kabica's "working relationship" with Sun City West developer John Meeker.

"He was telling John that he was painting this mural and Mr. Meeker said, 'Wow, we're building this big art center in Sun City West, and I think it would be absolutely perfect for it,'" Havlik said. "It expresses most of how he felt about the world and how he felt about people."

Havlik said her father was proud of the final product, which he titled, "From Evolution ... Through Progress ... To Where."

The piece showcases his ideas about earth's creation

SEE MURAL, A5



ASHLEY LOWERY/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Evelyn Grace Havlik of Sun City stands in front of the mural her father, Fred Kabica, painted as Fortress Electric employees work to remove it Thursday. The mural has been hanging in the Sundome since 1980.

MURAL

FROM A1

and prehistoric times to a futuristic landscape featuring spaceships and stars and his fears that humans would overdevelop the earth and fail to care for it properly.

"It's how the earth began, how it evolved, how Mother Nature took over and how it developed ... and the progress of it," she said. "It's something my dad felt needed to be explained, that he felt so strongly about his earth and what will happen if we don't take care of it. He let out his anxieties and

frustrations on canvas. (People) always say, 'Your dad was really prophetic. Yeah, he was. My mom said he wasn't always easy to live with because he had all of this in him that he wanted to express.'"

Havlik was contacted after the tracking efforts of Don Stone, who served as building engineer at the Sundome for 18 years.

Stone, too, said he is fond of the mural and wanted it to be returned to a worthy place as the Sundome is boarded up.

"Every time I look at it I find something new in it," he said.

Stone suggested several buildings at Arizona State University as potential homes for the mural once it is taken down

— a big process in itself, which includes cutting the wall behind the mural.

"I asked a couple people at ASU because we have several large buildings over there and large expanses to hang it in," he said.

Because the work was so personal to her father, it holds a special place in Havlik's heart. She said she was thankful she was contacted and is hopeful the mural hasn't seen its last days in the public eye.

"I was very pleased because they could've just said 'the heck with it,'" she said. "This means a lot to our family."

Erin Turner may be reached at 623-876-2522 or eturner@yourwestvalley.com.

ASU intends to sell events center

MITCHELL VANTREASE
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Arizona State University officials said they are "considering options" for the Maricopa County Events Center but eventually plan to sell the theater.

Maricopa County returned the Sun City West entertainment center to the school last week after its agreement with Nederlander Concerts ended. That move culminated the public/private partnership's three-year attempt to breathe life into the former Sundome,

which has struggled financially for years, including when ASU operated the facility.

"We weren't successful and neither were different groups that came in after us who took a shot at managing the facilities," said Virgil Renzouli, ASU vice president of public affairs. "It just didn't succeed and doesn't break even as a theatrical center."

The demise of the center will end a series of performances in the Sun Cities by many world renowned acts as well

as numerous local performers, shows and high school graduations.

"It's breaking our hearts that we can't crown our 20th queen there," said Marilyn Joyce, executive director of the Ms. Senior Arizona Pageant. "There is no venue like that for the ladies to perform at with the size of the stage and a top-notch crew."

In February, the pageant would have crowned its 20th pageant winner in the Sun Cities — 18 of them at the events center.

Joyce said the pageant will shift to Paradise Valley High School to accommodate the production and the 1,000-plus audience members.

"When the county took over the center, the cost to rent it when up higher but that's why we tried to secure our sponsorships to pay for it because it was so worth it," she said. "But we have to just keep moving on."

Carlos Wilson and his wife, Jan,

SEE CENTER, A5

CENTER: Variety show producers seek venue

FROM A1

were in charge of the Sun City West Variety Show benefit for Banner Del E. Webb Medical Center at the Events Center.

Wilson said they haven't determined the location of next year's show. They're looking at a number of options, including renting and performing at a local high school performing arts center.

"We're in the gray area right now, so we'll just have to wait and see," he

said.

When the Sundome closed three years ago, the variety show shifted to the Stardust Theatre, but it couldn't handle the crowds.

"The cast had to do like 10 or 11 performances just to keep the money that we normally get in one or two nights at the Events Center," he said.

The story of the events center dates back 28 years when on Sept. 13, 1980, Lawrence Welk and his orchestra performed the first of two shows for

the grand opening of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts.

Don Tuffs, the general manager of the Sundome at the time, said both shows sold out as soon as tickets became available. Welk would be followed by other entertainment legends over the years, including Bob Hope and George Burns.

At full capacity, the Sundome seats 7,169 people, the largest single-level indoor theater in the world.

The facility was built

as a marketing tool for Del Webb as a way to sell homes in Sun City West.

Tuffs said Sun City had the outdoor Sun Bowl, but it had to deal with the weather. During winter months, the Sundome drew acts away from the Sun Bowl.

But in the end, Maricopa County Supervisor Max Wilson said the county did not have enough cash for the renovations needed to make the Events Center a destination for large Broadway productions.



The Maricopa County Board of Supervisors has agreed to let Los Angeles-based Nederlander Concerts out of its 10-year contract to manage the former Sundome.

TOM TINGLE/
THE REPUBLIC

County votes for amicable break with manager of Events Center

By Cecilia Chan
THE REPUBLIC | AZCENTRAL.COM

The fat lady may have sung her last note at the 7,034-seat Maricopa County Events Center in Sun City West.

County supervisors have unanimously approved a settlement agreement, allowing Los Angeles-based Nederlander Con-

certs to opt out of its 10-year contract to manage the money-losing theater, which has hosted Bob Dylan, Paul Simon and musicals such as *Rent* and *Chicago*. Nederlander's three-year business relationship with the county ends Dec. 31.

Unable to find an operator, the county

See THEATER Page 11

THEATER

Continued from Page 10

is now handing the theater back to financially strapped Arizona State University, which got rid of the West Valley facility several years ago because it was not self-sufficient.

"It's in the process of being returned to ASU," said Sharon Keeler, ASU spokeswoman. "We are considering our options about what to do with the property. One option is to sell, but obviously the market is not very good right now. So, we would likely hold on to it for a little bit."

Keeler said she was unsure if the university would continue to stage performances or let the theater sit dormant until its fate is determined.

Developer Del Webb built the theater in 1980 and donated it to ASU in 1984 for \$1. The university put the facility up for sale in 2004 because it could no longer subsidize the venue. The county in 2005 agreed to take ownership for \$10 and contracted with the renowned Nederlander company to operate, manage, book and promote the theater, formerly known as the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts.

When the economy was thriving, Nederlander saw a viable opportunity to operate a theater in what was then the second-fastest growing county in the nation, Nederlander Chief Executive Adam Friedman said.

"Although we presented a number of top headline artists and theatrical productions at the Events Center, we are not inclined to make a further investment to take the venue to the next level in this economic climate," Friedman said in a prepared statement.

Supervisor Max Wilson, who spearheaded the county's acquisition of the theater in his district, called the parting a sad day.

"Nederlander has been a great partner as we attempted to keep this venue alive," Wilson said. "Unfortunately, we do not have sufficient capital funding for renovations required to make the Maricopa County Events Center a West Valley destination for the large Broadway productions. At the same time, we cannot ask our partner, Nederlander, to bear the financial impact."

Nederlander informed the county months ago it wanted out of the contract, said Scott Isham, Wilson's chief of staff. "They were going to leave in the summer time, but we said, 'No, give us until the end of the year to work out a soft landing.'"

Holiday pops concert last event of 2008

The Maricopa County Events Center in Sun City West is struggling to attract shows, and contractor Nederlander Concerts has notified county officials it plans to opt out of its 10-year contract to operate the facility. Only one show remains on its events schedule.

WHAT

Salt River Brass Holiday Pops Concert

WHEN

Friday, Dec. 19, 7:30 p.m.
Doors open at 6:30 p.m.

TICKETS

On sale now through Events Center Web site at www.maricopacountyeventscenter.com, through Ticketmaster at www.ticketmaster.com, or at Events Center Box Office inside the main gates to the right of the fountain at 19403 R.H. Johnson Blvd., Sun City West. Box office is open Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., and Saturday 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Box office is closed Sunday and Monday.

DETAILS

This is the West Valley debut of the Salt River Brass Band as it performs its Holiday Pops concert. The show includes classics and jazzy favorites, capturing the wonder of the season. The festive celebration regularly sells out at the Chandler Center for the Arts.

Under the contract, Nederlander paid the county a base fee each July 1 to operate the theater, and when its profits reached a certain point, it shared a portion of the revenues with the county.

Isham said the county could have gotten into a protracted legal battle with Nederlander over the contract, but in the end the company would have departed anyway.

"We wanted to part ways happily, and hopefully other people like Nederlander may be want to run it," he said.

Unfortunately, when the county issued an invitation to negotiate in August, no operators stepped forward, said Karen Stewart, county events operations manager. Stewart said the county is returning approximately \$2 million to the Sundome Performing Arts Association, which raised the cash to fund capital improvements for the theater.

Sun Cities Area Historical Society
Member Coffee April 14, 2008

Guest Speaker: Don Tufts
Benson & Tufts Financial Services

In 1971, Don joined the Del Webb Development Company's Public Relations department. He rose to become Senior Vice President for Marketing and Director of the Sundome in charge of event planning. In 1986, he became a partner in Benson & Tufts Financial Services and, eventually tiring of the constant travel for Devco, left the company in 1988 to devote full-time to his own firm.

The Sundome was started in 1978, completed in 1980, the largest single-level theater in the world. It was the vision of Devco President John Meeker, a Texan, who designed Sun City West to be "bigger and better". Don and other Devco employees tried to talk him into a smaller 5000-seat theater and an adjoining 1800-performing arts theater. It would still have been the largest in Arizona, but John wanted to best the world and it was a proud marketing boast. The cost was between \$12 and \$14 million (compared to \$13.1 million for the much smaller Peoria Center for the Arts in 2006.)

(When Garnet Burnham, a hostess for bus tours in SC/SCW, told her visitors that the Sundial was the world's tallest, one retorted, "We have outhouses taller than that in Texas." Her response..."In Texas, you need them.")

Meeker's inspiration was the Sunbowl, a year-around amphitheater in Sun City, which brought people in from Phoenix to see celebrity acts, then visit (and often buy) the model homes. Meeker wanted to improve on this successful marketing tool by making it larger, indoor and air-conditioned. They investigated using an inflatable roof, but found if several doors were opened at once, the air pressure blew people over. So a permanent roof was raised on the largest I-beams ever constructed as of 1978. The interior, at 110 yards across, is large enough for two football fields. The stage is the largest of its kind with room for an entire symphony orchestra in front of the curtain. However, the areas to the side and above the stage are not adequate for the scenery in today's big productions.

The Sundome opened in 1980 to a sell-out audience for the entire Lawrence Welk show. Tickets were \$5-7 and there were two days of performances. The next weekend was Tennessee Ernie Ford. Others who performed there were Bob Hope, Red Skelton, Steve and Eydie. There were 110 events the first year. A 6-lecture series that included speakers like Paul Harvey and Gerald Ford sold 7000 season tickets. The 8-film travel series sold 3500 season tickets.

Thanks to his connections with Gammage, Don was able to preview and book acts for the 1980-1 season at a 2-week conference in New York just before Christmas in 1979. He didn't like the modern pieces to be played by the Vienna Symphony Orchestra so he enlisted the help of Herb Tuttleman of the Fine Arts Society to get an entire program of Strauss, the only one of their 40 U.S. engagements.

In those early years, the Sundome had its own box office staff of manager, assistant manager and a total of 15 employees, quite an expense. Nevertheless, the first year saw the Sundome coming within \$100,000 of breaking even, a laudable accomplishment. Ticket prices were so reasonable that people found themselves coming frequently to the Sundome, so much so that by the end of the second season, they were somewhat sated.

Don talked Emmet Serig and the Sun City Symphony into moving their concerts from the Sundial to the Sundome despite fears that they could not fill the seats. Amazingly, their strategy of having celebrity guests like Skitch Henderson, Roberta Peters, Robert Sherrill, and Itzak Perlman resulted in the sale of 5600 season tickets, a record probably unmatched by any symphony to this day. The Symphony was solidly in the black for several seasons but when they returned to their classical roots, the attendance dropped off.

Don's favorite performer was Red Skelton. Although as a young man, he never appreciated the comic's television show, he found out from personal experience what a terrific individual he was. Red would arrive in SCW several days early and spend time touring the hospitals. He preferred a spaghetti and meatballs dinner at the Tufts to going out to a fancy restaurant and befriended their two young children, making clown sketches for both of them.

On the other hand, Steve and Eydie and their "*itch" manager were well known for many unreasonable requests like a larger dressing room and bowls of M&M's with the brown ones removed. The lighting crew once threatened to throw the manager in the lake until she backed down on her demands.

Limousines were always required, but one of the McGuire sisters refused to ride with the others and insisted Don drive her to the airport himself. Most performers were lodged at the Point Tapatio Cliffs, which also had an excellent restaurant. Owner Bob Gosnell loved having the celebrities who drew in other patrons.

The worst entertainer was Don Ho who had a raunchy act that he persisted in doing despite requests beforehand and boos from the audience during the show. "You just wanted a hook to pull him off the stage."

Always looking for something new and different, Don booked a three-ring circus with lions, tigers and elephants. The climax was the "slide for life", a performer hanging by his mouth on a cable stretched from the lighting booth to the stage. The 3-days' performances brought in 4-5000 people each.

Another novelty was the Bear Jordan car auction with cars being brought up one side of the stage, rotated on a turntable and sent down the other side. Other groups which rented the theater were school districts for their graduations and televangelists. Don remembers Oral Roberts who looked up at the ceiling in the afternoon service and said "God wants you to give \$10" and at the evening service raised it to \$20! The mother of one of the Devco employees gave a check for everything she had...\$14,000. And some of the people who were "healed" in the afternoon, came back to be "healed" again in the evening.

By 1982, Sun City West was selling so fast, the sell-out date was moved up and consideration had to be given to the future management of the Sundome. The Sunbowl had been turned over to the Sun City residents and languished. The tremendous operating costs of the Sundome (\$2000/day and \$3000 just to open the doors) meant that professional management was needed. ASU/Gammage had the 2nd best performing arts program in the country and could book the same performers for both theaters. He sent a memo to John Meeker that recommended turning the Sundome over to ASU. The University was in favor because this gave a \$10 million boost to their \$100 million fundraising drive and gave them another presence in the west valley. However, when ASU West was located at Thunderbird & 49th Avenue instead of between SC and SCW,

the distance probably became a factor. Although he would still write the memo, Don was ultimately disappointed in ASU management of the Sundome, their lack of connection with the audiences and failure to show creativity in booking/pairing acts.

He was upbeat when Maricopa County showed an interest in taking over the operation. He talked to one of their representatives who seemed to understand that the keys were more programming and reasonable prices. However, in the end, programming was turned over to Nederlander and has not improved. Another disappointment.

Don worked with the Sun City Performing Arts Association for many years, but he no longer has contact with the Sundome management.

ASU returns part of SPAA's funds

JARED HARTUNG
DAILY NEWS-SUN

The Sundome Performing Arts Association has received \$235,000 of the nearly \$3 million that was caught up in an impending legal battle between SPAA and the Arizona State University Foundation. SPAA had raised the funds to renovate the former Sundome, but the money was

caught in a funding limbo following the closure of the Sundome in 2004.

The funds were wired to SPAA by the foundation on Friday, with a promise to send the remaining \$2.5 million by Sept. 15.

"It's great," said SPAA President Dee Hjermstad. "This is the first sign of good faith from ASU."

The funds are sent to

SPAA and then funneled into a restricted account of Maricopa County, which owns the former Sundome, now known as the Maricopa County Events Center.

While the promise has been made to give SPAA the rest of the funds back, Hjermstad said the county and her organization are not spending the money just yet.

"Looking at how things

have gone to this point, I would not suggest that you hold your breath," she said.

SPAA has been in a battle to get the funds back from ASU after the university decided to shut down the Sundome in December 2004. Requests for the money increased after ASU sold the center to the county in November 2005.

The \$2.5 million will be

used by the county to renovate the stage area. The \$235,000 was the former operating funds of SPAA.

When the financial matter is resolved, SPAA must decide what role it will play with the center. The county hired New York and Los Angeles-based Nederlander Inc. to operate the building.

"We have decided once the \$2.5 million is transferred we

will sit down with Nederlander and see where they want us to go with this," Hjermstad said. "We would have to change our charter, our bylaws and change our name."

As a nonprofit organization, SPAA may be hard pressed to find a role with a profit-making Nederlander group, she said.

SPAA to ASU: Fork over our money

Foundation fails to return \$2M raised for theater renovations

PATRICK ROLAND
DAILY NEWS-SUN

The battle between the Sundome Performing Arts Association and the Arizona State University Foundation over nearly \$2 million aimed at renovations to the Maricopa County Events Center

stage will become a court matter if the situation isn't resolved soon, SPAA members said Monday.

"We're prepared to go to court," said Tom Engelhart, secretary/treasurer of SPAA. "There will be a court order."

SPAA has hired Phoenix

attorney Ellis Carter of Quarles and Brady to represent it in the matter that has been brewing since June 2004.

SPAA wants the \$1.7 million endowment it raised in 1998-99 to expand the stage to be dedicated to an account managed by the county. The money is being managed by the ASU Foundation. The group also seeks an additional \$250,000 operating

account, money raised by SPAA through the sale of bricks and refreshments, to benefit the events center. Past money from the operating account has been used to improve the sound system and recarpet the lobby.

Engelhart said a deal had been reached about two months ago between the two organizations to transfer the money from the foundation to a Sun City West bank, but

staffing changes at the university have pushed the case back to the drawing board.

The office of ASU President Michael Crow is involved with the matter, Engelhart said.

"The whole object is to get our money back into the community," Engelhart said. "They (ASU) are costing Sun City residents a lot of money in legal fees. The wheels are spinning, but there is no motion forward."

In June 2004, ASU announced it would close the Sundome and sell it. The Sundome, now called Maricopa County Events Center, was sold to Maricopa County for \$10. The county took over the facility and hired the Los Angeles and New York based-Niederlander Inc. to do all the bookings.

Prior to the sale, ASU

See SPAA, A5

SPAA: ASU says it's ironing out legalities, hopes for resolution

From A1

officials were to match a \$5 million dollar endowment that SPAA earned through a massive donor campaign. But ASU later reneged on its promise, said Dee Hjermstad, SPAA president.

"ASU never gave us a nickel," she said, explaining that the group returned some of the money to patrons and used about \$600,000 to renovate the bathrooms and recarpet portions of the venue.

About \$1 million is tied up because it was donated by a private donor, and the three parties are trying to negotiate with that person to see where

the money will go. About \$1.7 million remains to broaden the stage and orchestra area, but ASU won't turn it over to SPAA, Hjermstad said.

"We're right back to ground zero again. It's absolutely ridiculous," she said. "The money raised will not be used for anything but the promised stage renovation. That money should have been given to us months ago — weeks ago — days ago, yet we still haven't seen a penny."

Steve Rieher, senior director of communication and marketing for the ASU Foundation, said the foundation president did leave about a month ago, but denied any

involvement with Crow's office. He said it was just a matter of ironing out all the legalities with the foundation, SPAA and the county.

"We're continuing to work on an agreement to see how the funds will be used," said Rieher. "It's moving forward. We hope to resolve all of this soon."

Maricopa County District 4 Supervisor Max Wilson, who has been a champion of the Maricopa County Events Center, is hopeful everyone can come to a mutually beneficial agreement.

"We're trying to find a solution that's win-win for everybody," said Wilson. "It's

been an ongoing process. The time keeps marching on, but we are pursuing this."

Patrick Roland may be reached at 876-2522 or proland@aztrib.com.

March 15, 2006

SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT

New era for events center

County christens
former Sundome

By **Matt Loeschman**
Independent Newspapers

In addition to an all-new lineup of entertainment options, the Maricopa County Events Center will continue to host local events residents are accustomed to.

"Community events will continue to be held at the MCEC," said Vanessa Kromer of Nederlander, the company contracted by Maricopa County officials to operate the former Sundome. "We know this is a big part of the venue's history. This is a county venue and there will be a wide variety of events held there from concerts to cultural events to school graduations."

Officials held a grand re-

- www.nederlanderla.com
- www.maricopacountyeventscenter.com
- MCEC information, 544-2888

opening ceremony of the venue March 6, as Maricopa County District 4 Supervisor Max Wilson handed over a symbolic key to James L. Nederlander before a crowd of about 100 people.

"This is a historic day," Supervisor Wilson said. "I know there is still plenty of life left in the old girl. We just needed the right partner in place and Nederlander fits the bill perfectly. Welcome to a new era of entertainment in the West Valley."

The agreement marks a new chapter for the 26-year-old center that many feared would eventually be shut down.

When Arizona State University officials announced they wanted to sell the venue in 2003, residents in the area were afraid the historic performing arts complex might be replaced by housing and began calling Supervisor Wilson. He met with ASU President Dr. Michael Crow to discuss the possible venue purchase.

ASU for more than a decade subsidized the complex, giving it more than \$1 million. But as the university began to focus its limited resources to educate a growing number of students, it no longer could help support the performing arts venue.

The Maricopa County Board of Supervisors then voted Nov. 14, 2005, to approve acquiring the venue from the Arizona State

See MCEC — Page 8



: Sun Cities Independent/Matt Loeschman

Maricopa County District 4 Supervisor Max Wilson, left, presents a symbolic key to James L. Nederlander last week at the Maricopa County Events Center, 19403 R.H. Johnson Blvd. The center, formerly known as the Sundome, was the site of a re-opening ceremony March 6.

MCEC

Continued From Page 1

Board of Regents for \$10, \$9 more than ASU paid for the performing arts center when Del Webb Corp. sold it to them in 1984. The developer built the facility in 1980 to attract homebuyers to Sun City West and later donated it to the university to operate.

Last week's ceremony marked a rebirth for the MCEC as a venue showcasing a wide variety of events. The complex had been closed for nearly 18 months during the transition between ASU and Maricopa County.

Mr. Nederlander and Dan Wohleen, MCEC manager, said the venue will be marketed across the Valley instead of as a Sun Cities-exclusive amenity.

"We have seen the growth of the Valley," Mr. Nederlander said. "That's why we are here. But I look at this as the Phoenix area, not just the West Valley. With the additions to this side of the Valley, people are going to get used to coming out here. We want to take

advantage of that."

Mr. Wohleen agreed.

"Look at the population of Sun City, Sun City West and Sun City Grand," he noted. "It is somewhere around 100,000 but if you look at the Valley as a whole, you are talking about the fifth largest city in the U.S. We think there is a market we can tap into."

The Nederlander group was awarded a 10-year contract with an option to extend another 10 years.

Dee Hjermstad, president of the Sundome Performing Arts Association, said residents should have high expectations of the Nederlander group.

"This building has come back to life," she said. "And I expect Nederlander will draw on the reputation of the Sundome to bring excellent entertainment back here."

Nederlander announced its first four shows at the MCEC, the largest single-level performing arts complex in the nation. Johnny Mathis will play 7:30 p.m. March 25 followed by Bob Dylan at 8 p.m. April 8.

Comedians Harvey Korman and Tom Conway will take the

stage April 22 at 3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

And in an effort to bring more diverse shows to the 7,000-seat MCEC, 80's pop bands Devo, A Flock Of Seagulls, Bow Wow Wow, Animation, Dramarama and When In Rome will rock the house this October.

"This is the type of diversity we are talking about," Ms. Krotner said. "We want to appeal to different types of audiences."

The county seeks an organization to pay for naming rights to the facility, Supervisor Wilson confirmed. Some renovations are also planned for the box office, stage

area and concession stands.

Residents on hand last week were excited to see new life in the venue.

Thomas Smith awaits the appearance of new headline acts.

"From what I have seen and heard, it appears Nederlander is committed to be here for a long time," he said. "That's great news — it would have been heartbreaking to see this place shut down for good."

Post your comments on this issue at www.newspapers.com/forum29.

Reach News Editor Matt Loeschman at 972-6101 or

mloeschman@newspapers.com.

Sundome unit asks ASU to return funds

By Sherry Anne Rubiano
THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

SUN CITY WEST — More than \$2 million originally raised to renovate the Sundome may be coming back to the Sun City West venue.

Sundome Performing Arts Association members met with Arizona State University Foundation representatives for the first time to discuss returning \$2.5 million.

Sun Cities residents raised the funds four years ago to benefit the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts, now called the Maricopa County Events Center.

The money is sitting in an endowment fund set up by the foundation.

At a recent meeting, foundation representatives asked the Sundome association to submit the request in writing and said they would bring up the proposal at a board of directors meeting in April, according to two Sundome association members.

ASU Foundation officials could not be reached for comment.

Dee Hjermstad, president of the Sundome association, said she hopes the foundation will honor the request.

West Valley residents pledged about \$5.4 million for improvements to the venue during a fund-raising campaign that ended in 2002.

More than half a million dollars was used for bathroom upgrades at the venue.

When ASU announced it would no longer renovate the 7,000-seat center, donors were given a chance to withdraw their pledges donations. That offer came before the ownership change to the county. ASU sold the venue to Maricopa County last year, but the \$2.5 million didn't transfer.

This story may have appeared in your community section or community Republic.

VF

SCW

SUNDOME (MARICOPA COUNTY EVENTS CENTER)

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MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2006

THE WESTER Thursday, February 23, 2006

SPAA 'encouraged' by meeting with ASU to discuss return of \$2.5 million

Sundome support group hopeful board will OK transfer of donated money

By Jack Hawn

Tom Engelhardt, treasurer of the Sundome Performing Arts Assn., said Sunday he was "encouraged" by the attitude expressed by representatives of the Arizona State University Foundation at a recent meeting with SPAA officials to discuss the return of approximately \$2.5 million donated more than seven years ago to refurbish the Sun

City West facility.

SPAA Pres. Dee Hjermstad, board member Jim Booy, Engelhardt and attorney Ellis Carter of the Quarles & Brady law firm in Phoenix met Feb. 14 in Sun City West with Charles Wagner, the ASU Foundation's senior vice president and chief financial officer, and the foundation's legal counsel.

The representatives agreed to

place SPAA's proposal for the return of the funds before the foundation's board of directors no later than at its April meeting, Hjermstad said in an e-mail circulated last week.

"That's the next step," Engelhardt said. "We'll have to wait on the board of directors. That will be toward the end of April."

Engelhardt said SPAA has

been seeking a meeting with the foundation for months without success.

"We had to retain an attorney about three months ago," he continued. "That brought it to a head and where we are now. I'm not sure anything would've happened unless we had put on a little pressure."

He said Sunday there had been no formal response to a letter sent by Carter, but that the meeting—which lasted about an hour and a quarter—finally was arranged several weeks ago.

"We spent a lot of time briefing their attorney on the background and bringing him up to date on the community's attitude toward ASU holding the funds," Engelhardt continued. "I

was surprised (he was unaware)."

It was reported last November that SPAA paid a \$129,000 debt to General Electric incurred by ASU—remaining payments on the university's purchase of an air-conditioning system for the Sundome in 2002.

That payment broke a negotiating stalemate in the transfer of ownership from ASU to Maricopa County, which subsequently took control of the facility and renamed it the Maricopa County Events Center.

The check came out of a SPAA operating fund which had totaled \$397,000, accumulated from membership dues and contributions during the past two decades.

The operating fund is separate from an endowment fund set up to enhance Sundome programming, also controlled by the foundation.

When ASU announced in December of 2000 that construction plans to refurbish the Sundome had been canceled,

contributions intended for that purpose then were redirected to the endowment fund. Work was to have begun early in 2001.

A dramatic fund-raising campaign by SPAA to meet a \$5 million deadline—started in 1999—ended up with a reported \$5.3 million in pledges and contributions, but that figure dwindled to about \$2.3 million over the years.

County Supervisor Max Wilson reported last November that the county would not get involved with haggling about funds. Thus, SPAA had been left to deal with the issue on its own and was awaiting a check from the ASU Foundation for at least \$268,000—the balance of its operating fund.

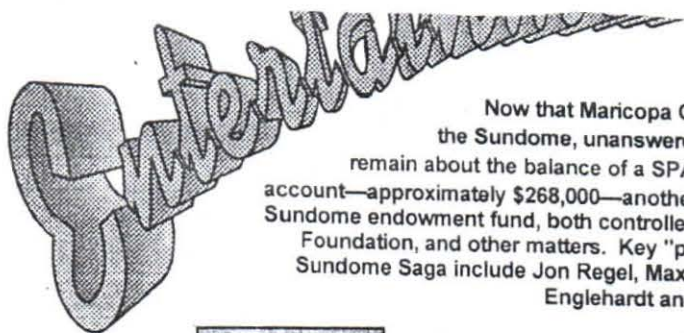
The total amount SPAA hopes to gain control of is approximately \$2.5 million, all of which is expected to be used for expanding the stage area of the

See **SPAA**, Page 2

SPAA, from Page 1
center.

"Details are left to be worked out," Engelhardt said. "Should the funds be made available we would set up some financial mechanism with the county for management and disbursement."

He said the center's new management group, Nederlander, Inc., would not be involved.



Now that Maricopa County owns the Sundome, unanswered questions remain about the balance of a SPAA operating account—approximately \$268,000—another \$2.3 million Sundome endowment fund, both controlled by the ASU Foundation, and other matters. Key "players" in the Sundome Saga include Jon Regel, Max Wilson, Tom Englehardt and Birt Kellam.

Jon Regel,
Ex-SPAA
president



Max Wilson,
Maricopa County
supervisor



Tom Englehardt,
SPAA treasurer



Birt Kellam,
Ex-SPAA
president

"Finally," the headline two weeks ago read, "Maricopa County assumes control of the Sundome."

Still, there are loose ends—uncertainties about management of the Sun City West Performing Arts Center, future programming, pricing of shows and, particularly, the role the Sundome Performing Arts Assn. will play.

Composed of about 900 members last year, SPAA's membership today is unclear, and, as a board member recently said, "We haven't encouraged anyone to renew."

Having recently paid a \$129,000 debt to General Electric incurred by Arizona State University—remaining payments on ASU's purchase of an air-conditioning system for the Sundome in 2002—SPAA apparently broke a negotiating stalemate in the transfer of ownership from ASU to the county.

Neither the university nor county was willing to pick up that tab, we've been told, which had threatened to terminate the deal.

So, while ASU trumpets its magnanimous gesture of selling the facility for a measly 10 bucks (a \$9 profit from what it paid Del Webb for the property 20 years ago), a large "surcharge" already has been pocketed and possibly more to come.

According to SPAA Treasurer Tom Englehardt, the \$129,000 check—grudgingly paid by the board—came out of a SPAA operating fund totaling \$397,000, accumulated from membership dues and contributions during the past two decades.

SPAA is not empowered to conduct

business for the Sundome, serving only as an advisory body and fund-raiser.

The ASU Foundation "serves as our bank," Englehardt said, "and charges us 2% in (deposits) and 2% out (withdrawals) for servicing the account. No interest is earned."

Englehardt said the foundation is holding the fund balance—about \$268,000—and apparently has no intention of releasing it.

Attorney Ellis Carter of Quarles and Brady law firm in Phoenix is representing SPAA and has been on the phone with ASU lawyers, Englehardt reported, but thus far no agreement about disposition has been reached.

Jack
Hawn

**Sundome
Saga: A tale
of \$\$, new
ownership
and loose
ends**



An effort to contact Charles Wagner, the foundation's senior vice president and chief financial officer, on Monday was unsuccessful.

The operating fund is not to be confused with an endowment fund set up to enhance Sundome

programming, also controlled by the ASU Foundation.

Originally reported to be \$5.3 million in pledges and contributions, that figure has dwindled to about \$2.3 million, Englehardt said.

Some donors requested and received refunds, but the foundation has never reported a public accounting.

The Sundome saga—dating back seven years or more—has taken some remarkable and dramatic twists.

See *Sundome*, Page C2

Sundome, from Page C1

Key players: Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, ASU's director of special events; SPAA presidents Birt Kellam, Jon Regel and Dee Hjermstad, now presiding; and most prominent last year, Max Wilson, chairman of the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors.

In March of 1999, Kellam—then SPAA vice president under Sandy Goldstein—spoke to 130 Sundome volunteers, providing an update of his campaign to raise \$5 million for a major renovation. He announced that an anonymous donor had pledged \$1.1 million the previous November but if the \$5 million goal was not met by Dec. 31, the pledge would be rescinded.

"What a loss to this community," Kellam said, "if we don't have the Sundome. It would affect real estate values. It would affect our lifestyles...."

Thus, a ticking clock immediately was set into motion.

On Dec. 30 of that year, a *Wester* headline announced the goal was "in sight"—about \$50,000 short as of a week earlier.

Nail-biting time.

Jan. 6, 2000: Still no report. An official at the ASU Foundation stated that pledges are "still coming in the mail."

A week later, Kellam announced that the deadline had been met, but exact figures were not yet available.

"This has been a real grass-roots effort," he said. "It's raised \$5 million basically from the public...."

Efforts to unveil the anonymous donor proved fruitless. Some critics questioned if the donor even existed as Kellam's campaign surged dramatically against the ticking clock. Also, was there really a caveat attached?

Sundome restrooms were enlarged, and details about additional major work generated excitement in the community. Meanwhile, presumably the donated money continued to earn interest as the year passed.

Early December, 2000: Only weeks before the major work was to begin, ASU announced there would be no renovation because of escalating construction costs. The money raised to finance it was redirected to an endowment fund to "improve programming."

Kellam was "mad, very mad," but, he added, "The endowment fund will enable us to take greater risks and enable us to do some additional face-lifting. From a gray day, we're seeing the sunshine."

Inside the spacious Sundome, however, there was no sunshine and little warmth as large sections of seats remained empty for most performances. Revenue spiraled downward.

In March of 2002, Jennings-Roggensack voiced her usual optimism, blaming the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and the sagging economy for part of the red ink. She predicted "good results in the fall."

Fast-forward to April, 2003.

Jon Regel, then SPAA president, stated it was important to let folks know "the endowment fund is still very much alive and with us. There have been rumors that \$5 million has been flitted away. We had to set that record straight. I've heard rumors that the Sundome is closing, selling.... We want to tell it like it is, rather than having a few people have negative thoughts."

He said he had overheard a man tell his friend from Mesa that "they raised \$5 million and blew it all."

Butting in, Regel told the man his information was wrong and asked where he had heard it.

"Walking the aisles of Safeway," the man told him.

September, 2003: ASU had given SPAA a \$300,000 line of credit to book events. Regel signed two Broadway musicals—"Cats" and *Singin' in the Rain*—and three other shows. All attracted impressive crowds and SPAA ended up with a profit.

In May, 2004, Jennings-Roggensack attended a black-tie, invitation-only SPAA president's dinner in Sun City Grand. She applauded Regel and his staff for the successful season.

One month later—June 17, 2004—ASU dropped its biggest bombshell.

In a year of jubilant celebration to commemorate Sun City West's Silver Anniversary, that ray of sunshine Kellam had foreseen, was blocked by a dark cloud that descended over the West Valley following an ASU shocker.

The university said it had decided to sell the Sundome because it no longer could afford to run it.

The news stunned the West Valley and triggered the emergence of a new "player" who set about writing the next dramatic chapter.

On July 15, 2004, Max Wilson announced an "exploratory" meeting would be held with a number of politicians representing the West Valley and ASU officials, including Jennings-Roggensack. The agenda was short: discussion of a possible county rescue.

That was the beginning of 17 months of negotiations involving lawyers from both sides, inspections of the facility, poring over documents and constant snags over various issues that prolonged the process.

Ultimately, Wilson obtained the keys to the auditorium.

The county, he says, wants no part of more haggling about funds. SPAA is awaiting a check from the ASU Foundation for \$268,000 and Hjermstad is waiting for her phone to ring, informing her of a meeting with representatives of the new Sundome managerial company, *Nederlander Downtown, Inc.*

And theatergoers are... well, simply waiting.

Finally...Maricopa County assumes control of the Sundome

ASU sells facility for \$10; management pact to be signed soon

By Jack Hawn

Now that Maricopa County has officially acquired the Sundome from Arizona State University for \$10, the next step is a signed contract with Nederlander Downtown, Inc., to manage the facility and its immediate future as an entertainment venue in Sun City West.

During a phone conversation Monday, Maricopa County Board of Supervisors Chmn. Max Wilson reported that the county at long last "is in control of the Sundome," and said the contract with Nederlander, a national theater management company that manages the Greek Theatre in Los Angeles among

other major venues, is expected to be signed shortly, possibly within a week.

Wilson declined to provide details about the pending contract, saying, "We will have more to say at a news conference at the Sundome. The new operators will be there and we will introduce them. We hope to set the date in short order."

When Wilson spoke last week at PORA, he was misquoted as saying a show already had been booked.

"I was asked if it was too late to book a show (this season)," he clarified Monday, "and I replied that (the new company) can book

a show at any time. I don't think we could get anybody any better to do the job."

A county Board of Supervisors agenda item for a recent meeting listed a proposed contract calling for a "base term of 10 years with three five-year options to extend for a total of 25 years.

"This is a revenue contract and it is anticipated that no general funds will be utilized to support this facility during the contract term."

The proposal also included the establishment of a new special revenue fund within the Parks and Recreation budget for the operation and maintenance of the Maricopa County Events Center

(Sundome).

Wilson said ASU had signed the contract to transfer ownership earlier and after a 10-minute discussion last Monday, Board members Fulton Brock (District 1), Don Stapley (2), Andrew Kunasek (3) and himself, representing District 4, voted to approve the agreement. District 5 Supervisor Mary Rose Wilcox was absent and did not vote.

Negotiations have dragged on for more than a year after ASU announced in June of 2004 it intended to sell the 7,000-seat Sundome, which had been donated to the university by the Del Webb Corp. for \$1 in 1984.

"After considering bids from

several national theatre management companies," Monday's press release stated, "Maricopa County will contract Nederlander Downtown, Inc., to act as facilities manager.... The internationally renowned Nederlander company operates many theatres around the world, including nine on Broadway.

"When ASU announced it wanted to sell the Sundome last year," the press release continued, "residents in the area were afraid the historic performing arts complex might be replaced by housing and began calling their county supervisor, Max Wilson. He met with ASU President Dr. Michael Crow to discuss the possible purchase of the venue. At a

public board meeting held at the Sundome on June 1, the Board of Supervisors voted to look into the prospect of taking over the venue.

"As the owner, the county does not have to pay property taxes on the multi-million-dollar complex. Supervisor Wilson explains, "It is consistently one of my primary objectives to protect taxpayers. I am looking forward to this partnership for many years to come."

Wilson acknowledged the transfer process "seemed like a long period of time. We just kept working this out and working that out until we got the

See *Maricopa*, Page 2

Maricopa, from Page 1

job done."

He thanked Crow "for his effort and," he added, "I hope we can get him out to attend a show."

Asked about the balance of \$5.3 million pledged in 2000 for a proposed Sundome renovation that never materialized, Wilson said the transfer of ownership did not include any funds from that account.

"We're not going to get into that," he added. "That's another issue for another time. We're not involved."

Following ASU's surprising announcement in December of 2000 that the renovation had been canceled because of escalating construction costs, the pledged money was redirected to an endowment fund. Some donors requested and received refunds.

A public accounting of those funds has never been reported.

County finally acquiring Sundome from ASU

West Valley Symphony mulls returning there

By Sherry Anne Rubiano
NORTHWEST VALLEY REPUBLIC

After months of negotiations, the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts will soon be under new ownership.

The Maricopa County Board of Supervisors voted this week to approve the purchase of the 7,000-seat performing arts center.

The board agreed to pay \$10 to the Arizona Board of Regents, the current owner.

Nederlander Downtown Inc., which operates several theaters worldwide, will pay the county to manage the facility.

It is too early to announce an opening date or what events will be booked, according to the county.

The Sundome's title has not been transferred yet, and the county still needs to officially take possession of the facility.



SUZANNE STARR/THE REPUBLIC

The Sundome Center for the Performing Arts is being taken over by the county. The West Valley Symphony will consider returning to its traditional home.

Plans are expected to be announced at an event in December celebrating the new ownership.

Richard Shelton, executive director of the West Valley Symphony, said he is

excited that things are finally moving along.

Since the pending sale was up in the air, the symphony chose to perform in two other venues for the 2005-06 season,

Glendale Arena and Prince of Peace Catholic Church in Sun City West.

Shelton said the symphony will consider returning to its home of more than two decades.

"We will discuss our future there with the new management to see if it makes sense for us to go back," Shelton said. "It's a whole new ballgame with new management, so we will see what they're willing to do for us as a non-profit."

The county's action ends uncertainty on whether the center's ownership transfer would be finalized.

Del E. Webb Corp. gave the Sundome to Arizona State University for \$1 in 1984, with the university promising to keep it an arts venue.

Last year, ASU decided to sell it because it cost too much to subsidize.

Some residents feared the historic complex might be replaced by housing and contacted their county supervisor, Max Wilson.

In June, the Board of Supervisors sent the Board of Regents a letter outlining its intent to buy the Sundome. The county originally had expected to take over the center by September.

Reach the reporter at sherryanne.rubiano@arizonarepublic.com or (602) 444-6915.

County optimistic about fall bookings at 'Dome

AMANDA MYERS
DAILY NEWS-SUN

The Sundome may be alive with the sound of music again by this fall.

"Between October and mid-December, we might see an act there," said Bill Scalzo, assistant county manager and director of the Maricopa County Stadium District, which operates Bank One Ballpark in Phoenix.

Scalzo is leading the county's staff in taking over the Sundome from Arizona State University, which came about after ASU officials announced in June 2004 they would close the amphitheater in Sun City West because of financial difficulties.

While early signs pointed to the Sundome closing for good, the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors Chairman Max Wilson led efforts for the county to assume ownership.

Scalzo said the number of companies looking to take over day-to-day Sundome operations has been reduced from five to three. Scalzo and staff are currently reviewing proposals from the companies, none of which is local.

"What we have required, though, is that they have a staff in the West Valley with no less than three full-time people," Scalzo said.

Though names or details about the companies vying to operate the Sundome cannot be released, Scalzo said the county is looking for an organization with experience in running an arts and entertainment venue.

"Our primary goal is that we have a good operator. We've specified that they provide a certain minimum number of events, both local — such as the symphony — and national," Scalzo said. Events with a history at the Sundome, such as the annual Variety Show, would also be required for inclusion in future budgets.

Because of the uncertainty about the future of the Sundome, the West Valley Symphony booked its classical concerts at Prince of Peace Church in Sun City West and its pops series at Glendale Arena for the 2005-06 season, while the Variety Show will be staged at the Stardust Theatre in Sun City West.

Scalzo has requested from ASU officials that monetary contributions donated by local residents prior to the

See SUNDOME, A5

SUNDOME: County negotiates for operator

From A1

Sundome's closure be put in a capital improvement fund to be used toward future renovations to the Sundome.

"We don't see this (Sundome) as a way to make money," Scalzo said, adding that another goal was to put any profits received back into the Sundome so people can enjoy the venue "for years to come."

While Scalzo and other county officials review the proposals, they are awaiting the intergovernmental agreement from ASU confirming the details of the transfer. Initially, ASU officials were using their own legal council to draw up the agreement, but in the interest of time, Scalzo said they have outsourced it to an independent law firm.

"They are busier than they anticipated," Scalzo said.

The Sundome will be "sold" to Maricopa County for \$10, the same price for which the Sundome was gifted to the university by Del Webb in 1984.

Scalzo said he expects more details to be released about the countering companies in mid-September when

the county has completed its negotiations. The company operating the Sundome will be in charge of finding and booking the acts to perform there. So far, Scalzo is optimistic about what he's seeing proposed.

"Without giving away part of the proposal, it's a good mix from what we're seeing. It's going to have something for everyone."

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From A1

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THE WESTER Thursday, June 23, 2005

Regents OK transfer of Sundome to county as talks continue

Process creeps toward takeover target date of September

By Jack Hawn

The Arizona Board of Regents has given its formal approval to Arizona State University to deal, attorneys for both sides continue to mull documents, Maricopa County is reviewing out-of-state company proposals to manage the facility and ASU has clarified an erroneous report.

Step by step, the slow process of transferring Sundome ownership from ASU to the county, frustrating as it might be for many, nonetheless, is progressing.

Judy Garza, a public relations director for the Board of Regents, reported Monday that the board—which met last Thursday at Northern Arizona University—

unanimously approved an agenda proposal to authorize ASU to sell the 7,200-seat Sun City West performing arts center to the county.

"It passed," she said. "There was no controversy," she added in reply to a question. "There never has been any controversy. The regents were waiting for the letter from the county."

The letter, dated June 8 from Deputy County Attorney Kevin Costello to the Board of Regents, merely confirmed that the county was "willing to move forward with the acquisition."

Garza made it clear that the regents never have been involved with negotiations and now have concluded their role in the transfer process.

process.

"A couple of people from ASU were (at the meeting) to offer explanations, if needed," Garza said. "They were Paul Ward, a legal counsel for ASU, and Rich Stanley, whose title has something to do with facilities. I don't remember if they spoke or not."

William Scalzo, the assistant county manager and director of Maricopa County Stadium District, was unavailable to update his report that five companies had expressed interest in managing the Sundome.

However, Karen Stewart, an assistant from his office, said, "We're in the process of reviewing the proposals but are not at liberty to discuss them. But the

process is moving forward."

Board of Supervisors Chairman Max Wilson said he believes all five companies have responded, but Stewart said she could not confirm the number. Scott

"The endowment is a gift agreement bound by legal contracts. The operating budget is \$400,000 or \$450,000. It's just the operating budget that will be included in the transfer."

—Virgil Renzulli,
ASU Vice President
for Public Affairs

Isham, Wilson's chief of staff, reported more than a week ago that proposals had been received from three companies.

Speaking at the June 1 Sundome meeting of the Board

of Supervisors, Scalzo told several thousand people who had come to offer their support that the companies were based in Chicago, Los Angeles and New York.

Wilson—who has targeted a takeover "before the end of September"—is anxious to complete the transaction.

"We're pleased with the offers we've had," he said. "We're in a position that we want to take it over not with a lot of tails on it. They have attorneys and we have attorneys talking back and forth. That may be scary."

In reply to a question regarding an Arizona Republic report that the transfer will include a \$2 million fund to be turned over by ASU, Wilson replied, "I was told whatever the fund is (that amount) will be turned over. There's been no accounting. I don't know what the numbers are. I understand it's up to two million dollars."

Wilson said the donors "can have their money back if they

want, but we would like to use it to improve the Sundome."

Dee Hjermstad, president of the Sundome Performing Arts Assn., responding to an e-mail, wrote the following:

"Max told the SPAA Board that he wants the transfer to go through and be totally signed off and then talk about the money. However, this money may be part of the negotiations and we are not privy to their discussions."

An effort by The Wester to obtain a complete accounting of the fund from ASU—initially more than \$5 million in pledges to finance a Sundome renovation that never materialized—has been unsuccessful.

However, late Monday afternoon, Virgil Renzulli, ASU's vice president for Public Affairs, returned a phone call from San Diego, where he was vacationing.

He said the Republic's report that \$2 million would be transferred to the county if and when the deal is finalized "is not correct."

"The endowment is a gift agreement bound by legal contracts," he said, and that some of that money is targeted for cultural purposes. "The operating budget is \$400,000 or \$450,000," he added. "It's just the operating budget that will be included in the transfer."

DAILY NEWS-SUN

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 1, 2005



Early birds arrive at the Sundome this morning for a meeting of the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors and a vote on accepting the transfer of the venue from ASU to the county.

JOY LAMBERT-SLAGOWSKI/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Stage set for Sundome transfer

STAFF REPORT

Supporters of the Sundome made the journey to the performing arts center in Sun City West this morning to urge the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors to acquire the facility and keep it operating as a Valley entertainment venue.

The board was scheduled

to vote today whether to take over the Sundome from its current operator, Arizona State University. An affirmative vote would send the matter back to the Arizona Board of Regents, which is expected to OK the transfer.

County and community leaders encouraged supporters of the Sundome to attend

the meeting as a show of support, demonstrating the region's desire to keep the facility operating. By the time the session began this morning, the 7,200-seat center was approximately three-quarters filled with supporters.

The theater was built by Del Webb as a marketing tool

during the development of Sun City West. Webb transferred it to ASU 20 years ago for \$10.

A county vote to accept receipt of the theater from ASU would be followed later this month by a vote of the Arizona Board of Regents to approve the sale.

Wilson said national

companies have expressed interest in providing entertainment at the theater, which also serves as the site of high school and college commencement ceremonies and special events.

As the owner, the county would not have to pay property taxes on the venue, which has an estimated value of \$22 million.

County to buy Sundome from ASU

Venue may not remain solely for fine arts

By Pat Flannery
The Arizona Republic

Maricopa County and Arizona State University will spend the summer negotiating details that should put the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in new hands by late September.

The County Board of Supervisors last week sent the Arizona Board of Regents a letter stating its intent to buy the Sundome, clearing the way for final negotiations to proceed.

Supervisor Max Wilson said many details remain for lawyers on both sides to work out, including whether to impose restrictions on how the facility

may be used in the future.

Del E. Webb Corp. gave the Sundome to ASU for \$1 in 1984, with the university promising to maintain it as an arts venue. But ASU decided last year to sell it, because its subsidy was costing too much.

The county now wants to buy the venue for \$10 and maintain it as a public amenity. It plans to hire a private entertainment company to book events, with five companies already expressing an interest in bidding for the contract.

The county thinks it can sustain itself, "But you can't do the same old stuff," Wilson said.

The university asked the county for assurances that the

Sundome would be maintained exclusively as a fine-arts facility, but Wilson said the county would not give such assurances. He said the county must preserve the private operator's options to book other kinds of events that will keep the Sundome from running into financial problems again.

"If they (ASU) want to give it up, we don't want a whole lot of strings attached," Wilson said.

Mike Whiting, general manager of the Recreation Centers of Sun City West, agreed that new operators must have room to improvise.

"I think there has to be some latitude to allow a third-party operator to book acts that make



Suzanne Starr/The Arizona Republic

Maricopa County recently informed Arizona State University of plans to buy the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts.

it self-sustaining," Whiting said. "We're interested in it succeeding."

Negotiations include the transfer from ASU to the

county of \$2 million in trust accounts. The money was raised several years ago from Sun-

See SUNDOME page 4

From Page 1

dome and West Valley Symphony patrons for renovations, but sat unused.

Wilson said the county would offer refunds to donors who want them. Remaining funds will be used by the county to improve the facility.

Whiting said he hoped most donors would leave their money in the capital improvement accounts, saying the list of Sundome needs is long. The air-conditioning system needs to be upgraded, he said, and the area around and above the stage might need a redesign to

attract other kinds of events.

Uncertainty over when the ownership transfer would occur forced the West Valley Symphony to book other venues for its 2005-06 season. The orchestra will perform its classical concert series at Sun City West's Prince of Peace Catholic Church, while its popular-music series will move to Glendale Arena.

Symphony Executive Director Richard Shelton said a decision on where to perform in 2006-07 would be made by the symphony's board after the upcoming season ends in April.

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THURSDAY, JUNE 2, 2005

County moves toward taking over Sundome

By Pat Flannery
The Arizona Republic

SUN CITY WEST — The Sundome Center for the Performing Arts moved a step closer to new ownership as the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors on Wednesday agreed in concept to take over operation of the venue.

The board, whose meeting at the Sundome drew about 2,500 spectators, voted unanimously Wednesday to draft a letter to the Arizona Board of Regents proposing terms for taking control of the venue from Arizona State University.

A formal county vote is expected next week on the letter and the transfer terms. The regents then would have to act on the matter as well.

Supervisor Max Wilson has been trying to forge an agreement since ASU announced last year that it intended to sell the facility because it could not afford to subsidize its operations. Del E. Webb Corp., Sun City West's developer, donated the facility to ASU in 1984 for \$1. The county proposes to pay \$10 to ASU to transfer ownership.

William Scalzo, assistant county manager for community services, said the county recently asked professional booking and management firms to submit proposals to operate the facility. The county believes the venue, if managed properly by experts, could be self-supporting and wouldn't need a public subsidy.

Scalzo said at least five firms are interesting in operating the Sundome. But Mary Becker, a Sun City West resident, urged the county to keep a lid on ticket prices, saying that a private operator could hike prices out of the reach of young families and senior citizens living on fixed incomes.

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FRIDAY, APRIL 29, 2005

ASU to transfer Sundome to county in pending deal

By Pat Flannery
The Arizona Republic

SUN CITY WEST — A formal agreement is taking shape to transfer ownership of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts from Arizona State University to Maricopa County, which would allow the venue to continue in its role as a West Valley cultural hub.

However, the pending deal comes too late to forestall the West Valley Symphony's change of venues for the coming concert season. The orchestra will perform its classical concert series at Sun City West's Prince of Peace Catholic Church, while its pops series will move to Glendale Arena. The decision was forced by uncertainty over whether the Sundome would remain open.

"We don't like the idea of being out of there, but everyone was pointing fingers and nothing was getting done," said symphony Executive Director Richard Shelton.

If the deal is closed later this year, the symphony could move back to the Sundome next season.

Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, executive director of ASU Public Events, said the Arizona Board of Regents on Thursday was briefed about the pending agreement, under which ASU would transfer the Sundome and its parking lot to the county for \$10. The county would agree to continue operating the Sundome as a performing-arts center.

The Sundome, traditional home of the symphony, has been mired in administrative limbo since ASU announced in June 2004 that it could no longer afford to subsidize the venue and would sell it. That announcement drove away some patrons who expected the orchestra to fold or move to less convenient venues.

Maricopa County Supervisor Max Wilson said the county now has a "good plan" under which a professional manager could be retained to

manage the facility and book national acts into the facility, making it self-sustaining. Wilson said there is strong support for the plan in the West Valley, although he has not yet counted votes among fellow supervisors.

The Board of Regents will vote on the matter in June, and county supervisors thereafter.

The symphony, meanwhile, has launched a fund-raising drive to replenish its depleted reserve fund, which had been built up during a similar drive last year.

"Ticket sales have been down this year, all related to continuing issues with the Sundome," Shelton said. "We've just about depleted our cash reserve."

Just under \$100,000 has been raised, with two large chunks coming from anonymous donors who consider the symphony's survival vital to the West Valley's cultural health. The goal is to raise at least \$200,000 for the reserve fund for the coming year.

ASU prepares Sundome transfer

Proposal to hand over venue to county goes to regents

AMANDA MYERS
DAILY NEWS-SUN

ASU officials are proposing transferring Sun City West's Sundome and parking lot to Maricopa County, giving up their financial obligations to the performing arts venue.

At Thursday's Board of

Regents meeting at ASU, board members will receive a status report regarding the proposed transfer. Once Maricopa County officials decide whether they will accept the Sundome as their obligation, ASU officials will seek the approval of the board to transfer the Sundome for the same sum the Sundome was

transferred to them by Del Webb nearly 20 years ago — \$10.

Maricopa County Board of Supervisors Chairman Max Wilson, R-District 4, said the board of supervisors has asked him for a financial plan for the Sundome's future, and Wilson is confident once that is completed, a smooth transfer should occur.

"We think we can do that, and we think that it's critical," said Wilson, a long-time proponent of keeping the

Sundome in operation. However, Wilson doesn't necessarily think the Sundome will be a big money-maker for the county.

"What I would like to have it do is not lose money for Maricopa County," said Wilson. "It's not my goal to bring it on board to make a profit for Maricopa County."

ASU's decision to transfer control of the Sundome comes after a lengthy wait by Sundome supporters in the West Valley over the fate of

the beloved performance space. ASU officials announced last June that they intended to sell the venue after Dec. 31, citing financial reasons for their decision.

When the Sundome was gifted to ASU in 1984 by Del Webb Corp., it came with a 20-year deed restriction requiring the facility to remain as an entertainment venue. That restriction expired last year. However, the adjacent Sundome

parking lot was gifted to ASU in 1997 with similar restrictions.

In the agenda for Thursday's board meeting, the Sundome is the first issue up for discussion at 1:30 p.m. The agenda states that an auction for the transfer of the property is not feasible as the restrictions still active on the parking lot will "greatly affect an appraisal of the property." It goes on to read, "Obtaining

See SUNDOME, A5

From A1

a fair appraisal of the parcels of property will be difficult given that the ability of the operator/owner to successfully operate the Sundome as a performing arts center is the real value of the property."

However, the agenda's summary also reads, "ASU will benefit if the Sundome continues to be operated in the West Valley as a performing arts center."

Jacque Petroulakis, Del Webb and Pulte Communities director of public affairs, said the company has no objection to the Sundome transfer, should it occur.

"Pulte Homes does approve of the sale and we hope it happens," Petroulakis said. "We also let Maricopa County know if they need to do some changing in our deed restriction for commercial property along the borders, as long as the Recreation Centers of Sun City West agrees with it, we're fine with it, too."

Tom Taggart, a member of the Sundome Performing Arts Association board of directors and a Sun City West resident, said the board is unanimous in its support of the transfer.

"I think the transfer would be very positive for our community," said Taggart. "I think the county would do everything in its power to keep the Sundome operating as an entertainment venue for the Northwest Valley."

Wilson said he hopes ASU will turn over the Sundome to the county by September, and he would like to see shows booked for that month.

Last week, the West Valley Symphony, the Sundome's No. 1 tenant, announced new venues for its classical and pops concerts because of the uncertainty of the Sundome's future.

Taggart said he hopes the SPAA board and Sundome volunteers play a role in the Sundome's future.

Amanda Myers may be reached at 876-2513 or amyers@aztrib.com.



Almost 10 months ago, a news release issued by Virgil Renzulli, vice president of Public Affairs for Arizona State University, dated June 17, 2004, announced the Sundome would close last Dec. 31 because of its "inability to operate without university subsidy."

In the text, President Michael Crow focused on "our educational mission" and noted that all of ASU's "ancillary divisions"—"from the book store to the alumni association, from KAET television to Gammage Auditorium"—were self-sufficient or close to it. "The Sundome," he added, "has not been economically viable..."



**Jack
Hawn**
●
**Sundome
saga: Hoping
the other
shoe won't
drop**

A month after that bombshell exploded over the entire West Valley, Maricopa County Supervisor Max Wilson entered the picture and was negotiating to gain county control of the 7,000-seat auditorium which the Del Webb Corporation had "sold" to the university in 1984 for one dollar.

Max suggested ASU might make a similar transaction for \$10, thus pocketing a \$9 profit. Periodic updates proved promising for the transfer of ownership, and various Sundome events were scheduled through June, including West Valley Symphony concerts. All events were rentals, ensuring even larger profits.

Now, we are approaching this season's final curtain. Jack Jones spent an evening with us last Saturday, and this Saturday, Glenn Miller's Air Force Band will conclude entertainment bookings.

As Sundome manager Smoky Renehan told me last week, 13 graduation ceremonies in the next couple of months and a June 17 Southern Baptist convention will clean the slate.

"We close the doors on June 30," she said. "That's the end of the fiscal year. Does that mean the county opens the door on July 1? I don't know. I talk to all the (ASU) Public Events people quite often. They ask me what's happening."

Smoky's former secretary, Veronica Mize, bailed out after she and other employees were notified of the intended closure, and Melissa Schwartz, the senior events coordinator, has been working only four days a week, as has Smoky. Both decided to take vacation time "just in case."

Apparently no one who has a stake in the facility's future has a clue of what President Crow and his attorneys are mulling over, why there has been no press update, no official proposal or why the Board of Regents did not include the Sundome transfer on its last two agendas and may ignore it again when the Board convenes April 28 and 29 at

ASU.

Wilson provided an encouraging update last week, reporting that Dr. Crow had told him during an informal chat "everything is going according to schedule." A lot of people, suspect, would be keenly interested to know details of that schedule, if, in fact, one exists.

Richard Shelton, executive director of the symphony, told me last week he is "very disappointed that ASU has not acted promptly on this decision to turn the Sundome over to Maricopa County. We have planned our (next) season. We have to move forward. We will let everyone know what that decision will be within the next couple of weeks."

We can only speculate about that statement, but the symphony has made it clear from the beginning it will not suspend its operation. That can only mean it will go elsewhere next season if necessary.

Jeanne Tarr, who books the Sundome for her lavish Variety Show in November of each year, has set a deadline for the coming show, already in rehearsals.

"We have to know by the end of April if the Sundome is a possibility," she said the other day. "That's the cutoff time. If there's nothing then, we will have to go to Plan B—the Stardust for about 15 performances."



With the Sundome closing its doors June 30, questions remain about its future. Among those deeply concerned are, from left, Jeanne Tarr, Dee Hjermstad and Smoky Renehan.

"My aim is to get \$50,000 for the benefit of the (Del Webb) hospital. We met with all the soloists. Some don't want to do that many."

Sadly, she may have no alternative.

Dee Hjermstad, president of the Sundome Performing Arts Assn., also is fidgeting. She's hopeful Wilson will have some news when SPAA's board resumes its meetings April 21 after being inactive the previous two months. Meanwhile, she has asked directors to write Board of Regents members requesting the Sundome issue be placed on its next agenda.

"We are in a crisis situation with a question of the transfer," she wrote in a recent e-mail.

Jae Paselk, who directs Sundome volunteers—242 at last count—also is deeply troubled by the absence of information.

"They ask me, 'Have you heard anything? What's happening?' They're all so dedicated. I'm really proud of them," Jae said. "They work all the events, the soda bar, selling candy, ushering, working the parking lot, distributing programs. Basically, they do everything except maintenance, the box office and backstage."

Jae, who has been involved with the volunteers for 16 years, hopes they all agree to continue, "if it goes forward...."

SPAA will honor them at a Sundome luncheon immediately after its board meeting, which Wilson expects to attend.

"I hope he says something to the volunteers to put their minds at ease," Paselk said.

Jan Wilson, who phoned last week about her 16th annual Monte Carlo Review April 14-17 at the Stardust Theatre, was

asked if she had heard anything new.

"Nope," she replied, "same old runaround." No news.

We certainly hope we're not getting "the same old runaround." Sun City West residents, particularly, have reason to be suspicious when regular communication with ASU regarding the facility bogs down as it has this year.

Most of us, I'm sure, can recall the first bombshell dropped by ASU four years ago when the university announced a planned multi-million-dollar Sundome renovation had been abandoned because "rising construction costs and shrinking university budgets caused the renovation to become economically unfeasible."

That announcement, as I recall, came about a month before the major work was to begin and during an ongoing SPAA fundraising campaign to finance the job. The goal was to collect \$5 million in contributions and pledges, which became a dramatic race-to-the wire because of a strict deadline imposed by an anonymous donor. It wasn't until \$5.4 million had been pledged before ASU reneged on its pledge to the community.

The money was "redirected" to an endowment fund "to ensure high-quality entertainment for West Valley patrons," a long-delayed ASU report stated.

I don't recall ever receiving a follow-up press release on the distribution of those funds; but I suppose I could get that information if I tried...once again.

Meanwhile, let's hope the other shoe—or should we say the next bombshell?—doesn't drop in the form of another shocking ASU announcement.

County supervisor gives upbeat report on Sundome transfer

ASU president says 'everything on schedule'—Max Wilson

By Jack Hawn

Although negotiations to transfer ownership of the Sundome from Arizona State University to Maricopa County control seemingly have come to a standstill after months of hopeful progress, Max Wilson, chairman of the Board of Supervisors, provided an encouraging update last week following two informal chats with ASU President Michael Crow.

Responding to a Wester inquiry, Wilson said he had spoken to Dr. Crow when they were seated

together at two recent dinners.

"He said most of it is still on a 'go' and that everything is going according to schedule," Wilson reported. "I have asked our attorneys to review everything so there are no hang-ups. He said he would touch bases with us."

Wilson said Crow indicated that the Board of Regents could vote in July on a proposal to turn the 7,000-seat Sun City West performing arts theater over to the county. However, according to information posted on the internet and confirmed by an ASU

spokesperson, the board is not scheduled to meet in July.

The regents—who did not address the Sundome issue at two previous meetings this year—are scheduled to convene April 28 and 29 at ASU, June 16 and 17 at Northern Arizona University and again in August. The agenda for the April meeting is scheduled to be posted April 20.

Wilson also said ASU had been "concerned about a title problem, something to do with parking, when the deed restriction would run out," which, he

implied, could have bogged down the transfer process.

"It's a lot easier to deal with what's going on in Maricopa County," said the 62-year-old Wilson, who underwent heart bypass surgery Feb. 2. "We can't dictate what ASU does."

Scott Isham, Wilson's chief of staff who also has been working on the transfer, returned a call Friday but had no additional information.

"We're all frustrated," he said. "I talked to Dee (Hjermstad) and asked her to put all the pressure she can on ASU (to speed the process)."

Hjermstad, president of the Sundome Performing Arts Assn.,

which has not met for two months because the support group had no business to conduct, will resume its monthly meetings April 21 to be immediately followed by a luncheon at the Sundome to honor volunteers.

Wilson said he plans to attend the SPAA meeting, "if I'm invited."

Hjermstad, meanwhile, has asked SPAA directors to write to each member of the Board of Regents and send a copy of the letter to Dr. Crow, requesting that the Sundome issue be placed on the regents' agenda for their April meeting.

In an e-mail titled "Letters Needed," circulated last week to a number of influential people along with a list of names and addresses of the Board of Regents, Hjermstad wrote:

"We are at a crisis situation with the question of the transfer of the Sundome....I urge you to write (to each member of the



"It's a lot easier to deal with what's going on in Maricopa County. We can't dictate what ASU does."

—Max Wilson
Maricopa County
Supervisor

Board of Regents), requesting that the transfer of the Sundome to Maricopa County be put on their April agenda. Here are a few talking points you may want to include:

"1. This matter has been hanging since June, 2004, 10 months when Virgil Renzuli announced the closing of the Sundome.

"2. Scheduling for programs, graduations and the West Valley Symphony must get going as soon as possible to have a 2005-2006 season.

"3. Maricopa County has examined the premises along with

theatrical producers and is ready to discuss the transfer issue with the Regents.

"4. This entertainment venue is in the middle of the highest growing area of the county. Population has more than doubled in the last 10 years and will double again in the next 10. There is no other large entertainment venue to serve what will become 500,000 people.

Sundome stays open; deal sought for takeover

By Louie Villalobos
The Arizona Republic

West Valley residents can enjoy the rest of the current season at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts while Maricopa County and Arizona State University officials look for a way to keep it open permanently.

The Sundome, in Sun City West, is being sold by ASU because of its inability to become self-sufficient. ASU will give preference to potential buyers looking to keep the Sundome open as a fine-arts facility. The initial plans were for the building to close Dec. 31, essentially canceling the second half of the season.

But Dee Hjermstad, president of the Sundome Performing Arts Association, said the university decided to let the season run its course before officially closing the doors in June. Everyone is waiting to see if the county will take it over, she said.

"It's the big hope," she said. "But we don't have any definite answer."

Max Wilson, a Republican county supervisor whose district includes the Sun Cities, said he would like to see the county take over and operate the building as a fine arts center.

He didn't want to be too specific but said talks are underway between the county and ASU. Wilson said he's received numerous calls from community members who don't want to see the Sundome closed down. Wilson said he believes the county has a few business plans that will make taking the Sundome over a financially sound decision.

"It's really been kind of a centerpiece for culture in the west side," he said. "They're so many difficult uses for that building."

One of the organizations hoping to keep the Sundome open is the West Valley Symphony, which plays its entire season at the Sundome.

Richard Shelton, executive director of the symphony, said the Sundome is the only venue of its kind in the West Valley. Without it, his group may have to consider performing in other parts of the Valley, he said. Symphony sales have been lagging behind last year's numbers, Shelton said.

"They're being reluctant to buy tickets until closer to the concert time to make sure it's not canceled," he said. "They're just waiting."

ASU took over the Sundome when Del Webb Corp., which developed the Sun City communities, donated it to the university. The university has said that over the past 10 years the university has given about \$1 million to the Sundome with the goal of seeing the venue become self-sufficient, something that hasn't happened. The department's yearly budget is about \$5 million.

Sundome transfer 'moving head'

ASU expected to offer proposal to county for venue's takeover

KATY O'GRADY
DAILY NEWS-SUN

The expiration of a Sundome deed restriction in two weeks isn't troubling Maricopa County and ASU officials, who are still plugging away on plans to transfer the Sun City West venue to county control.

"I don't really know if that's a hard deadline. We've never felt pressured by that date," said Scott Isham, spokesman for Maricopa County District 4 Supervisor Max Wilson, who has been working to transfer the Sundome to county control.

Wilson had originally hoped to have the transfer

complete by this fall.

"This is not as simple as people had hoped," Isham said. "This is a big property, and ASU wants to make sure they do it right, and I guess we can't blame them for that."

The deed restriction requiring the Sundome to be kept as a performing arts venue was placed on the property by Del Webb Corp. when it gave the Sundome to Arizona State University in 1984. It expires Dec. 21, after which the venue can be used for other commercial purposes.

ASU officials in June announced their intent to sell the property at the end of this

year because of ongoing losses, but they promised to first consider offers from community groups to keep it as an entertainment venue. Wilson's plan to take the Sundome under the county's wing has taken center stage.

"We are moving ahead," said Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, executive director of ASU Public Events, which operates the Sundome.

Jennings-Roggensack said because of the ongoing negotiations, she couldn't make further comments except to say ASU and Maricopa County attorneys are "dotting the i's," and she believes ASU can offer a proposal soon.

Isham said county officials have not seen any proposals, but he believes the Arizona Board of Regents has

discussed the matter in executive session, which is a meeting closed to the public to discuss legal matters.

In the meantime, it's business as usual at the Sundome, where Director Smokey Renehan said rentals for 2005 have been steady. ASU is honoring all bookings at the venue made through the end of this year for dates through June 2005.

Area high schools, which traditionally hold their graduations at the Sundome, will do so again in 2005, Renehan said. In addition, the Symphony of the West Valley has its shows running into 2005, and SPAA has booked a program of acts.

"We're busy," Renehan said.

Dee Hjermstad, president

See SUNDOME, A16

From A1

of the Sundome Performing Arts Association, which is a supporting arm of the Sundome, said the lack of a decision on the venue's fate has made it difficult to book acts for the fall of 2005, a process that normally occurs now.

"It's the same thing for the Symphony. They can't book anything either," Hjermstad said.

In a letter to the Sun City West Property Owners and Residents Association, Richard Shelton, the Symphony's executive director, urged residents to support the Symphony despite the uncertainty surrounding the Sundome. News of the Sundome's possible sale caused many Symphony supporters to forego tickets this year, according to Shelton.

"Please don't let unfounded fears of a possible venue closure keep you from supporting a vital community cultural jewel — the West Valley Symphony," Shelton wrote. "The Symphony, like other nonprofit performing arts groups, needs your support now more than ever. Regardless of the venue, the West Valley Symphony is here to stay."

All things considered, Hjermstad said, the future looks good for the Sundome.

"The best news is there's no news. If we have no news then it's not bad news," she

said.

Hjermstad said she believes university officials are working to make a smooth transition to county control.

"I think they are negotiating in good faith to have some sort of transfer to the county," Hjermstad said.

She isn't sure when a transfer might take place, but

she said she believes it will keep the Sundome as a performing arts center. Until then, SPAA will continue its work to promote the venue.

"The SPAA board is meeting regularly and we are keeping in close contact with ASU, and as soon as there is anything to update, we will notify the public immediately," Hjermstad said.

THE WESTER Thursday, August 12, 2004

Retired Del Webb executive recalls role in 1984 transfer of Sundome to ASU

Chuck Roach, who oversaw SCW development, talks about donation

By Jack Hawn

Former Del Webb executive Chuck Roach, during a recent phone chat from his Scottsdale home, recalled his small role in the company's donation of the Sundome Performing Arts Center to Arizona State University almost 20 years ago.

"I didn't have a whole lot to do with it," Roach said. "The Sundome was such an important facility it was being handled by Bob Swanson, who was chairman, president and chief executive officer of the company. He was in Phoenix; I was in Sun City, West. Fred Kuentz (whose name adorns the recreation center at Stardust and R. H. Johnson boulevards) was my boss."

Roach, who did play a major role in the development of Sun City West and took an early retirement in 2001 at age 54, was vice president of finance when the Del Webb Corp. handed the Sundome to ASU for "monetary compensation (reportedly \$10) to make it valid."

"I was a bean counter with a fancy title," Roach said of his position in 1984, when ASU was conducting an aggressive fundraising campaign.

"That was the reason (for the donation), to help the university. The company agreed to support losses for three years, I believe, between half a million and a million dollars. It was approximately \$700,000 for three years. Del

"...The (Del Webb) company agreed to support losses for three years, I believe, between half a million and a million dollars. It was approximately \$700,000 for three years."

—Chuck Roach,
on donation to
ASU



Webb paid that. There was a deed restriction. It couldn't be torn down."

The stipulation was that ASU could not sell the facility for 20 years. That agreement expires Dec. 21, almost exactly six months after the university announced on June 17 that the 7,000-seat auditorium would be offered for sale at the end of the year.

Maricopa County District 4 Supervisor Max Wilson reported another meeting with ASU officials would be held sometime this week to continue discussions about a possible transfer of ownership to the county.

The Wester still has not been able to obtain a copy of the financial report of last season's operating losses for fiscal year 2003-2004. Sundome manager Smokey Renehan stated in mid-June she would not have that information until June 30, when the fiscal year ended.

She said the figure could range anywhere between \$60,000 and \$600,000. Contacted again last week, Renehan stated the report

See RETIRED DEL WEBB

EXEC., Page 2

from ASU still had not arrived.

Also still unavailable is an estimate of the Sundome's market value. An appraisal was said to be forthcoming, but there has been no further word from ASU regarding when or if an appraisal has been requested.

Roach, a senior vice president of the Del Webb Corp. when he left just before Pulte Homes purchased the company, had served on the Sundome Performing Arts Assn. board of directors as a Webb liaison.

"I really haven't paid much attention (to ongoing Sundome news reports)," Roach said. "My folks have talked to me about it."

Roach's parents, Paul and Wilda, reside across the street

from Briarwood Country Club, where their son, other family members and friends helped them celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary two years ago with a gala dinner-dance.

"I'm still enjoying retirement," said the 57-year-old father of two grown children and grandparent of two. "We've been traveling an awful lot, and I've been learning new skills. I'm taking horseback riding lessons and beginning Spanish lessons."

Hopefully, he rides better than he understands Spanish.

Unable to translate a brief comment in the foreign language, Roach replied, "Hey, I've just started."

Maricopa County to own Sundome?

County, state officials in talks with ASU to keep venue open

By Cecilia Chan

Independent Newspapers

Maricopa County may take ownership of the Sundome Center of Performing Arts in Sun City West.

District 4 elected officials and ASU representatives last week discussed options to keep the doors opened at the 7,000-seat theater. ASU announced in June it could no longer subsidize the venue and will shut it down at

the end of the year and sell it.

"We are talking about purchasing the Sundome for a minimal amount of money," said District 4 Supervisor Max Wilson, who spearheaded the effort to save the facility. "I think we have a tentative agreement with the university... for the county to take over Sundome."

Supervisor Wilson said the county offered \$10 for Sundome, the same token amount ASU paid to Del Webb in 1984

for the performing arts center. The developer built the facility in 1980 to attract homebuyers to Sun City West and later donated it to the university to operate.

"Because of the importance of Sundome to the people of the West Valley, our goal would be to get it in the hands of a community group of some sort that would continue to use it as a theater," said Virgil Renzulli,

See Sundome — Page 3



Submitted photo

The future of the Sundome has still not been determined.

Sundome

Continued From Page 1

spokesman for ASU administration. "This is important and we will bend over backward to make it work if the county is interested. We're willing to accept \$10 if everything works out."

ASU for the past dozen years subsidized Sundome, giving it more than \$1 million. Now as the university focuses its limited resources to educate a growing number of students, it can no

longer help support the performing arts venue.

Sundome, which has a yearly operating budget of about \$1 million, receives its revenue from ticket sales, facility rental fees, concession sales and donations. Non-ticketed events such as college and high school graduations also are held at the facility.

Supervisor Wilson is confident the county would not be stuck subsidizing the facility.

"There are a lot of things we have experience in," he said. "We also run the stadium district where the Diamondbacks play. We have expertise in that, that

maybe somebody else doesn't have. We are exploring having the same management team rather than hiring additional staff."

In 1991, supervisors created the Maricopa County Stadium District, which built, owns and operates the 48,569-seat Bank One Ballpark in downtown Phoenix.

"This point in time we are still putting down what has to be done and what needs to be done in order to accomplish our goals and one by one review those," Supervisor Wilson said.

If and when both sides reach

a final deal, it would still need to go before the board of supervisors and the Arizona Board of Regents for approval.

"The Sundome is an important asset to this community and I think we need to carefully weigh all the options related to the decision because it is a difficult facility to manage," said Mike Whiting, a member of the Sundome Board of Directors and general manager of the Recreation Centers of Sun City West. "But it has the potential to become something more than it is right now."

WEDNESDAY, JULY 14, 2004

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COMMUNITY COLUMNIST

Time to gently put Sundome out of its, our misery for good

That September evening in 1980 when the Sundome opened, couples sipped champagne and swayed on the dance floor to the tunes of the Lawrence Welk Orchestra.

By next spring, the Sundome will be dark, awaiting its fate on the real-estate chopper's block. Its owner, Arizona State University, announced recently that hemorrhaging red ink was forcing it to close the 7,030-seat arts center.

Shall we mourn the passing of this venue of countless concerts, plays and performances? Or shall we rather rejoice that the aging white elephant, unable to compete in the Valley's performing-arts arena, will soon be put out of its misery?

Del Webb Corp. built the Sundome as a marketing tool to entice retirees to buy homes in Sun City West. The developer sold the Sundome to Arizona State University in 1984 for \$1.

Touted as the largest one-floor theater in the United States, it catered to the tastes of seniors who flocked to acts like Phyllis Diller, the Ink Spots, and Steve and Eydie.

But fans are fickle and tastes change, and by the late '90s the Sundome was in financial trouble. So the Sundome Performing Arts Association, a volunteer group of predominantly Sun City West residents responsible for fund-raising and programming, began booking acts to appeal to younger patrons outside the retirement area.

The 2001 season included Bob Dylan, the Black Crowes and Julio Iglesias. The 2002-03 season continued the more eclectic offerings, including hard-rock sensation Loverboy and rock and roll artist Eddie Money. Prices escalated to between \$25 and \$65.

The changes in show genre and ticket prices froze out retirees, but didn't attract younger audiences either. Several shows had to be canceled due to lackluster ticket sales, and the Sundome continued to ooze red ink.

Losses were made up from the interest on an approximately \$5 million endowment fund composed of donations to SPAA by individuals and civic



Suzanne Starr/The Arizona Republic

The Sundome suffers from vast size and design so poor many in the audience can't see or hear what happens on stage.



ELEANOR NELSON

Special for The Republic

organizations. The fund originally had been created to make substantial renovations to the Sundome, including rebuilding the stage to accommodate large-scale productions like Broadway plays.

But soon after the \$5 million had been raised, ASU dropped the renovation package because, it said, costs had escalated to a prohibitive \$13 million. Donors were urged to leave their money in the fund to finance "better programs," and most did.

The death knell to the Sundome was dealt about two years ago, when ASU withdrew its financial support. The university had been subsidizing the Sundome to the tune of between \$70,000 and \$600,000 annually, and in the past 12 years has given it more than \$1 million, according to ASU President Michael Crow.

So the Sundome is to be put on the market after the Symphony of the West Valley concludes its season there next spring. Note ASU's impeccable timing: The 1984 sales contract with Del Webb stipulated that if the university ceased to operate the Sundome as an arts

venue at any time before Dec. 31, 2004, the facility would revert to Del Webb.

The Sundome competes with six other theaters in the Valley, from Phoenix's 90-seat Playhouse on the Park to the 1,475-seat Orpheum. By almost any criteria, the Sun City West facility ranks near the bottom.

Its cavernous interior is so poorly designed that many of the audience cannot see or hear what happens on the small stage. And two large TV screens on either side of the stage haven't alleviated the problem.

Patrons seated farther back than the 20th row often need binoculars. As *The Arizona Republic* put it recently, "It's simply too vast. The design makes the actors look like talking clothespins."

The acoustics also leave much to be desired, except for band or orchestra performances.

There is some talk of a civic organization buying and operating the Sundome. But if ASU, with its vast infusions of money, can't make a go of it, what chance does any other group have?

Put the Sundome out of its misery. Let the aging white elephant depart with dignity.

Eleanor Nelson is a freelance writer and former journalist. She can be reached at ernelson23@aol.com. The views expressed are those of the author.

ASU to close Sundome

Group bookings will be honored through spring

By Cecilia Chan

Independent Newspapers

Sundome Performing Arts, a major entertainment venue for the West Valley, will shut its doors at the end of the year and go on the sale block, Arizona State University officials announced.

ASU officials faulted the 7,000-seat theater's inability to generate enough revenue to be self-suffi-

cient for the closing. For the past dozen years, the university has subsidize Sundome in Sun City West, to the tune of more than \$1 million.

"With ASU's challenge to educate the growing population of metropolitan Phoenix and the state of Arizona, we need to devote every available resource to our education mission," ASU President Michael M. Crow said in a

released statement. "More than a year ago, I directed all of ASU's ancillary divisions — from the book store to the alumni association, from KAET television to Gammage Auditorium — to be financially self-sufficient. Happily, those organizations are — or are close to becoming — self sufficient. The Sundome, however, has not been economically viable."

Before Sundome officially closes Dec. 31 it will feature "Fiddler on the Roof" and Mr. Las Vegas himself — Wayne Newton. Sundome will honor rental events through the spring.

Mr. Crow said ASU would give preference in the sale of Sundome to any community group that would pay market price for the property and continue to operate it as a theater.

"It's a lost to the community. There is no question about it," said

Chuck Ullman, president of the Property Owners and Residents Association of Sun City West Governing Board, which is housed in a building next door to the Sundome.

Mr. Ullman said the closing comes as no surprise, saying the theater has trouble filling its seats.

Del Webb Corp. built Sundome in 1980 to attract homebuyers to Sun City West. In 1984, he

See ASU — Page 3

ASU

Continued From Page 1
donated the facility to ASU.

Sundome receives its revenue from ticket sales, facility rental fees, concession sales and donations, ASU spokesman David Harrison said.

ASU has had to make up for shortfalls in Sundome's yearly operating budget of about \$1 million with subsidies ranging from \$70,000 to \$600,000 annually.

Mr. Harrison said ticket sales typically account for 50 percent or less of a performing arts venue's

revenues.

"Ticket sales revenue was not keeping up," Mr. Harrison said. "The Sundome is an awkward size, it's too big for a Broadway house and too small for a real concert hall... which made it difficult to perform and find the right acts."

Mr. Harrison said the building's value has not been assessed yet and the next step is to solicit a buyer, who hopefully will continue the performing arts venue.

"The reality is it will be up to the buyer to decide what the next use of the building or site will be," he said.

For 2003-04, ticketed attendance figure — which does not

count heads for events such as graduations — was 66,678, said Smokey Renehan, Sundome director for 10 years. She did not have readily available attendance figures from prior years.

About two years ago, Sundome scaled its seating capacity for performances from 7,000 to 3,200 seats, she said.

"There are so many venues operating in the valley and in the state that they will have other places to go," Ms. Renehan said. "Of course, most of the residents brought homes knowing there was a performing arts venue in their backyard."

The Symphony of the West Val-

ley in Sun City is one of 40 regular groups that rent Sundome for events.

The 95-member symphony has performed at Sundome since it first opened, but now it will need to find a new venue.

"We are very disappointed in the announcement," said Richard Shelton, symphony executive director. "The Sundome is a very important quality of life for the West Valley and for the symphony. We feel it's a bad choice."

The symphony, which performs every two weeks during its season, will play its last note at the Sundome in April, as long as it doesn't impede the facility's sale,

he said. The symphony attracts on average 2,000 people for each concert.

"There are alternatives we have to explore and make a good decision that would be best for the symphony and for the community," Mr. Shelton said. "Certainly there are no performing arts facility in the West Valley like the Sundome."

Mr. Shelton said season ticket holders should not be concerned.

"The symphony will continue, we just won't be performing in the Sundome," he said.

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at newsblog.info/0302

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Sundome closure announcement spurs talk of a 'rescue'

Community leaders scrambling to come up with a solution

By Jack Hawn

In the wake of last week's announcement by Arizona State University that it will close the Sundome Dec. 31 as a result of a steady flow of red ink has generated more questions than answers as officials, community leaders and residents scramble to find a solution to keep the performing arts center open.

In a year of jubilant celebration to commemorate Sun City West's Silver Anniversary, a dark cloud descended over the West Valley with last Thursday's shocking announcement.

It was simply stated in a news release that Virgil Renzulli, vice president of Public Affairs for ASU, had informed the Sundome

Performing Arts Assn. board of volunteers of the university's decision.

"The reason for the closure is the Sundome's inability to operate without university subsidy," the announcement stated. (Complete text of the news release appears elsewhere on this page.)

The SPAA board held an informal meeting Tuesday to discuss possible options it might pursue and dispensation of an endowment fund created about three years ago after a scheduled renovation project was canceled.

During a widely publicized fund-raising campaign, donors pledged \$5 million to finance the upgrades. When ASU announced the project had been canceled —

about two months before work was to begin — and performance dates unfilled, contributors were furious. Nonetheless, most did not withdraw their pledges.

*"I'm very, very
sad. I live here
(in Sun City West)
too."*

—Smokey
Renehan
Sundome Manager



A call to obtain an update on the fund from Jeffrey Schemmel, senior vice president of the ASU Foundation and executive director of development, was not immediately returned. It is believed

about \$2 million remains in the fund.

Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, executive director of ASU Public Events, reported that "the foundation is going to be contacting all the donors. They're in the process of formulating that."

Commenting about the pending closure, she said, "I'm just devastated. My hope is that someone will come in and will continue to do theater in this building."

Sun City West Recreation Centers' Gen. Mgr. Mike Whiting, a member of the SPAA board, wondered why ASU waited so long to make the announcement.

"A six-month window is no time at all to put through a rescue plan," he said. "It leaves a big hole in Sun City West. The big question is how it might operate

*"A six-month
window is no time
at all to put
through a rescue
plan."*

—Gen. Mgr. Mike
Whiting



and who will operate it. It's no small operation...."

Whiting believes professional help is needed to develop a rescue plan, including legal assistance.

"I think we need to be very smart and careful about how we deal with this," he continued. "We need to be very cautious (on how to proceed). We need to look at it very professionally and that will take a little time to do that."

Whiting said he has talked with Recreation Centers' Governing Board members about the problem and — although on summer hiatus — directors may gather to

See **SUNDOME CLOSURE**,
Page 2

OVER

discuss the closure.

Board member Randy Fuller, Properties chairman, said the Rec Centers has a mutual easement on the Sundome parking lot, and consequently has an interest in what happens to the performing arts center.

"It's a community-wide issue," he said. "I hope we can set up a meeting with some of these movers and shakers. We've got a lot of good people here."

"I have sent e-mails to several key people — Joe Davisson (past president and director emeritus of SPAA), Chuck Ullman (PORA president), Rec Board directors, Del Webb-Pulte people, Carole Hubbs (District 4 representative)...."

Fuller said the reason he sent e-mails is because of a call he received from Max Wilson, the District 4 supervisor, "who was concerned about it."

Fuller said he is leaving Friday for his home in California but would "stay in touch."

ASU Public Events has operated the 7,000-seat Sundome — the world's largest single-level auditorium — since the Del Webb Corp. sold it to the university for \$1 in 1984 with a stipulation it could not be resold for 20 years.

The Maricopa County Recorder's Office reported the agreement was dated Dec. 21, 1984.

It is unknown when the decision was made to sell the facility, but Sundome manager Smokey Renehan — who expects an operating loss of between \$60,000 and \$600,000 when the fiscal year's figures are tallied June 30 — saw it coming.

"It was a surprise," she said when the bomb dropped, "but it

was going to happen. I didn't know when. It just makes sense that eventually something like this was going to happen. I'm very, very sad. I live here (in Sun City West) too."

Jennings-Roggensack said the wide gap in Renehan's estimate of operational losses was based on annual figures over the years, as low as \$60,000, as high as \$600,000.

The public events director said it takes about \$920,000 to run the Sundome, not including programming — \$185,000 for electricity alone, and \$10,000 for the sprinkler and fire services.

Jennings-Roggensack said any community group that can pay market value would be given precedence in buying the Sundome as an entertainment facility.

ASU Public Relations Director David Harrison was unable to place a value on the building, saying the university will obtain an appraisal soon.

Asked her thoughts about communities in the Sun Cities area entering into a joint ownership agreement, Jennings-Roggensack replied, "That would make great sense."

However, a local realtor who deals in "numbers" laughed at the idea, citing a long history of poor Sundome attendance figures and overhead expenses that would make such an alliance economically unattractive.

Outgoing SPAA Pres. Jon Regel reported last season's shows backed by the fund-raising organization generated \$350,000, a profit of \$100,000.

Jennings-Roggensack: "That still didn't put a dent into what we need."

at an invitation-only SPAA president's dinner, Regel excitedly unveiled the coming season — five shows with more to come.

The season apparently has been short-circuited. Thus, the Sundome's 25th year of operation will conclude with "Fiddler on the Roof," Mark Russell, "Smokey Joe's Cafe," "Crazy for You" and Wayne Newton.

However, it was announced that rental events already booked will continue through spring of 2005, including Symphony of the West Valley concerts through April.

Symphony executive director Richard Shelton, "shocked and disappointed" by the announced closure, said the board is considering its options, but did not make them public.

"We intend to be here next year and continue into the future," he said.

The Del Webb company broke ground on the Sundome Nov. 8, 1978, and used it as a marketing tool to sell homes until donating the building to ASU.

A Lawrence Welk concert opened the center Sept. 13, 1989. Attendance: 5,639 — a resounding kickoff.

DAILY NEWS-SUN

FRIDAY, JUNE 18, 2004

Sundome's closure stuns community

Timing of ASU press release angers local leaders

KATY O'GRADY
and MITCHELL VANTREASE
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Local officials are reeling from the news delivered Thursday afternoon that the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in Sun City West is closing, effective Dec. 31.

"They were mad. They were angered because some of them have been active Sundome members for 17 years," said Sundome Performing Arts Association President Jon Regal, just hours after Virgil Renzuli, ASU's vice president of public affairs, dropped the bomb.

ASU Public Events has operated the facility since Del Webb Corp. sold it to the university for \$1 in 1984.

The venue is a casualty of ASU President Michael Crow's requirement that ASU-affiliated enterprises be self-sustaining, and his refocus on education.

"With ASU's challenge to educate the growing population of metropolitan Phoenix and the state of Arizona, we need to devote every available resource to our education mission," Crow stated in a press release.

"I'm not saying it's a shock because Michael Crow has made many statements, not about the Sundome ... but



STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN FILE PHOTO

Looking over Sun City West from the roof of the Del E. Webb Memorial Hospital is the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts, which will be closed by Arizona State University Dec. 31.

his goal is to increase the research at ASU and eliminate the frill — that's not the word he used, but that was my interpretation," Regal said.

Rep. Carole Hubbs of Sun City West, R-District 4, said she's in shock about the announcement. She said she knew about Thursday's meeting with the board of directors and asked to attend.

However, they called her at home and told her not to.

"I assumed that it might come down to this," she said.

Hubbs said her next step would be to research how much it would cost to buy the Sundome. She's planning to talk with local organizations for a possibility of a grassroots effort.

"I'm sure that just keeping the air conditioning on alone is probably expensive," she said.

Hubbs said there have been fund-raisers to help fund the Sundome. But there has to be more effort put into saving the facility.

Mike Whiting, general

manager of the Recreation Centers of Sun City West, said he and other community leaders will figure out what to do about the Sundome. However, he said ASU shouldn't have waited until six months before its closure to say something.

"We needed time to put a strategy into place," said Whiting, who is on SPAA's board of directors. "Hopefully, we'll figure this out fast."

Whiting said he also talked with members of RCSCW board about the situation, but no one's come up with any ideas yet on handling the problem. They intend to gather soon to talk about the Sundome's closure.

Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, executive director of ASU Public Events, said any community group that can pay market value would be given precedence in purchasing the Sundome, provided it remains an entertainment facility. She said she wasn't sure what the market value was.

The Del Webb Corp. broke ground on the Sundome Nov.

8, 1978, and envisioned it as a marketing tool to attract homeowners to Sun City West just as the Sun Bowl amphitheater had done in Sun City.

The Sundome opened Sept. 13, 1989, when 5,639 concertgoers christened the world's largest single-level entertainment venue during a concert starring Lawrence Welk.

Before the last curtain call under ASU tutelage in December, five shows are booked — Fiddler on the Roof, Smokey Joe's Cafe, Crazy for You, political pundit Mark Russell and Wayne Newton.

But that doesn't lessen the blow among Sundome supporters and volunteers.

"It's such a tragedy because the Sundome has to be one of the largest attractions in the Phoenix area," said Joe Davisson, one of SPAA's first presidents and a director emeritus. "It's very sad. I just hope there's something that can be done."

See SUNDOME, A5

OVER

Equally stunned was Richard Shelton, executive director of the Symphony of the West Valley, the Sundome's No. 1 tenant.

"Obviously we're shocked and disappointed," he said. "We were anticipating that something like this might happen, but we didn't think ASU would shut us down in the middle of our season."

The symphony's performances run through April.

"They did this three years ago," Shelton said, explaining the symphony's season was canceled part way through because ASU officials wanted to do some renovations at the Sundome, a move that proved costly to the symphony in lost subscribers and lost revenue and landed the organization in the red for the first time in 33 years.

"We'll have to sort all of this out," he said.

Shelton said the symphony board has considered other options in the past, and will study them more intensely now.

"We've been looking at this for some time. There's not a lot of options, but we do have some," he said. "We're not prepared to make any of them public."

"We intend to be here next year, and continue into the future," he added.

Regal said he asked Renzuli if any options were available. "He said, 'I'll have to get back to you on that,'" Regal said.

Smokey Renehan, the Sundome's director, said the venue lost somewhere between \$60,000 and \$600,000 in operating costs this year. She won't know the final figures until the end of June.

Jennings-Roggensack said it takes about \$920,000 to run the facility, and that doesn't include programming. Annual overhead expenses include \$185,000 for the electrical bill and \$10,000 for the sprinkler and fire services. However, she said, the shows have always sold well.

In a story about the Sundome's 10th anniversary in 1990, Jim O'Connell, executive director of ASU public events, said "Politically, the Sundome was a very important addition to the university," which was in a battle for funding for ASU West.

Financial benefits also prompted the university to consider the transfer of ownership as a positive move, he said. If ASU accepted the Sundome, its \$12 million price tag could be counted toward the \$75 million goal of the university's centennial



JOY LAMBERT-SLAGOWSKI/DAILY NEWS-SUN FILE PHOTO

Smokey Renehan, director of the Sundome, stands in front of the venue in this photo taken Dec. 9, 2002. She said the venue lost somewhere between \$60,000 and \$600,000 in operating costs this year. She won't know the final figures until the end of June.

celebration fund drive.

Regal said last year the SPAA's shows brought in \$350,000, \$100,000 of which was profit.

"We had a very good season last year. We made money, but we're looking at it from the Sundome Performing Arts Association's view," he said.

Jennings-Roggensack said SPAA's revenue "still didn't even put a dent in what we need."

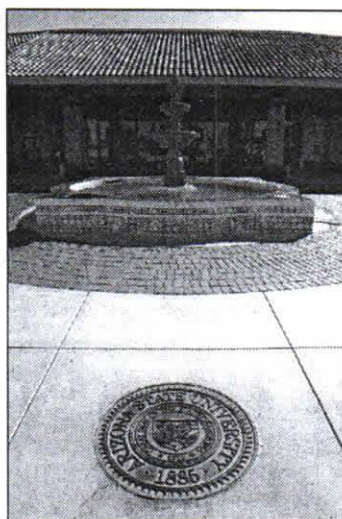
She attributes the funding problems to other performing arts venues "popping up in recent years," such as Glendale Arena, BankOne Ballpark and various theaters.

"We're not the only game in town anymore," she said.

In an attempt to introduce new revenue, the Sundome in recent years has expanded its reach beyond its traditional senior audience, bringing in younger acts as the Black Crowes.

According to the Sundome's Web site, the venue is ASU's "cultural magnet for the West Valley. It is a gateway to theater, music and dance for hundreds of thousands of Valley residents."

The Web site states the Sundome has staged performances since 1980 for "the fast-growing — but often culturally underserved — West Valley. As the communities neighboring the Sundome grow and flourish, the theater's programming has diversified to serve multiple age groups. The result is a facility that attracts more and more interest and involvement from its surrounding communities with each



STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN

The Arizona State University seal is at the entrance to the courtyard at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in Sun City West, owned and operated by the university since 1984.

passing year."

Davisson said every fund drive he has participated in has surpassed its goal. "As long as the community was aware of the need, they responded," he said.

Davisson said support came from throughout the Northwest Valley, not just Sun City West and Sun City. "That's why it's so tragic."

Regal said he wanted people to understand that his volunteer board was not behind the Sundome's closing.

"We're there to keep it open," he said. "We're not happy campers. We went home with our heads down."

Regal said staff members found out about the closing only 10 minutes before the

board.

"We are just now digesting this and understanding what direction we can go," he said.

Regal said his board will examine possible ways to reincarnate the Sundome. "If we can get some people here who want to invest in the Sundome, that would be the answer to our prayers," he said.

As for those who've already invested in the Sundome, the future is cloudier still. Many residents heeded ASU's call to donate for a major renovation a few years ago, but when the project failed to materialize, many donors then agreed to put their money into an endowment fund. Details on the fund's dispensation were unavailable as of this morning.

Jennings-Roggensack said ASU appreciates all the work and effort the West Valley put into the venue over the years.

"We deeply appreciate the many friends, including the surrounding communities, SPAA volunteer board members, donors, volunteers, business partners and others who have embraced ASU and the Sundome for the past 20 years," she said.

Regal said with this being the final season, he's hoping the community shows up in force for the last five shows.

"We're really going to push for supporting the Sundome — not with contributions, we're not doing a fund drive — but coming out and supporting the Sundome's 25th anniversary season," he said. "If we're going to close Dec. 31, we want to go out with a bang."

Sundome closing highlights cash woes

By Louie Villalobos
The Arizona Republic

Arizona State University's decision to close the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts took the Sun City West community by surprise and brought to light the financial problems the building was fighting in its battle to become self-sufficient.

The impending loss of the major cultural institution touches on many parts of West Valley life, from high schools that hold their graduations there to the Symphony of the West Valley, which plays its entire season there.

David Harrison, spokesman for ASU Public Events, said that over the past 10 years the university has given a total of about \$1 million to the Sundome, situated in Sun City West. The department's yearly budget is about \$5 million, he said.

"That certainly isn't the ideal situation," Harrison said. "But it is by no means unusual or unexpected."

What was unexpected was the decision to close the Sundome, announced last week by ASU officials.

ASU is now trying to sell the building and will give preference to potential buyers looking to keep the Sundome open as a fine-arts facility.

Jon Regel, president of the Sundome Performing Arts Association, which is responsible for booking performances, said that when he was told of the decision, a great sense of disappointment engulfed him and his board members.

"A hush fell over the whole room," he said. "Then questions began to be fired."

Some of the questions were about the money.

Regel said his group was forced to financially back all the shows of the previous year because ASU wasn't willing to do so. He said that cost about \$300,000.

"ASU couldn't afford to lose a penny on anything," he said. "So we brought in the shows. If we didn't sell one ticket, we would have to pay for all the shows out of our pockets."

The good thing was that the community turned out in great numbers and gave the group a profit of about \$100,000, which meant that much more for next year's performances. That



File photo

ASU will close the Sundome at the end of the year and put it up for sale because it can't support itself financially.

SUNDOME W. Valley arts hurt

From Page 1

same year, Regel said ASU made about \$350,000 from renting out the Sundome.

The bad thing was that it cost about \$920,000 to run the center that year, Regel said. Essentially, the facility was about \$500,000 in the hole.

"So our \$100,000 profit is a kick in the bucket to 920 (\$920,000)," Regel said.

Harrison said ASU asked the Sundome to become financially independent about two years ago, when the university stopped receiving state money it was using to help subsidize the facility.

Before then, Harrison said the university was happy to operate a fine-arts facility in the West Valley.

ASU took over the Sundome when Del Webb Corp., which developed the Sun City communities, donated it to the university in 1984. Harrison said Webb created the facility to be able to build homes around it and attract residents seeking cultural activities.

Once the communities were established, Webb asked ASU to operate the facility, Harrison said.

"He turned it over to the university to continue to operate it as a theater," he said.

But in recent years, the financial needs outweighed the educational and cultural benefits, Harrison said.

"The university is saying, 'what we really do is educate people,'" he said. "And we are going to put our financial resources to that core purpose."

Harrison said the university did look at performing major renovations to help the Sundome attract bigger acts but learned that it would cost about \$35 million and decided against the upgrades, which he said would have included rebuilding the stage area from the ground up.

Still, that doesn't make the closing any easier for a com-

munity that has grown accustomed to having the Sundome literally in their back yards.

Richard Shelton, executive director of the Symphony of the West Valley, said the loss will deal a blow to his group, which plays its entire season at the Sundome.

The symphony will be allowed to perform its upcoming season at the Sundome, provided doing so doesn't interfere with the sale of the building. Shelton said he will have to find a different, and most likely less appropriate, place to perform.

The symphony's 10-show season ends in April and will be at the halfway mark when the Sundome closes in December.

At this point, he said local churches or school gyms are being considered.

"There really isn't much out there," he said of venues in the West Valley. "It's (the Sundome) the only location that's made for the performing arts."

Regel said the immediate goal for his organization is to make sure each of the upcoming shows, which include three Broadway shows, is a memorable one.

"We're going to try to do everything we can to create a positive attitude as we go forward," he said.

He would like to hold a party after each performance where attendees could meet the performers, including Wayne Newton, who is scheduled to appear in December.

"We didn't know we were bringing in Wayne to close the season," Regel said.

Area high schools also will be affected by the closing.

The Glendale Union and Deer Valley Unified school districts have held graduation ceremonies at the Sundome. Deer Valley had reserved the building for the 2005 ceremony.

Timothy Tait, Deer Valley school district spokesman, said there are few buildings in the area that can hold the number of graduates and families the Sundome does.

"It will be unfortunate to see it shuttered," Tait said.



Associated Press

Wayne Newton will appear at the Sundome in December.

See SUNDOME Page 5

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Mendoza contributed to this article.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 23, 2004

DAILY NEWS-SUN

Scramble's on to save Sundome

Webb-ASU contract scrutinized

KATY O'GRADY
DAILY NEWS-SUN

With deed restrictions expiring at the end of this year, land housing the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts could be used for just about anything once the

property goes up for sale.

Local and county officials, meanwhile, are huddling to see if the performing arts venue in Sun City West can be saved.

Rep. Carole Hubbs of Sun City West, R-District 4, said the land is zoned commercial, and with the property probably worth more than the building itself, officials are hoping buyers don't look to raze the Sundome in favor of some other business

enterprise.

"They wanted at one point to put time shares up there," said Hubbs. "That's what we're afraid of."

The Ryerson Company owns land adjacent to the property, and Hubbs said the company wanted to build three-story condominiums at the site.

Denny Ryerson, the company's president, is not available for comment until Monday, said Marylou Degnan,

the company's marketing director.

Maricopa County Supervisor Max Wilson said he is working with local and state officials to try to save the Sundome.

"I put some feelers out to see if we could get a handle on it. It would be my view on it that it should stay exactly what it is," he said.

Del Webb Corp., now owned by Pulte Homes, gave Arizona State University the

property in 1984 for \$10, according to a warranty deed filed with the Maricopa County Recorder's Office. Restrictions on the property's use expire 20 years after the filing, which occurred Dec. 21, 1984.

Prior to the 20-year mark, Del Webb or the Sundome Performing Arts Association had a say in the property's future. After Dec. 21 this year, however, it appears anything goes.

"By the time ASU closes the Sundome, we will have completely fulfilled our obligation to Del Webb," said David Harrison, ASU's communications director. "We are being very careful to completely fulfill the requirements of the donation from Del Webb and to honor that gift."

Jacque Petroulakis, Pulte's communications director,

See SUNDOME, A5

OVER

SUNDOME: ASU will contact endowment donors

From A1

said the company is examining the deed to see whether Pulte remains a player.

"It's just up to us to look at that deed and make sure we understand it. After we do that, if there's any decision to get involved, we'll definitely touch base with the SPAA board, of which we are a part of, and ASU," Petroulakis said.

"Clearly, the intent of donating this land was to maintain a great venue in the West Valley for cultural and entertainment value," she said.

Citing revenue losses, ASU officials notified the Sundome board Thursday of their intent to sell the property after Dec. 31. They said any community group offering fair-market value and promising to keep it as an entertainment venue would be given preferential consideration.

Harrison said university officials aren't sure how much the property is worth. "That is probably one of the next steps. There will be some sort of appraisal so we can put it up on the market," he said.

Hubbs said uses for the Sundome are limited given its design.

"How do you appraise it other than just the land because the building itself is just a monster," she said. "I can't think of any professional entity that would want it."

Wilson said he will fight any attempt to transform the Sundome into something other than an entertainment venue.

"I absolutely would not support any type of zoning change that would have to go through the board of supervisors," he said. "I would like the county to be able to continue to operate it or have a group be able to do it."

Wilson said he has the county's facility management team looking into the possibilities, and he has been discussing the issue with Hubbs, Randy Fuller of the Recreation Centers of Sun City West and Chuck Ullman of the Property Owners and Residents Association.

Said Hubbs, "If something can be worked out with the county, that would be absolutely wonderful. It doesn't have to be just for Sun City West."



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN FILE PHOTO

Bob Hope and George Burns entertain at the 10th anniversary celebration of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts, Sun City West, Nov. 2, 1990.

Wilson said he believes ASU ought to consider donating the Sundome to the county considering Webb gave it to the university in order to gain a tax break.

"They've been losing money on this and they need to do something to stop losing money, and if that's the case, we can help them. If they're looking to just make some dollars," the county will investigate its options, he said.

The county will not purchase it, he added. "We will buy it for \$1," Wilson said.

Harrison, however, said ASU can't give away the property.

"As a state entity, as a public entity, we are not allowed to make donations," he said.

Whether the building is razed and what use the property is put to will be up to the buyer, Harrison said.

"We haven't solicited any offers at this point and to my knowledge, none have been received," he said.

One company that won't be bidding on the property is Sun Health, which is mentioned in the deed granting the property to ASU.

"Sun Health and Sun Health Properties have no plans for acquisition of the Sundome plaza," said Lee Peterson, Sun Health's

president and CEO. "We have not explored it in any way, nor has anyone approached us on it, but it is not among our plans at all at this time."

The deed includes a provision prohibiting the property from being used for an acute-care hospital until July 28, 2003, provided that by July 28, 1988, Sun Health has started constructing a hospital in the community. Peterson said Webb included the provision to ensure Sun Health's investment in the community by preventing a competing hospital from opening on the Sundome land.

Petroulakis said Del Webb also has no plans to purchase the property.

Sundome Director Smokey Renehan said those who have booked the Sundome will have their contracts honored through spring 2005, "with the caveat that the rental will go forward provided it does not impede the sale."

Half a dozen area high schools use the facility for graduations, and the Symphony of the West Valley holds its annual concert series there.

Renehan, who's been with the Sundome five years, said she and her staff were notified Thursday right before the board was told of the sale.

"It's better than getting

(notified) at Christmas, and we have six months to prepare," she said.

Renehan said she isn't sure if she'll seek another position with ASU.

"If there are university jobs, we can apply for them. I haven't made up my mind yet," she said. "We're just waiting to see what happens. It was a shock but we're dealing with it."

Harrison said area residents whose donations went into an endowment for the Sundome will be contacted about their money.

"I think that ASU is committed to making this as smooth a transition as possible, and it certainly has been a wonderful experience for those of us who have worked with the Sun Cities for the last 20 years," he said. "As the university moves forward, I hope there may be more opportunities for partnerships in the Northwest Valley."

Aside from the Sundome, ASU has other ties with the Sun Cities. Ullman announced recently that PORA was working with ASU West to bring educational courses to Sun City West, and talks are taking place for a similar arrangement in Sun City.

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

CRACKS-UP



Photo by Erik Burg/Independent Newspapers

According to Sundome Director Smokey Renehan, the cracks and potholes at the Sundome parking lot will be filled in before the fall season.

COMING SOON

Sundome lot to be repaired

By Erik Burg
Independent Newspapers

When the R.H. Johnson Recreation Center's parking lot received a makeover two weeks ago, the gaping cracks in the adjacent parking lot of the ASU Sundome received no attention.

But according to Sundome Director Smokey Renehan, the lot is due for and will receive an annual pothole and crack fill-in before the start of the fall season. Repairs are coming soon, he pledged.

R.H. Johnson Recreation Center's neighbor to the north, the ASU Sundome, 19403 R. H. Johnson Blvd., plays host to a variety of live entertainment, such as theater and music festivals.

"It's always done in the summer," Ms. Renehan said of any refurbishing at the Sundome. "We do maintenance in the summer when there are no events."

She added that the parking lot, approximately the same age as the 23-year old auditorium, had not been resealed to her knowledge.

In the opinion of R.H. Johnson Recreation Center Projects Manager Larry Griffith, the Sundome lot is an "eyesore."

"Their asphalt is coming up, and there's exposed aggregate," Mr. Griffith said. "Water is asphalt's biggest enemy."

He added that he had worked at the R.H. Johnson Recreation Center for approximately four years and had never seen any work done on the lot, aside from the addition of handicapped parking signs.

The recent repaving job in front of the Johnson center's administration lecture and social halls was the final phase in a three-stage process. The phase includes seal-coating and striping.

"We do it in thirds because it's so big," Mr. Griffith said. "We'll probably get two more years out of the first phase before we have to start all over again."

Although the Sundome has no events during the summer months, its lot is frequently used as a pick-up and drop-off point for

buses carrying Sun City West residents to various activities, such as trips to Laughlin.

Residents have expressed concerns not only about the lot's state of disrepair but also about their safety in the dimly lit Sundome lot. Ms. Renehan said the Sundome has no idea when such trips take place, and it is their policy to use lights only for Sundome events.

"We do not have the parking lot lights on 24-7," she said. "It's quite expensive to run the lights all the time. We have to be fiscally responsible."

Ms. Renehan said the first event the Sundome will host this season is the graduation ceremonies of Phoenix's Bryman School.

Its concert season will begin in October with a concert by Monica Mancini performing the greatest hits of the father, famous composer Henry Mancini. The concert will be at 3 p.m. Oct. 19.

For more information or tickets, call the Sundome Box Office at 975-1900.

Sundome raises interest in Northwest Valley properties

DEL WEBB: Developer conceived performing-arts center as marketing tool

MICHAEL MARESH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

A lot has happened in Sun City West since Sept. 13, 1980, but that date stands as one of the most significant the community has experienced in its 25 years of existence.

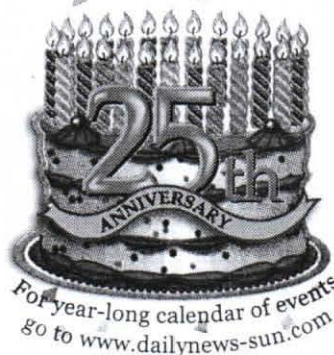
On that date, Lawrence Welk and his orchestra performed the first of two shows for the grand opening of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in Sun City West.

Don Tuffs, the general manager of the Sundome at the time, remembers both shows selling out as soon as tickets became available. He said that over the years, the center has put on a variety of shows, and he was never surprised by the huge attendance figures.

At full capacity, the Sundome seats 7,169 people, and in its heyday, it was rare for the theater not to reach full capacity, Tuffs said.

The Sundome, the largest single-level indoor theater in the world, was built as a marketing tool for Del Webb. When constructed 23 years ago, the Sundome presented challenges in three areas — design, fabrication and

Happy Birthday Sun City West
You're invited to today's FREE
kickoff parties, 1-4 p.m.
R.H. Johnson Social Hall &
Palm Ridge Summit Hall
music, refreshments & more.



erection — because of its size and shape. The challenges diminished when Del Webb brought in a building superintendent who had previously worked on the California Angels' baseball stadium in Anaheim, Calif.

Tuffs said Sun City had the Sun Bowl, but it had to deal with the weather elements. During winter months, the Sundome drew acts away from the Sun Bowl. He added that the Sundome could not have asked for a better opening act.

"In 1980, Lawrence Welk was very popular with Sun

Citians and Sun City West-ers," he said, adding that 14,338 people attended the two shows.

Tuffs said a lot of stars have performed at the Sundome, but none compared to the Nov. 2, 1990, Gala Celebration, which comedy superstars George Burns and Bob Hope headlined.

Fred Dunikoski, who has served on the Sundome Performing Arts Association since 1988, said it was a coup to have both superstars perform on the same night on the same stage. He said it is his understanding the Sundome is the only theater that can boast that distinction. Shows such as this, he said, attracted people from all over and proved to be extremely important to the West Valley real-estate market.

"We are the venue for the West Valley, and have been for the last 25 years," he said, adding very few communities have nearby performing-arts theaters.

Since the 1990s, Dunikoski said, the Sundome has turned into more than just a performing-arts theater.

"The month of May is used daily for graduates of West Valley high schools, Thunderbird Academy and Arizona State University West," he said, adding that the Sundome is also the venue for numerous programs for schoolchildren throughout the year.

Former manager charts history of Sundome

DAILY NEWS-SUN

THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 2003

MICHAEL MARESH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

When Sun City West was just a blip on the radar screen, developers knew it needed something that would set it apart from the already established Sun City.

Donald Tuffs, former and first general manager of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts, gave residents a look behind the scenes of the center as it opened in 1980.

Tuffs was the guest speaker at the 17th-annual spring meeting of the Sun Cities Area Historical Society. He said the Sundome originated partly because Sun City West needed a jewel to attract residents to the retirement community.

"When you talk about the Sundome, you must talk about Sun City," Tuffs said. "We had to figure out how to beat our competition, and that competition was Sun City."

Developer Del Webb realized the challenge and started to embrace it by building R.H. Johnson Recreation Center, which turned out to be the largest rec center in the Sun Cities. Webb then built Hillcrest Golf Course before undertaking the construction of the Sundome.

Tuffs said Webb officials looked at the Sun Bowl, located at 107th and Olive

avenues in Sun City, as a model of what was to come in Sun City West.

When designing the Sundome, Webb thought of building an amphitheater similar to the Sun Bowl with an inflatable roof. A permanent roof structure replaced the inflatable concept because it was more feasible, Tuffs said.



Tuffs

But even before construction of the center started, Tuffs was working behind the scenes in an attempt to line up future acts.

Tuffs said he had to get the word out that there was a place in Sun City West where performers could stop and entertain instead of bypassing the venue when traveling to and from Southern California.

In the Sundome's first year of existence, 110 events were held in an attempt to offer residents a variety of choices.

"A lot of work went into it," he said. "It was just a tremendous amount of work. We needed 110 performances every year."

A lot of entertainers, he said, have come and gone, and added his favorite entertainer without question is Red Skelton.

The entertainer performed at the Sundome several times and always came out to the community several days in advance to meet and talk to residents.

Tuffs said Skelton never asked for anything out of the

ordinary. Other performers requested some ludicrous things, but he declined to say what some of those requests entailed.

Twenty years ago, Tuffs said, Arizona State University was considered a big player in the performing arts, with its Gammage Auditorium already up and running.

At the time, ASU was ready to kick off a \$100 million fund-raising campaign.

Tuffs said he thought it would be good synergy for Webb to donate the \$14 million Sundome to ASU to kick off the fund-raiser, and the developer agreed.

Tuffs said the Sundome was and is still expensive to maintain, and ASU is better equipped to handle and schedule shows for the venue.

Listening to Tuffs Wednesday afternoon were the seven original members of the Sun City West Variety Show. The variety shows were some of the first performances at the Sundome in 1980.

Since 1980, variety performances have raised more than \$1 million for Sun Health.

Variety performer Bess Porterfield said it is good to see residents are still visiting the Sundome after 23 years.

"It is amazing," she said, adding that the cooperation of the residents made the



STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Betsy Bennet listens to the guest speaker at the Sun Cities Area Historical Society meeting in Sun City West Wednesday.

Sundome and her group's performances a smashing success.

Marilyn Friebolin, also a variety performer, said Sun City West can boast of having something other communities

do not have.

"I think it was the greatest thing we have ever had," she said. "I could not believe how large and beautiful it was."

Michael Maresch can be reached at 876-2513 or mmaresch@aztrib.com.



STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Dick Elton and Theda Vickers take a Sun City West history quiz at the spring meeting of the Sun Cities Area Historical Society in Sun City West Wednesday.

SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT

JULY 24-30, 2002

**Del Webb donates
\$50,000 to Sundome**

Pulte Homes and Communities by Del Webb recently presented a \$50,000 check to the Sundome Performing Arts Association toward the Sundome's programming endowment.

The check represents the fifth payment of a \$250,000, five-year commitment to the Sundome.

John Waldron, director of public affairs for Pulte Homes and Communities by Del Webb presented the check to Sundome officials.

"Through their wholehearted endorsement of the Sundome's programming endowment, Pulte Homes and Communities by Del Webb are making an important contribution to the community's vitality," says Jon Regal, SPAA president.

"The endowment allows us to expand the entertainment offerings throughout the year, attract a wider audience and expose them to our fabulous, remodeled facilities."



Photo by Lu Urdang/Special to the Independent

Pulte donates to Sundome

Pulte Homes and Communities by Del Webb recently presented \$50,000 to the Sundome Performing Arts Association. From left, Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, executive director of ASU Public Events; John Waldron, director of public affairs for Pulte Homes and Communities by Del Webb; L. Birt Kellam, SPAA immediate past president; Julie Gillespie, vice president of the ASU Foundation.

Poor ticket sales plunge Sundome further in red

SEARCHING FOR SOLUTIONS:
Impact of 9-11 continues to
affect venue

1st of 2 parts

KATY O'GRADY
DAILY NEWS-SUN

If only they could all be like Paul Anka.

Arizona State University's Sundome Center for the Performing Arts wouldn't be in financial straits if more shows sold as well as Anka's upcoming performance Friday.

"Since Sept. 11 — that infamous date that we all know so well — we've seen a significant decline in attendance at events at the Sundome," said David Harrison, director of communications for ASU Public Events, which manages the Sundome.

The performing arts center has been operating in a deficit since then, and ASU is looking to revamp the center's programming to stop the losses.

"Everything's in a flux right now," said Sundome Director Smokey Renehan. "We're just concentrating on getting through this season."

Birt Kellam, past president of the Sundome Performing Arts Association, which is a fund-raising arm for the center, said the Sundome booked Bernadette Peters, Patti LaBelle and the Commodores, all of whom did worse than expected this season. "We put together what we thought was a gang-buster season, something for everyone no matter their age," he said. "Paul Anka, if they were all like that, we'd be fine."

"I'm mystified," Kellam said. "I see the problem. I don't know what the solution is."

The Sundome's season began in September and ends in June 2003, but already lower than



STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN FILE PHOTO

Wearing a Bob Dylan-esque wig, Gabe Cesare, left, sings at a block party for Sun City Grand residents when Dylan performed at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in August 2001. Dylan is the biggest box-office draw in recent years.

expected box-office receipts have compounded a problem that began in 2001. Anka is "the first time this season they'll make money," Kellam said.

"It really started last year," Renehan said. "This year (the problem) is bigger than last year. The impact builds," she said.

Kellam said he doesn't believe 9-11 alone is to blame. "I think a lot of things get blamed on that, but the economy was going south before that," he

said. He also doesn't believe ticket prices are too high — "We're already beneath the market," he said — or that there are any issues with the venue itself. He said Dodge Theatre in Phoenix, which unlike the Sundome is for-profit, also has been in the red this year.

"It's not just us," he said. "If it happens enough, we'll be able to renegotiate prices with some of the artists. That's already happening."

Besides revenue from ticket sales, the Sundome collects rental from the Symphony of the West Valley, about \$96,000 for the season. Total rental revenue for events such as the Sun City West Variety Show, the Northwest Valley Chamber of Commerce Better Living Expo and Daily News-Sun Taste of Valley Cooking School average about \$200,000 to \$300,000 per year, depending on the number of rental events and whether the sponsoring organizations are nonprofit, Renehan said.

Changing demographics

Other than the upcoming Anka show, one of the last major draws at the Sundome was the August 2001 Bob Dylan concert, aimed at attracting Baby Boomers and younger audiences.

The outreach with younger acts began two years ago as the center's attempt to let Valley residents know the Sundome isn't exclusive to the Sun Cities, and to tap into other pocketbooks that can help keep the center afloat. Harrison said ASU has contended with the center's reputation as a seniors-only facility since Del Webb Corp. donated the Sundome to the university in 1984.

"That has been a battle that we have fought for as long as ASU has been involved in the Sundome," Harrison said. "We've worked so hard to combat that."

Webb began construction on the Sundome in 1978, and dedicated it in 1980, when it welcomed

See SUNDOME, A5

OVER

SUNDOME:

Traditional acts fail to draw crowds

From A1

Lawrence Welk as its first act.

As the largest indoor, single-level performing-arts center in the world, the Sundome officially seats 7,030, Renehan said. Dylan's folk-rock concert drew more than 5,000, which was almost double that of some performances in recent years.

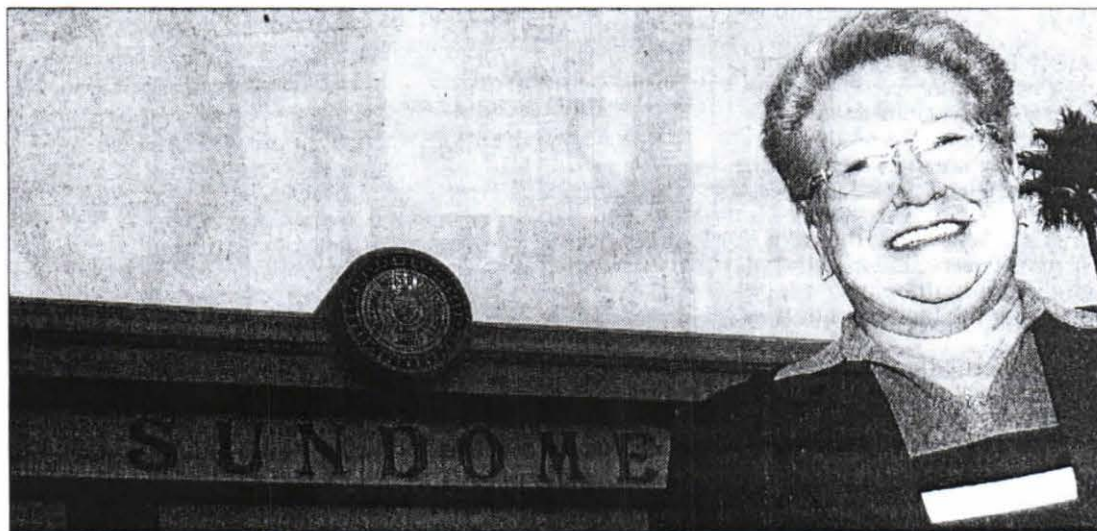
"In the past, they'd be between 2,500 and 3,500. It's a lot less (now)," Renehan said. "The average, the quote 'traditional' acts, don't bring in the number of people they used to. The West Valley's demographics have changed significantly."

Harrison said Dylan was "very successful," but not all of ASU Public Events' attempts to draw younger audiences have paid off. Plans for "Cirque," "Asleep at the Wheel," "Cinderella," and "Triple Shot of Rock" featuring Loverboy, Survivor and Eddie Money, all of which were considered shows to attract younger audiences, have been canceled because of poor ticket sales, he said.

Many West Valley families are at a point in their lives where they can't afford to support the arts or don't have the time, he said.

"Until they're a little bit more on their feet as a family, we won't be seeing them as audiences," he said.

In-disposable income



JOY LAMBERT-SLAGOWSKI/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Smokey Renehan is the director of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts.

'I'm mystified. I see the problem. I don't know what the solution is.'

Birt Kellam, former president
Sundome Performing Arts Association

Aside from an inability to cash in on younger audiences with any reliability, the Sundome faces other sobering realities. Renehan and Harrison said falling interest rates have taken a toll on Sun Citizens' entertainment spending.

"Not only are we not attracting new audiences at this point, but we're also not bringing back traditional audiences in Sun City," Harrison said. "The bad economy is hurting everyone; 9-11 hurt everyone. Also, election years are traditionally very hard for ticket sales."

Talk about war with Iraq, as with any war, also has hurt arts groups nationwide.

"The Persian Gulf War was very, very hard on arts organizations all over the country," Harrison said.

Add to that slashed state funding of \$260,000, Renehan said, and the picture gets worse. Harrison also said ASU Public Events used to subsidize some Sundome costs, but has eliminated that since the Legislature ordered universities to cut their spending.

"All of this has come sort of simultaneously with some changes in the touring, the performing-arts industry, where performers are looking to increase fees and cut even better deals where it's more lucrative on their end of the table," Harrison said. "It's sort of a double squeeze, so the Sundome's been operating at a deficit for some time."



FILE PHOTO/DAILY NEWS-SUN

George Burns, along with Bill Cosby and Alan King, were the only artists who have been allowed to smoke on stage at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts.

SUNDOME TRIVIA

- Del Webb Corp. broke ground in 1978 on what remains the largest single-level theater in the world.
- Lawrence Welk, U.S. Sen. Dennis DeConcini and 5,639 concertgoers opened the Sundome on Sept. 13, 1980.
- Del Webb Corp. sold the center to Arizona State University for \$1 in 1984.
- Former President Gerald Ford and former astronaut James Lovell have appeared there.

DAILY NEWS-SUN

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 11, 2002

ASU searches for way to revitalize Sundome

CHEAPER PERFORMERS: Booking lesser-known entertainment would reduce ticket, production costs

2nd of 2 parts

KATY O'GRADY
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Despite losing money on ticket sales, the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts is not about to go dark.

What may change, however, is its programming.

Sundome Director Smokey Renehan assures the community the venue will continue its season and will continue partnering with community organizations such as Theater Works.

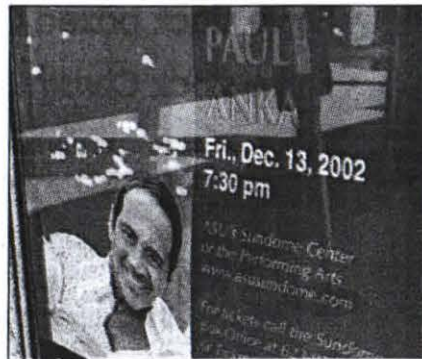
"We just don't know which way we're going yet," she said.

One direction might be booking less expensive performers, meaning lower ticket prices.

A couple of years ago, the Sundome offered a series titled "You Don't Know Me But" That brought in lesser-known acts at cheaper

production and ticket costs, said David Harrison, director of communications for ASU Public Events, which manages the Sundome.

Something similar might be brought back next season, although nothing is final yet.



In addition, ASU Public Events will probably look at more flexible scheduling that doesn't involve booking acts a season in advance.

"All of these things are sort of new ideas that we're just sort of tossing around," Harrison said. "We will still



JOY LAMBERT-SLAGOWSKI/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Kathy Howe of Sun City Grand checks upcoming shows at the Sundome box office. She was returning Tony Orlando tickets for a refund Tuesday after the performer canceled his show. Inset shows Paul Anka, who is expected to draw a crowd to the Sundome Friday night.

maintain the possibility of some big-name programming, because some of the big names, like Paul Anka, are doing very well."

About a year ago, a programming endowment was established with funds donated for a Sundome renovation project that was scrapped. Construction estimates came in \$8 million more than planned, so ASU

officials canceled the project and asked donors, who had given more than \$5 million, to leave their money for the endowment.

Some donors asked for their money back, but many left it in the endowment.

"It's about \$4 million right now," Renehan said. Interest from the fund helps offset the costs of more celebrated performers.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Other attempts to revitalize the Sundome's bottom line include booking more rental programming and partnering with community organizations such as Theater Works, which on Tuesday presented "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever" at the Sundome to about 5,000

See SUNDOME, A5

OVER

From A1

school children. In September, the two arts organizations teamed up for a performance of "Meet Me in St. Louis," also performed at the Sundome.

"Our hope is that we can begin to look at some new means of programming the Sundome that would involve more community partnerships, more rentals and more co-promoted events where someone else is sharing the risk," Harrison said. "It just might look a little different than it is currently."

Debbie Wilden, executive director of

the Northwest Valley Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber already books its annual Better Living Expo at the Sundome, but has no other events that would fit a venue that size. However, she said, other exhibitions such as a car show can and have been staged there. Those events combined with the cultural aspects make the Sundome an important part of the West Valley's offerings, Wilden said.

"We have it on our Web site. We talk about it in terms of what it means to quality of life," she said. "I think we all realize what a big asset it is."

The chamber supports the center through an annual Sundome Sale-A-Thon where members donate a portion of their sales on a certain day to the center.

Harrison said he hopes the West Valley, young and old alike, embraces the changes to come and supports the Sundome by attending shows.

"If people value the Sundome and are able to ... we hope they please vote with their ticket purchase," he said.

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

New and improved

CHUCK HEEMAN
DAILY NEWS-SUN

While renovations to ASU's Sundome Center for the Performing Arts may not be as thorough as originally planned, the Sun City West facility is getting a major facelift this summer.

"All of the cosmetics — the benches, the awnings, wallpaper, things like that — were all 20 years old," said Sundome director Smokey Renehan. "By the time we're finished, the place will look like new. That may take a while, but we've made great progress this summer."

The Sundome renovations were planned in two phases. Phase I included replacement of outside benches and awnings, renovation of restrooms, a new paint job, the installation of new marquees and other less noticeable changes.

"Most of the Phase I work is already complete," Renehan said. "Some of it has to wait for the larger projects to be finished."

Phase II in the renovations was to include larger projects such as the refinishing of the entire stage shell, replacement of all carpeting and other major projects.

Funding for the larger renovation fell through late last year, but a \$100,000 donation by the Sundome Performing Arts Association allowed the carpet replacement to be done as scheduled.

"The Association contributed their part, and ASU is paying for the rest," Renehan said. "ASU is also paying for all of the other upgrades we are seeing, along with regular maintenance."

While physical renovations have had to wait, programming at the Sundome is entering a new era.

Of the \$5.3 million originally raised through cash and pledges for the capital improvement campaign last year, more than \$5 million has now been redirected to Sundome programming. In addition, ASU Public Events will use its \$1 million capital campaign commitment, raised from a \$1 ticket surcharge, to add to the earnings of the endowment.

A \$1.1 million anonymous donation, received in March, is also designed to upgrade Sundome programming.

The endowment money will not be used for physical renovations, according to Renehan.

"That money has nothing to do with this renovation," she said. "ASU and the SPAA are paying for the work being done this summer."

With the new funding in place, the 2001-2002 Sundome season includes a number of entertainment acts not usually seen in a Sun City West atmosphere.

Country star Dwight Yoakam performed at the Sundome July 1, and rock legend Bob Dylan is scheduled for Aug. 23. In a radical departure from regular programming, The Black Crowes, a

hard-rock band, will play the Sundome Sept. 9.

"We've had to fight the perception that the Sundome is only for seniors," Renehan said. "We've been very aggressive in getting new, more diverse acts to come here. Shows like Bob Dylan and The Black Crowes will put us on the map."

Renehan said tickets are selling "very well" for both the Dylan and Black Crowes shows, and the Yoakam concert was a near sellout.

"We had a great response for the (Yoakam) concert," she said. "In the winter, it would have sold out, but so many people are gone for the summer. Either way, we were very happy with the whole event."

Renehan said the public can expect more events to be added to the Sundome's already announced lineup.

The facility's renovations will only help to bring more people to the Sundome, which in turn will allow even more programming, Renehan said.

"Obviously, the nicer the facility, the more people will enjoy coming here," she said.

While the carpet replacement is being performed by a professional company, all other renovations are the work of Michael York and Jack Ellis,

who make up the Sundome's entire maintenance staff.

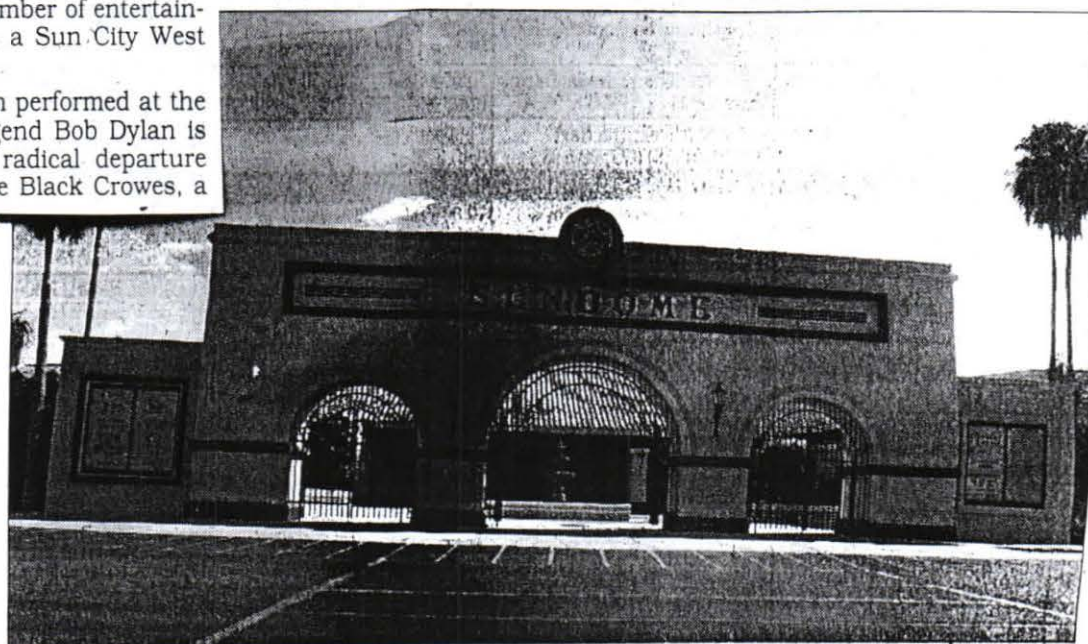
"These guys are amazing," Renehan said. "Jack works a half day, and does more than most people do in an eight-hour shift. Michael keeps this place together, and they've done a wonderful job with all the changes this summer."

Renehan said the renovations called for in the original plan will be completed, but not on the time frame called for last year.

"We will get the stage refurbished, but that will probably be next year," she said. "To do it right, you have to shut down for about two months, and that won't happen this year. The rest of the smaller items will be done as soon as we can get to them."

Renehan said she hopes to be able to re-stain the existing tile in the facility's two concession areas to match the new color scheme.

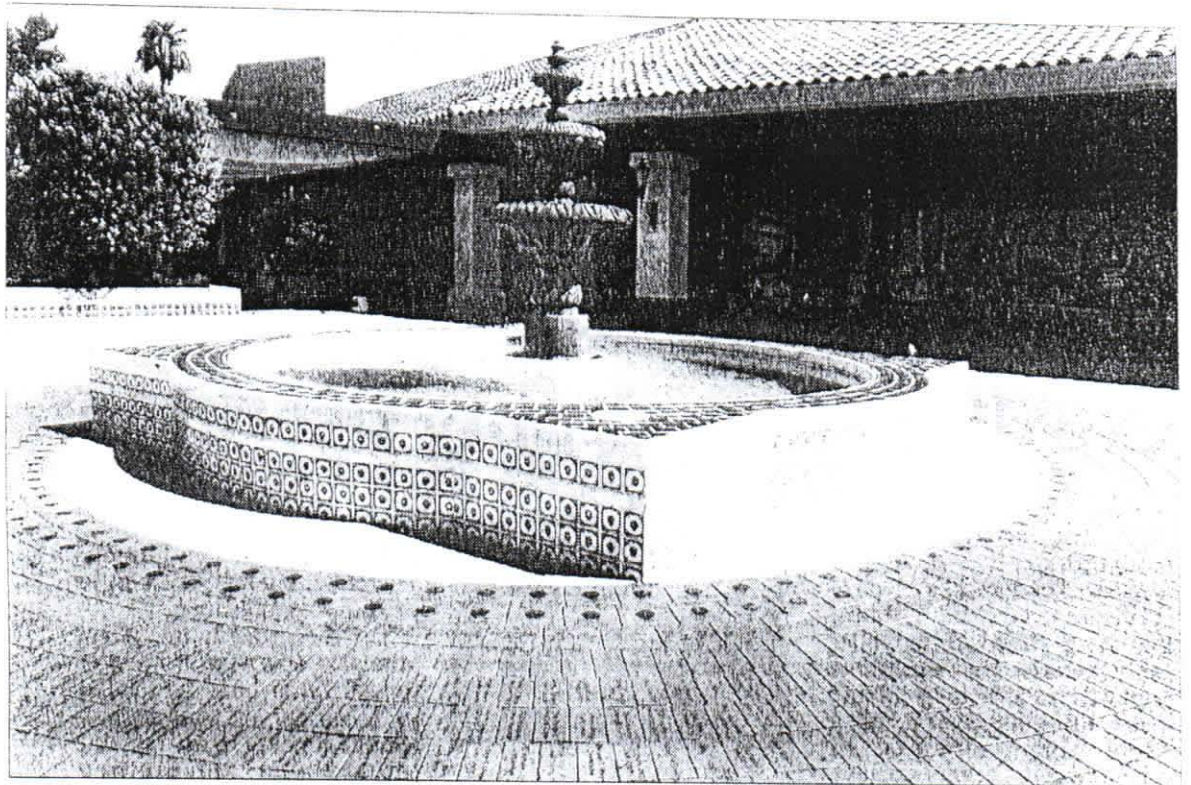
"We'll eventually have everything matching," she said. "The colors may have been a good idea 20 years ago, but times have changed, and we will too."



MOLLIE J. HOPPER/DAILY NEWS-SUN

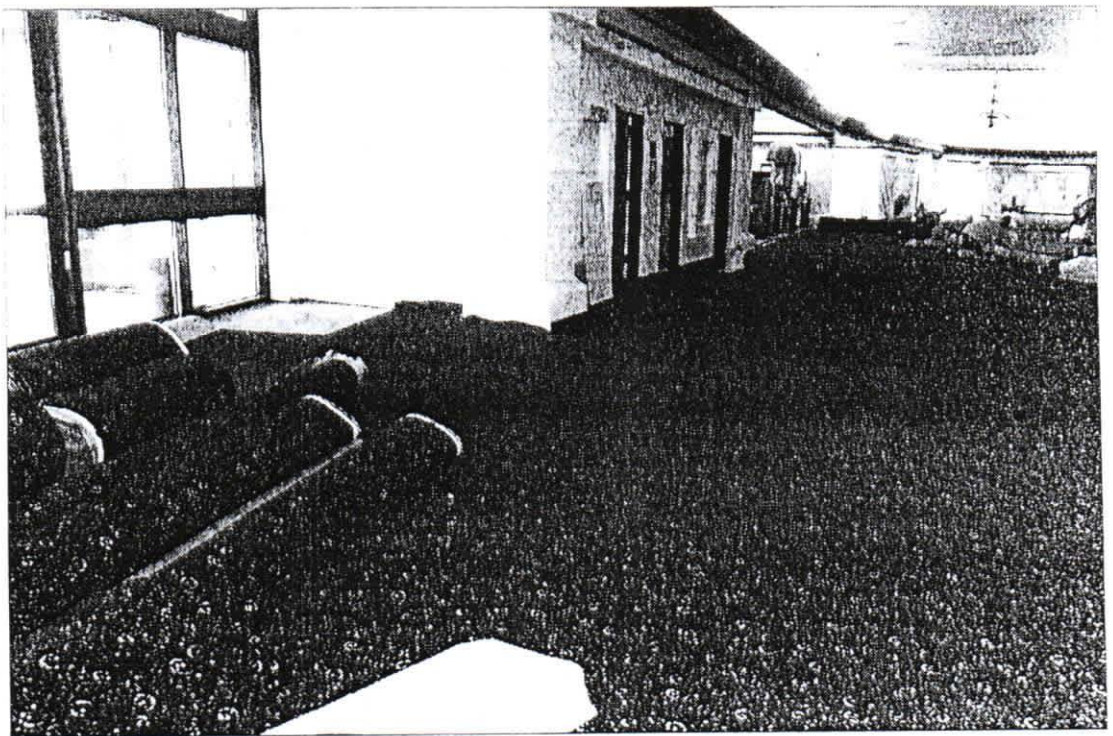
Sundome director Smokey Renehan said the 20-year old marquees on the right will match the new marquees on the left when the facility's summer renovations are complete.

OVER



MOLLIE J. HOPPES

The tile on the Sundome's main entrance's fountain was replaced over the summer. The original tile was 20 years old, as were many of the facility's cosmetic features.



MOLLIE J. HOPPES

More than 5,400 feet of carpet will be replaced throughout the Sundome during the summer. The new carpet, along with most of the other summer renovations, should be complete before the Aug. 23 concert featuring Bob Dylan.



MOLLIE J. HOPPES

Sundome director Sinokey, Renahan shows off the facility's new benches and awnings. The improvements are part of the first phase of Sundome renovations designed to update the facility before the 2001-2002 season.

6-18-2001

FRIDAY, JUNE 18, 2001

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

For ASU, Sundome is setting

West Valley arts center to be sold

By Louie Villalobos
and Monica Mendoza
The Arizona Republic

After almost 25 years of operation, the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts is being sold because of its inability to become self-sufficient, Arizona State University officials announced Thursday.

ASU officials said the Sundome will be put up for sale, with preference being given to potential buyers looking to keep it open as a performing-arts center.

ASU President Michael Crow said in a news release that he directed all of ASU's auxiliary divisions to become self-sufficient, something the Sundome has failed to do.

He said other divisions, such as the university bookstore and the Alumni Association, are close to reaching that goal.

ASU has operated the Sundome, located in Sun City West, since 1984.

"If it comes to a choice of putting a teacher in a classroom or putting an artist on stage, there is no choice," said Smokey Renehan, the Sundome's director.

Renehan said her staff was

saddened by the news and expected West Valley residents to react with equal disappointment.

She said the Sundome was given a great amount of community support.

"We're right in their backyard," she said. "When most of the people in the community and the surrounding communities bought their houses, they bought their houses because where they come from, the arts are the norm."

There are still several events scheduled for the rest of this year. On the list of performances are *Fiddler on the Roof*, Mark Russell, *Smokey Joe's Cafe*, *Crazy for You* and Wayne Newton.

On average, Renehan said, the center put on three Broadway shows a year and several concerts.

Past concerts included a Bob Dylan show and several performances by the Symphony of the West Valley.

Richard Shelton, executive director of the symphony, said the closure would pose a real hardship because there are no similar venues on the west side where it can perform.

From Page B1

Shelton said he was told the symphony would be allowed to finish its 10-concert season at the Sundome, provided the performances don't interfere with the sale of the building.

The symphony's season ends in April.

"That would be the ideal thing for us," Shelton said. "Our obligation is to our subscribers and to those people who have already invested in the season."

The news came as a shock to Deer Valley Unified School District officials, who had the Sundome reserved for 2005

high school graduation ceremonies. The Deer Valley district held three graduation ceremonies there this year and the Glendale Union High School District held four.

"The closure of the Sundome is a detriment to the entire West Valley," said Timothy Tait, Deer Valley district spokesman. "It is a cultural and civic point of pride for the whole northwest Valley."

The Deer Valley district has held graduation ceremonies in the performing-arts center for at least 10 years. There are few venues large enough to accommodate graduation ceremonies, Tait said.

See SUNDOME Page B2

Daily News-Sun • Thursday, May 3, 2001

The Sundome is back

Donor's \$1.1 million gift prompts early reopening

CHUCK HEEMAN
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Thanks to the generosity of local donors, and the special effort made by one anonymous giver, the Sundome will open its 2001-2002 season much sooner than anticipated.

Funds previously raised for the renovation of the facility have been "redirected" to begin the season in July, rather than in January. The Sundome had been scheduled for a complete renovation during the calendar year 2001, but when construction estimates exceeded original estimations, the upgrading of the facility was put on hold.

"With the assistance from the recent redirection of funds, we were able to secure contracts with some of the top touring performances in the nation," said Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, ASU public events executive director. "We are very excited to present these big-name acts and look forward to the Sundome's continued expansion as a center of activity in the West Valley."

More than 16 artists have been scheduled for the season. Kicking off the concert series is country music star and budding actor Dwight Yoakam, who will appear July 1.

Names like Sergio Mendes (Sept. 14), Julio Iglesias (Oct. 14), Pam Tillis (Nov. 29), the Charlie Daniels Band (Dec. 7) and Itzhak Perlman (Feb. 13) dot the growing list of acts already booked. Joining the nationally known stars on the schedule are local favorites such as the Student Mariachi Performance scheduled for Dec. 6 and a celebration of one of music's legends in "Our Sinatra," booked for Jan. 19.

Anonymous donor

Because of what Jennings-Roggensack called the "extraordinary response" to the Sundome Performing Arts Association programming endowment drive, one anonymous donor pledged \$1.1 million, committing the entire amount to the endowment fund.

"I've been so awed by the level of support for the Sundome that I've decided to leave the entire sum intact," the donor said.

The donor offered the amount as a challenge grant, matching on a percentage basis the total amount other Sundome capital campaign donors committed to the program, up to the \$1.1 million total.

Program and facility improvements

Of the \$5.3 million originally raised through cash and pledges for the capital improvement campaign last year, more than \$5 million has now been redirected to Sundome programming. With the completion of pledges, more than \$3 million will be designated specifically to fund

the Sundome's new programming endowment, enhancing the facility's show lineup. In addition, ASU Public Events will now use its \$1 million capital campaign commitment, raised from a \$1 ticket surcharge, to add to the earnings of the endowment.

The SPAA also announced that the balance of its \$800,000 pledge to the campaign will be redirected to the continuing physical enhancements to the facility. Restroom renovations and additions to date have used \$440,000 of the pledge.

"This is a remarkable response,"

Jennings-Roggensack said. "We are thrilled that so many donors want to do what is best for the Sundome and want to be a part of its success."

New courtyard awnings and benches, fresh paint in the lobby, courtyard and exterior trim, new parking lot signage, building marquees, event attendant uniforms, a refurbished orchestra shell and new chairs for musicians are among the improvements under way, according to Jennings-Roggensack.

She added that new carpeting would be installed throughout the hall this summer, with the SPAA providing \$100,000, more than half the estimated cost.

Auditorium enhancements

The Sundome's auditorium will be modified using a system of "pipe and drape" to block off rear seating areas for selected performances. According to Jennings-Roggensack, the system will allow the hall to become viable for artistically significant, smaller-scale performances for which fewer seats are ordinarily sold.

About half of the auditorium's 7,016 seats can be eliminated from view using the system, improving both acoustics and aesthetics for the smaller attractions and making the facility more attractive to a wider variety of acts.

A wider range of artists

"When some artists whose work in intimate hear that the Sundome seats more than 7,000 people, they become concerned because their audiences may not ordinarily be that large," Jennings-Roggensack said. "No one wants to play to a half-full house."

Acts under the "smaller" category that Jennings-Roggensack hopes to attract to the Sundome include dance companies, theatrical performers, performance artists, concert soloists, small ensembles and new and emerging artists of all musical genres.

"The 'pipe and drape' schematic is

really ingenious," said the SPAA's Birt Kellam. "My hat goes off to the Sundome staff and others from the university who have been involved in our efforts to re-envision the future of the Sundome. Some very creative thinking has been augmented by extraordinarily hard work. The university has rolled up its sleeves and put its heart in to this process. Their commitment to the Sundome is quite apparent."

Jennings-Roggensack agreed that the early reopening of the facility was a team effort.

"When one method didn't work, people rolled up their sleeves and said 'OK, let's try this another way!'"

Tickets for the Yoakam show go on sale at 10 a.m. May 11 and will be available at the Sundome box office or through any Ticketmaster location. Further ticket sale dates will be announced at a later date.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Tim Conway appears with Harvey Korman Jan. 12 at the Sundome.

OVER

Season at a glance

The Sundome has announced 16 dates for the upcoming season, beginning with country star Dwight Yoakam on July 1. The season's acts are as follows, with show times and schedule additions to be announced later:

● Dwight Yoakam: July 1.

● Sergio Mendes: Sept. 14

● Julio Iglesias: Oct. 14.

● San Jose Talko: Nov. 3.

● Pam Tillis: Nov. 29.

● Student Mariachi: Dec. 6.

● Charlie Daniels Band: Dec. 7.

● Tim Conway and Harvey Korman: Jan. 12.

● Our Sinatra: Jan. 19.

● Les Ballets Trocadero De Monte Carlo: Jan. 29.

● Itzhak Perlman: Feb. 13.

● Lisa Globbi: Feb. 17.

● Festival of Four: March 20.

● Merry Widow Opera: March 27.

● Jubilent Sykes: April 7.

● Robert Mirabel: April 12.

For information on the shows listed, call the Sundome at 975-1900.

"When one method didn't work, people rolled up their sleeves and said 'okay, let's try this another way!'"

Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, ASU public events executive director



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Itzhak Perlman performs in a recital setting Feb. 13 as part of the Sundome's 2001-2002 season.

Sundome donor backing program

By Ashley Bach
The Arizona Republic

Two months after canceling the renovation of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts and beginning an endowment in its place, Arizona State University officials received some encouraging news last week. The renovation's lead donor, who had pledged to give \$1.1 million, is keeping his money in the pot.

The anonymous donor will now redirect his money to the endowment — with a catch. He'll give the full amount only if all the other donors to the now-canceled renovation also redirect their money, instead of taking their money back. If only some of the donors redirect, the lead donor will give only that percentage of the \$1.1 million, ASU officials said.

ASU officials say many major donors have come on board, but they won't give specific numbers.

The announcement in December that the renovation was being canceled surprised Sun Cities residents, who had worked for two years to raise \$5 million for the project. Officials said new estimates put the cost of the project at \$13 million and therefore out of reach.

Officials then set up the endowment, which they say will provide the money to attract top acts and touring Broadway shows.

The reason for the higher construction estimate has never been fully explained, although ASU officials attribute it to higher costs and the lack of building code and disabilities requirements in the original estimate in 1995.

VF

SUNDOME

SCW

© THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2000



Lu Urdang

Surpassing a \$5 million goal in the drive to finance expansion of the Sundome is celebrated by Colleen Jennings Roggensack and Birt Kellam, fund co-chairman.

Sundome expansion fund drive a success

By Connie Cone Sexton
The Arizona Republic

When the cast of *Show Boat* appeared at the Sundome this month it arrived without two

truckloads of equipment and scenery.

The reason? Too small a stage. Don't look for that happening in the year 2002. A multimillion-dollar renovation campaign will greatly enlarge the stage, raise the ceiling and usher in bigger Broadway-type shows.

The campaign got a boost this month as a \$5 million fund-raising effort went over the top, bringing in about \$5.2 million. Meeting the goal cemented a \$1.1 million pledge from an anonymous donor.

Members of the Sundome Performing Arts Association announced their victory last Wednesday and put the spotlight on key donors. Ken Meade Realty and the Meade family pledged \$100,000 and will have the Sundome lobby renamed in their honor.

The orchestra pit will be named after Don and Phyllis Heyl, who made a private donation and helped secure about \$1.75 million in donations or land. The Sundome stage will be renamed the Bloechl Family Stage for the private donation from Richard and Eileen Bloechl and the \$125,000 donation from their five children. And Birt and Louisa Kellam will have the Green Room room named after them for their private pledge. Kellam was co-chair of the Sundome capital campaign.

The Sundome's remodeling is expected to begin in late December. The performing arts auditorium is to reopen January 2002.

Sundome future at hand

When the Sundome Performing Arts Association hosted its annual volunteer recognition luncheon this past week, the event came complete with the usual food, speeches and good will.

What was unusual, however, was the surrealistic aura in which the event was bathed.

Unlike previous years, when the luncheon's tone was very heavily dipped in remembrances and reminiscence, this time around it was what looms in the Sundome's future that held most of the attention.

In many ways, the Sundome — as it has been — is both a jewel and a big white elephant. The Arizona State University-owned structure has 7,000-plus seats, making it a suitable venue for acts that can draw large numbers. However, many of the seats are far enough away from the stage to impart pole sitting in them with the feeling of being at a large venue, such as America West Arena, rather than a theater. Also, because of their angle in relationship to the stage, some of the seats are virtually useless in terms of rendering patrons a view of the entertainers.

In terms of hosting major touring Broadway-style shows, the Sundome has also been plagued with a losing hand. The stage area is not deep enough, and the area above the stage is not high enough to house the sophisticated paraphernalia that today's best traveling shows rely on for their spectacular effects. Also, the dressing room area is too small.

An example of the Sundome's shortcomings was evident last season when producers looked at the venue as a place to stage the popular Riverdance. The stage was adequate for this show, but chances of it coming to the area were undone by the theater's lack of significant dressing-room space.

When the Sundome was just part of what was largely viewed as a group of sleepy retirement communities, its shortcomings were more or less accepted. However, when it became apparent that it was located in an area that was about to undergo tremendous growth, its shortcomings became something that had to be dealt with if the venue's money-making potential was to be maximized.

This past year, SPAA successfully staged a \$5 million fund-raising drive that will provide the answers to some of the Sundome's woes. Among the renovations, the stage will be deepened, the ceiling raised and an orchestra pit added. But these things will not occur without inflicting a cost beyond the dollars connected to the renovations.

There will be an unusual rhythm at the Dome the next two years. There will be a truncated 2000-2001 season, with shows to run from September to the end of December. A period of darkness will ensue while the work takes place. Then, if things run on schedule, regular bookings will resume in January 2002.

"In effect," said Sandy Goldstein, SPAA president, "we will have two half seasons spread over two years. It was the best way to accomplish the renovations and keep the Sundome active. In the end, it will be well worth the inconvenience, for when things are done we will be able to attract the very best of the touring shows."

The Symphony of the West Valley, which also calls the Sundome home, also has had to adjust. It will pack its eight 2000-2001 shows into a September-December festival season and schedule performances at other West Valley venues in 2001-2002.

Talking to some of the volunteers, it was evident that there is some degree of jealousy among the Sundome loyalists regarding Gammage, also owned by ASU. The idea is that Gammage has been given a better selection of shows.

"We hope that will change," one of the volunteers told me. "We hope we can get those big shows, too."

Lance W. Evans, features editor of the Daily News-Sun, may be contacted by e-mail at lance.evans@thomnews.com.

SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT MAY 10-16, 2000

Sundome pays tribute to volunteers

Ceremony also salutes SPAA contributors

By DIANA SHAUGHNESSY
Independent Newspapers

They tramped down the aisle to the sound of applause. Not an unusual sound in the Sundome, but this time the applause was for the many volunteers who make Sundome operations run smoothly.

These same volunteers not only received applause, but were served lunch and given small gifts at a luncheon held April 11. Mingling with the executive committee, directors and staff members, volunteers also received pins indicating number of hours worked at the Sundome.

Melissa Schwartz, Sundome events coordinator, served as the emcee. She introduced Sundome director Smokey Renshan, who thanked the volunteers for their "smiling faces" and time given to help her sparse staff, introduced individually during her brief speech.

Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, executive director of public events with Arizona State University, spoke about honoring the volunteers for the past, present and future.

"Today we honor the volunteers



Photo by DIANA SHAUGHNESSY/Independent Newspapers

Ken Meade, left, receives an award medallion from Dr. Lattie Coor, ASU president, during a recent banquet honoring Sundome donors. The banquet recognized businesses and individuals for their generous donations in helping the Sundome surpass its \$5 million remodeling goal.

for their hard and dedicated work, assuring a future for the Sundome," she said.

Sandy Goldstein was bittersweet in his speech, as this was his last time speaking as the president of the executive committee. His

reflection included a typical visit to the Sundome and contact with the various volunteer stations.

"The staff, volunteers and community have worked together to make the Sundome work," he said.

The Sundome Performance Arts

Association was mentioned with an introduction of members. SPAA has been responsible for raising funds, which were used to purchase a video presentation, sound enhancement, earphones and a special sign in the lobby. Additional money collected was pledged toward the major renovation project, which reached its \$5 million goal as the calendar tripped from 1999 to 2000.

Each participant received a small calculator as a gift. Mr. Goldstein had everyone do some mathematical work, using figures he supplied. As the product of 803,819.5 appeared on everyone's screen, he told the audience that number represented how much in dollars was saved by having volunteers working at the Sundome.

"We came to that figure using \$5.50," he laughed.

"It was tough to figure on a rate of pay because our volunteers are priceless."

Through the season, tickets were sold for a cruise donated by Holland America and Ford's World Travel. Manager Dan Bachmann was present at the luncheon and chose the winner, Karen Schoof of Grosse Pointe, Mich. Ms. Schoof will have her choice of an Alaskan or Caribbean cruise, airfare included.

Daily News-Sun • Tuesday, May 16, 2000

Keillor show takes attendance record

**PRAIRIE HOME
COMPANION:** Live
presentation was also
among top earners along
with Tim Conway show

BRUCE ELLISON
DAILY NEWS-SUN

The May 6 presentation of Garrison Keillor's "Prairie Home Companion" at the Sundome drew the highest crowd ever reported at the Sun City West venue.

With Sun City West Fire Marshal Jim Heger allowing the sale of 70 standing-room-only seats, the number in the hall came to 7,064 — a record, said Sundome Director Smokey Renehan.

The average ticket price (over all five categories of seats down to \$5 for the SROs) was \$22, making the Sundome's gross from the event about \$155,000.

Renehan wasn't sure if that was the record gross take for a show, but it certainly was among the top few, she said.

Average ticket price for the Tim Conway show, also a top seller, was \$26, she said.

The Sundome itself, owned by Arizona State University, and Phoenix public-radio station KJZZ (operated by Maricopa Community Colleges) were sponsors of the show along with the Minnesota public-radio station that produces "Prairie Home Companion."

As such, the three will divvy the profits of the two-hour program. Expenses haven't been totaled, but officials think the production was nicely profitable.

Renehan said attendees came from all across the state.

The program, hugely popular on public radio, has been a favorite for years as Keillor presents homespun humor and tales of the fictional Minnesota town of Lake Wobegon.

Sundome expansion hits snag

BRUCE ELLISON
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Renovation work at the ASU Sundome Center for the Performing Arts is seriously behind schedule, and construction likely won't start until March or later, ASU officials confirmed today.

That could jeopardize a \$1.1 million grant for the work that was conditioned upon physical construction being under way by Jan. 1.

Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, director of ASU Public Events, which operates the Sundome, said this morning that she could not comment on the reason for delay or the future of the grant.

She did confirm that bids for the renovation project were considerably over budget but would not confirm estimates by others that the overrun was on the

order of \$5 million or more.

"I just can't say now," she said. "We are still trying to work out many of these things."

ASU officials had worked with the local Sundome Performing Arts Association to raise \$5 million over several years for the renovation project, which will add more stage and backstage area, and a flyloft and orchestra pit, among other things.

The changes would make possible larger shows at the Sun City West venue which is trying to stem the declining attendance caused by the limited variety of programs now presented.

The \$1.1 million challenge grant was made anonymously, and had two strings

See Delay could, A5

From A1

attached. One was that the \$5 million fund-raising goal be reached, with the \$1.1 million included, and the other was that work start by Jan. 1. On Jan. 11, Birt Kellam of Sun City West, who headed the local fund-raising effort, announced that the goal had been met, with \$5,203,044 in hand.

Since the gift was anonymous, the donor could not be reached for comment on the delay, or to say whether the cash would stay on the table a while longer.

Sundome officials plan a major strategy session to hash out the problems on Friday, Jennings-Roggensack said.

Kellam said this morning that he didn't know what would become of the \$1.1 million grant.

"They may let us know that

tomorrow," he said.

Smokey Renehan, Sundome director, said Wednesday that construction had been put off "for a couple of months, maybe longer."

But, Renehan said, "That's all they're telling me, and I don't know anything about" financing or the reasons for the delay.

Others in a position to know said the delay is due to a much higher estimated construction cost than was originally anticipated. They said the initial estimates were about five years old and seriously outdated.

They also said that ASU officials don't want to take other university funds to pay for the shortfall, which sources say is more than \$5 million.

Any delay in construction would push back the planned first quarter 2002 re-opening of

the venue and could force cancellation of events being booked for that year.

Plans for the project are complete, Kellam said, with work on them starting more than 18 months ago.

Other ASU officials involved in the project could not be reached.

Sharon Arnold of the fund-raising ASU Foundation, did not return several calls. An aide said she was in meetings all day and would be too busy to talk with a reporter.

The Sundome auditorium is the largest venue in the United States all on one floor. It can accommodate about 7,100, including more than 100 in wheelchairs.

The Sundome was built by developer Del Webb Corp. as part of the amenities of Sun City West, and in December 1984 was donated to the university, which has operated it since.

'Dome appeals to campaign donors

IMPROVEMENTS PLANNED: Although plans for a major overhaul are off, Sundome officials want to make cosmetic changes to the venue

BRUCE ELLISON
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Although Arizona State University has scrapped plans to renovate the Sundome, some cosmetic improvements in the venue may be in the offing.

At least that's what the Sundome Performing Arts Association expects to see, SPAA President L. Birt Kellam said Monday.

Kellam and Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, ASU director of public events, met with media and a handful of residents at the Sun City West structure Monday morning to explain



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

L. Birt Kellam, president of the Sundome Performing Arts Association, talks about plans and funding during a press conference Monday.

why the long-planned renovation won't take place.

In a nutshell, the decision to kill the project was purely financial. Costs

were way over budget.

Initial fund-raising was based on a \$5 million cost, and the \$5 million was raised, Kellam said.

"We — and you in the community — did our part, as asked," Kellam said.

But with cash in hand, SPAA officials discovered, engineering plans completed early this year showed a cost that initially was \$25 million. Later that was pared to \$19 million, then \$13 million as more and more items were dropped and new engineers studied the plans.

"We worked with the university to see if we could find some way out," Kellam said.

Those discussions included paying for some of the work with surpluses from ASU's Gammage Auditorium in Tempe, some sort of inter-departmental loan and other innovative financing.

"In the end, they were willing to go as high as \$10 million in total" — the already collected \$5 million and another \$5 million from the university — Kellam said.

"We went back to the donor who

See Sundome set, A5

OVER

From A1

had pledged \$1.1 million if we started by Jan. 1, to see if he'd leave it on the table while we continued trying to raise funds, and essentially were told no," Kellam said. "He pointed out that costs might well go up if we took a year, and we'd be in the same place."

Instead, Kellam said, the anonymous donor suggested a two- or three-month campaign.

"The university and we decided that wasn't workable," he added.

SPAA members now are trying to persuade the 2,200 individual donors to the campaign to leave their funds with the university as a Sundome performing arts endowment, rather than for reconstruction.

The endowment would allow the university to spend more on larger performing groups, though not major Broadway productions.

"For instance," Kellam said, "maybe Barry Manilow" and a back-up group.

The bigger names would attract larger and younger audiences, he suggested, helping to keep the Sundome in the black, something that's been difficult to accomplish in recent years.

Those who choose not to support the endowment will get a refund, officials said.

The fate of the \$1.1 million from the anonymous donor remains unknown, but Del Webb Corp. already has agreed to leave its \$750,000 gift in place.

The endowment campaign got a big boost at the press briefing when the giver of the largest known individual gift, Dick Bloechl, said he was leaving his family's cash with the university.

One member of the audience sharply questioned why a 1995 cost estimate never was updated. Officials defended the estimate, saying they thought it was correct. It was made by the same engineering firm that designed the Sundome and estimated the cost of washroom improvements completed a year ago — a job that came in right on budget, Kellam said.

Jennings-Roggensack said, "We were prepared for some cost increase. We knew costs were going up. But we weren't prepared for this 160 percent increase."

And the university tried to

accommodate the unexpected hike, Kellam repeated, when ASU officials said they were willing to use their funds to a meet a \$10 million limit.

"There was some room, but not another \$8 million," he said.

Although major renovations aren't planned, SPAA board members do want to see some cosmetic improvements in the 20-year old auditorium, Kellam said.

They'd also like to see the auditorium partitioned so it can be rented for use by groups that want a smaller audience.

"As it is, we sometimes have people just aghast at the thought of five thousand empty seats" that can be seen by a smaller audience and performers, Kellam said.

Paint on the outside would help; so would new carpet. Some inexpensive additional backstage area also would be good, and a new backdrop for the symphony would improve the stage appearance, Kellam suggested.

Some board members also would like to see a Starbucks coffeehouse in the lobby, although that suggestion might run afoul of competitive bidding rules.

The Sundome will stay open in 2001, the officials said, and its director, Smokey Renehan, already is calling regular renters to see if they want to book space.

The two largest regular local users, the Sun City West Variety Show and the Symphony of the West Valley, would like to get in, their spokespersons said.

Maryanne Leyshon, president of the symphony board, said two of the orchestra's seasons — and its own ticket sales and fund-raising — were affected by the planned closing. She said the symphony would like to be able to get a spring Pops concert into the venue if suitable available artists can be found. The Symphony will resume its normal concert schedule in the Sundome in the fall.

Symphony concerts generally attract some 3,000 people, and no other venue can accommodate that many.

And Jeanne Tarr, who produces the Variety Show, would like to make the effort to do another fall production that raises funds for Sun Health, but her husband said he isn't yet sure how it can be worked out.

Questions over Sundome

Cancelled renovation baffles community

By Ashley Bach
The Arizona Republic

The original architect of Sundome Center for the Performing Arts can't understand how costs for its proposed yearlong renovation are so high over original estimates. He's not the only

one. Last week's announcement by Arizona State University officials that they were cancelling the yearlong renovation of the Sun City West arena because of high costs

has baffled community members, many of whom gave money to the project and were anticipating a new slate of top-class acts.

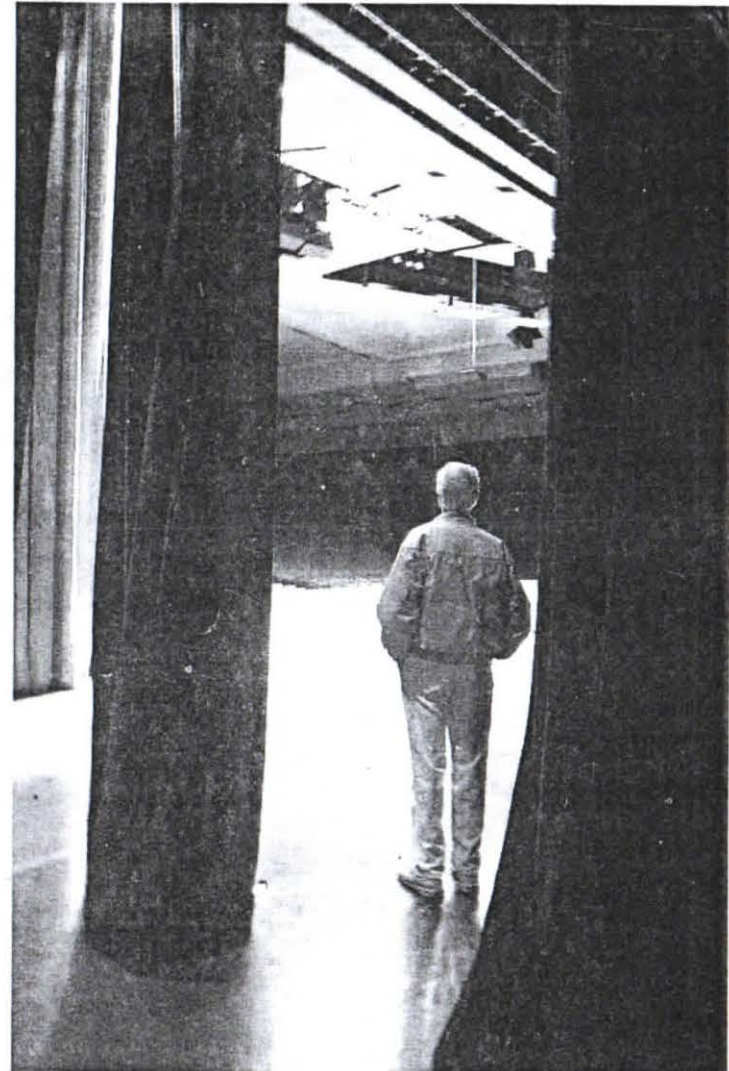
ASU officials and Sundome board members say these acts could still be on the way, assuming donors switch their money to a new endowment to attract entertainers with high fees. But the cancellation of the renovation, especially on such short notice, has raised more questions than answers for many.

Jasper Hawkins, who de-

signed the Sundome in 1980 and who made the original estimate of \$5 million for the renovation, said the \$13 million estimate for the project that engineers made this year is unexplainable without major changes being made to his plans.

ASU officials attribute the new estimate to inflation and rising Valley construction costs. Hawkins said that can't explain such a huge difference.

See **SUNDOME** Page 7



Suzanne Starr/The Arizona Republic

Lee Rintz, a Sundome maintenance man, stands on the stage of the facility, which had been scheduled for renovation.

(over)

From Page 1

"I had every piece of equipment laid out and somebody came in and gold-plated it," he said. "That's all I can think of."

The portion of Hawkins' plan that did get built, an expansion of the arena's lobby bathrooms, was completed last year for \$800,000, right on budget, said Birt Kellam, president of the Sundome board.

Hawkins said that when he was asked to bid on the renovation last year, four years after he made the original estimate, he balked because ASU wasn't willing to give the architect full control. Instead, it wanted to hire an independent theater consultant to plan some of the project, he said.

"I said it was flawed and doomed for failure," he said. "I was right."

Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, executive director of ASU Public Events, which

operates the Sundome, wouldn't comment on Hawkins bowing out of the project. She said that as far as she knew, there weren't any significant differences between the plans under the \$13 million budget and what Hawkins laid out in 1995.

Kellam said ASU officials told him they didn't know why the new estimate was so high. But it was originally much higher. The architects hired last year estimated the cost at \$25 million, then, after prodding by ASU, at \$19 million.

Jennings-Roggensack admitted that these architects were "much more elaborate" in their plans.

A local engineering firm then was hired and got the number down to the current figure, Kellam said.

"Thirteen million was the bare minimum to bring Broadway here," he said.

ASU had some money set aside to accommodate for inflation and other costs and

was willing to pay or raise another \$5 million for the project, Jennings-Roggensack said. But the last \$3 million needed to meet the \$13 million estimate was too much to overcome, she said.

"It might seem small, but it's not," Jennings-Roggensack said. "That was a big leap."

The inability to reach an affordable estimate throws the future of the Sundome into limbo. It could be an essential venue for a growing West Valley, officials said, but it's long been plagued by a reliance on low-cost acts such as Victor Borge and Debbie Reynolds, whom residents have tired of seeing over and over again, Kellam said.

Because of this, the arena has barely broken even in recent years and will start to lose money if major changes aren't made on some level, Kellam said. If that happens, the arena could go under, he said.

The renovation, of course, was supposed to change all this. It's still unclear whether the new endowment will be an adequate replacement.

Kellam, who coordinated the two-year campaign that

raised the original \$5 million, said he was initially angry when he heard that the renovation was being canceled. Now he says the endowment could be a better solution.

"You can pull from the endowment each year and attract acts like Barry Manilow," he said. "We will have far better programming than we've ever had and more of it."

ASU officials and board members say this all depends on whether donors are willing to redirect their money to something they didn't originally sign up for. Kellam said the major donors he's talked to so far have switched, but a \$1.1 million donor still hasn't made up his mind.

Even if the endowment is successful, it might be harder to heal the wounds of community members, who saw their dream of a larger, improved facility thrown aside.

"We were led to believe we were going to get bigger things out here," said Ed Curley, who lives in Sun City West. "This is disappointing."

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Suzanne Starr/The Arizona Republic

A planned yearlong renovation of ASU West's Sundome was canceled when cost estimates nearly tripled.

Groups cry foul over Sundome

Canceling renovation surprises many

By Ashley Bach
The Arizona Republic

Sun Cities residents and community leaders reacted this week with unhappy surprise to the cancellation of a yearlong renovation of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts.

Arizona State University officials announced the move this week, citing costs that far exceeded original estimates. In 1995, officials planned the project at \$5 mil-

lion. After a successful two-year fund-raising campaign that raised the \$5 million, the university recently estimated the cost at \$13 million.

The difference in the estimates came as a shock to many residents, some of whom helped raise money for the project. Phil Garner, president of the Property Owners and Residents Association in Sun City West, said the original estimate of \$5 million was obviously far off target.

"That was poor judgment,"

he said. "It should have been more realistically appraised."

Luann Bauman, who lives in Sun City West and gave some money for the renovation, said she feels "devastated" by the news.

"What a sneaky little thing (ASU) did," she said. "It took a lot of people to raise that money, it really did."

All donors can get their money back, said Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, execu-

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From Page 1

tive director of ASU Public Events, which operates the Sundome. But the school is asking that donations be redirected to an endowment to attract acts that normally couldn't be booked because of high fees and production costs.

School officials knew in August or September about the new estimate for the project, which came about

because of high Valley construction costs, Jennings-Roggensack said. Since then, they thought about raising more money but decided to create the new endowment, she said.

The renovation, scheduled to begin in January, would have expanded the Sun City West arena's backstage and added an orchestra pit. It was meant to attract high-profile shows that need elaborate stages and orchestra space and to expand the life of an arena that many said was poorly designed and in disrepair.



Tom Tingle/The Arizona Republic

ASU's decision to cancel the Sundome's renovation and ask donors to redirect their funds has surprised many residents.

The future of the Sundome now depends on the donations given to the new endowment, Jennings-Roggensack said. Some major donors have already pledged to redirect their money, she said, and other donors are being contacted.

Gerald Unger, a director of the Sun City Home Owners Association and member of the Sundome's board, said the arena now depends on its patrons more than ever.

"If people have faith in this thing and keep their money in it," he said, "it's going to improve."

Reach the reporter at
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Daily News-Sun • Monday, Dec. 4, 2000

Shows will go on



SUBMITTED PHOTO

ASU and the local Sundome Performing Arts Association announced today they are "committed to ensuring that the Sundome remains the cultural anchor for the West Valley." To do that, the university will focus on programming enhancements rather than structural improvements.

OVER

FACE LIFT OFF AT SUNDOME: ASU wants campaign contributors to support endowment

BRUCE ELLISON
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Faced with costs that are \$8 million more than planned, Arizona State University officials have scrubbed plans to renovate the Sundome in Sun City West.

But their decision to pull the plug on the long-planned remodeling isn't the final curtain for the performing arts venue, they said.

Instead, officials hope to convince those who donated more than \$5 million in total for the renovations to put that cash into an endowment fund that would be used to support bigger shows and higher-priced talent than what's generally appeared at the 7,100-seat venue previously.

Officials from ASU Public Events, which runs the Sundome, scheduled a media briefing for 10 o'clock this morning in Sun City West to unveil the new plan, which could see the Sundome's Jan. 1 closing canceled, allowing some long-time users to continue their presentations there.

Among those users are the Symphony of the West Valley and the Sun City West Variety Show.

Both had canceled 2001 productions in the Sundome because of the yearlong planned construction which university officials now say would cost about \$13 million, rather than the \$5 million originally budgeted.

In remarks prepared for delivery this morning, Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, director of ASU Public Events, blames increased construction, materials and labor costs as factors pushing the renovation price up.

The original estimate was

made in 1995 by Jasper Stillwell Hawkins F.A.I.A., the original architects. But it wasn't updated with the passage of time.

ASU's assistant director of facilities planning and construction, Vance Linden, on Thursday said the Sundome renovations as originally planned were "a major construction project, and difficult," with much of the work being done a hundred feet or

more above the ground."

Jennings-Roggensack said ASU and the local Sundome Performing Arts Association are "committed to ensuring that the Sundome remains the cultural anchor for the West Valley."

To do that, she said, the university will focus on programming enhancements rather than structural improvements.

Donors who pledged \$5.1

million for the renovation are being asked to redirect their gifts and pledges to benefit that programming, officials said.

With more money in hand for performances, the Sundome may be able to attract top stars, elaborate productions and more special events that in the past haven't been scheduled because

of their higher artist fees and production costs, and resulting higher ticket prices, officials said.

But, they added, even that change won't help to bring such super Broadway shows as "Phantom of the Opera" to Sun City West.

That road show requires 22 tractor-trailer loads of scenery and costumers props and gear, and there is no way the current Sundome could accommodate it, they said. Only the full \$13-million project could enlarge the stage area enough for that.

Among other donors, Del Webb Corp. already has agreed to rechannel its contribution toward the programming effort, officials said.

Webb built the Sundome as part of the amenities for Sun City West, and gave the venue to Arizona State University in 1984.

In written comments, ASU President Lattie Coor said, "offering a variety of cultural and entertainment attractions is part of the university's indispensability" to its community.

"The Sundome has been an important part of the lives of residents in the West Valley for many years and we hope it will continue to be a special source of pride for years to come."

Unclear from the prepared remarks is the fate of a \$1.1-million challenge grant for the work. That grant was conditioned on an equal amount being raised locally, and on the physical start of construction by Jan. 1, 2001, something that won't happen.

Officials said donors who choose not to redirect their gifts to the performance endowment would receive a full refund of their contributions.

They also said that while it might seem logical to simply redirect other university funds to the Sundome, the primary mission of the university is education and research, with limited funding.

Other money raised in the "Campaign for Leadership" for capital funding that included the Sundome were, like the Sundome cash, contributed for specific purposes and cannot be redirected, they said.

Sundome rescue

RENOVATIONS

JEOPARDIZED: Community funds needed to improve venue

BRUCE ELLISON
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Time is running out on the Sundome.

Volunteers already have raised about \$4.8 million in cash or pledges to renovate the ASU Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in Sun City West.

But a crucial deadline, Dec. 31, is only three weeks away, and without an additional \$155,558 a promised \$1.1 million matching grant is in danger of being lost, which would endanger the renovation, said Sandy Goldstein, president of the Sundome Performing Arts Association.

The matching grant was revealed publicly in mid-November 1998, but the source remains anonymous.

The payment was contingent on a public

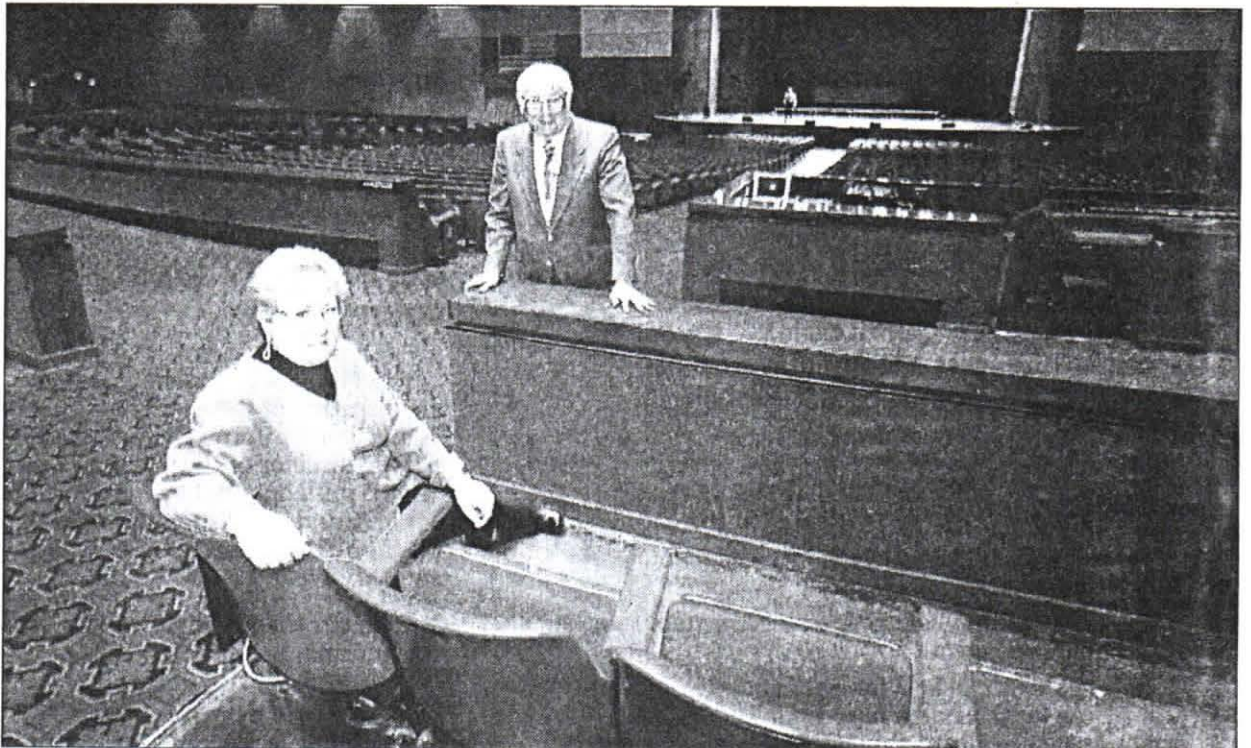
fund-raising campaign netting about \$1.25 million by the end of this year. It also required that physical work be started by Dec. 31.

"We're almost there" in money, Goldstein said. "And we have met part of the challenge by completing the expansion of restrooms this year."

With the rest of the money in hand, plans call for the Sundome to close for all of 2001, when the backstage area and stage are significantly expanded, remodeled and upgraded. The additional space, for instance, will allow for a flyloft, more scenery storage and larger dressing rooms. Those allow for larger casts and bigger orchestra so that top Broadway hits, such as "Phantom of the Opera," can be staged in Sun City West, as well as at ASU's Garfield Auditorium in Tempe.

To help meet the final \$155,000 or so goal in three weeks, the Sundome group is selling inscribed paving blocks, a method used with success by the non-profit Phoenix Zoo in a campaign that started in 1991 and ran about six years. The zoo sold 18,000 bricks (at \$50 each) and used the money to build a new exhibit area, the Forest of Uco.

See Brick sales, A5



STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Smoky Renehan, left, director of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts, and Sandy Goldstein, president of the Sundome Performing Arts Association, are leading a fund-raising effort to renovate the West Valley venue.

OVER



STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Jim Schneider, a stagehand and audio technician at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts, helps get the sound ready for an upcoming show.

From A1

Goldstein calls the Sundome pavers "a great opportunity to commemorate birthdays, anniversaries, graduations and other events in your life" while helping out the largest West Valley indoor venue.

The bricks can be inscribed with the name of a loved one and will be laid as part of the main entrance.

Three types are offered, Goldstein said:

- Star pavers are 8 by 8 inches, and carry a three-inch bronze medallion with an engraved star. They also have room for four inscribed lines. Cost is \$2,500, which may be paid over five years.

- Pavers, also 8 inches square, include four lines of inscription. Cost is \$1,500, payable over five years.

- Individual bricks measure 4 by 8 inches and can carry two lines of text. They cost \$150, payable in a lump sum.

All contributions are tax deductible.

The Sundome fund drive had its official start on Oct. 23, 1997, as part of a much larger Arizona State University Campaign for Leadership that sought to raise \$300 million for the Tempe-based institution.

The Sundome portion was \$4 million, to ensure that the

auditorium, which seats about 7,000 people all on one floor, remains the cultural anchor for the West Valley. The Sundome serves about 300,000 patrons a year.

ASU itself would put up \$1 million, with contributions adding \$4 million, for a total of \$5 million in construction costs.

Del Webb Corp. kicked in \$750,000 in that initial announcement, with Chuck Roach, general manager of the Sun Cities-Phoenix division saying "we are committed to ensuring the long-term success of the Sundome."

It was developer Webb which built the hilltop auditorium as an amenity for Sun City West residents, then, in 1984, donated it to ASU.

For additional information on how you can help, call the Sundome office at 584-3118, or Goldstein at 584-1946.



STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sandy Goldstein and Smoky Renehan stand in the entranceway of Sundome where commemorative bricks will be placed as part of fund-raising effort.

'Dome drive falters

By BRUCE ELLISON
DAILY NEWS-SUN

A \$1.1-million challenge grant that would help renovate and modernize the Sundome started strong, but interest — and contributions — are fading fast, officials say.

An anonymous donor late last year pledged the \$1.1 million toward the \$6 million project, but only if others would match that amount, and match it in pledges before the end of this year.

"We have \$950,000 to go," said L. Birt Kellam of Sun City West, president of the Sundome Performing Arts Association, the local non-profit group that helps support the Sundome.

The Sundome in Sun City West is owned and operated by Arizona State University. With more than 7,000 seats, it is the largest single-floor auditorium in the nation, and the most accessible.

But it needs work on its stage and backstage areas to bring it into the 21st century. Planned renovations would allow the venue to compete with ASU's Gammage Auditorium in Tempe for first-run Broadway productions such as "Phantom of the Opera," giving West Valley residents a crack at such shows without a long drive.

Different shows also might help the Sundome attract a more diversified audience.

The anonymous gift was to have been the cash that put the project on the fast track, especially with its deadline that construction actually be under way before Jan. 1.

But Kellam is worried now.

"It's a lot of money to raise. And although we've had several significant gifts, things definitely are slowing down."

Many people are away for the summer — in fact, Kellam is leaving soon — and won't be back until late September or even October.

"People say they're worried we may not make it," Kellam said. If renovations aren't scheduled, there is a fear that ASU might close the venue, rather than spend state money on its operation, which is supposed to break even.

That's not a thought that appeals to Sharon Arnold, vice president of the ASU Foundation, the university's fundraising arm in Tempe.

"We don't want to be forced to make a decision on a matter like that," she said.

For that reason and more, Arnold will be using volunteers in the West Valley this summer to solicit help from the area's business community.

"We believe we can offer the people in that community some attractive opportunities for recognition for gifts in excess of a thousand dollars," Arnold said.

"There are some things we can suggest that would give

See Restroom renovations, A5

From A1

them positive response for their help."

Kellam said that while a million dollars is just ten \$100,000 pledges, it takes much more public participation when the cash comes in \$100 or \$1,000 at a time.

Still, he said, "a pledge of \$1,000 can be paid over that five-year period, which means just \$200 a year out of pocket, and with the contribution being tax-deductible, it comes to even less."

Duplicating the Sundome, Kellam said, might cost \$40 million today. "So it definitely is worth saving, no doubt about it."

The venue was deliberately designed with wide aisles and extra access between rows of seats, so older residents who might not be too steady on their feet could walk in easily. It's also large, more than 1,000 seats bigger than Radio City Music Hall in New York for

instance.

For the same reason, it's all on one floor. The only steps are those at both sides of the stage, which, incidentally, is about 30 percent wider than the stage at Gammage, Kellam said.

The most recent major gift to the renovation effort came last month as Lending Hands, which is winding up its business, contributed \$15,000, which Kellam said he was delighted to receive.

Meantime, one part of the renovation for which cash is in hand already is under way. Additional restrooms, long sought to reduce the lines seen during most performances, are being built now. When that job is finished this summer, there will be 52 women's seats, 42 men's spots and four unisex rooms.

For more information on how to contribute to the Sundome renovation campaign, call the Sundome administration office at 584-3118

Showdown for the Sundome

Donations to meet funds challenge slow

By Connie Cone Sexton
The Arizona Republic

SUN CITY WEST — Financial support for renovating the Sundome is down to a trickle.

"It's just not coming in like it was," said Birt Kellam, vice president of the Sundome Performing Arts Association.

With summer approaching and many winter visitors leaving, things could continue to dry up. Many longtime Sundome supporters, especially those in the Sun Cities, will depart these next few weeks for cooler climes.

That wouldn't

be a problem except for one thing — Sundome supporters are facing a deadline.

An anonymous donor has pledged \$1.1 million, but only if the association meets its fund-raising goal of \$5 million by Dec. 31.

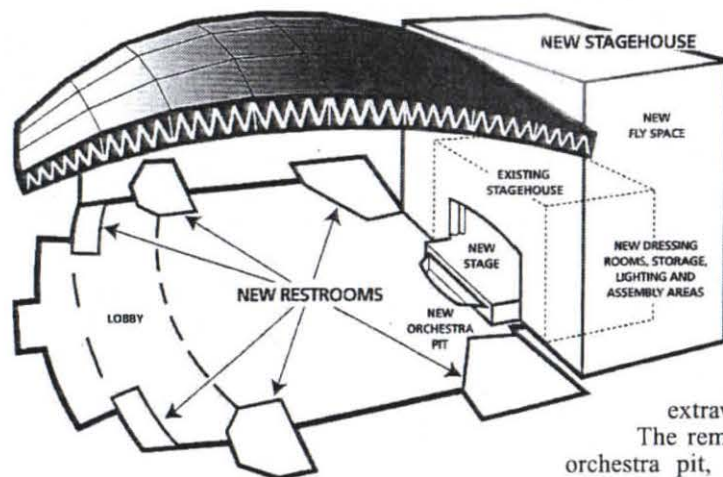
So far, \$4.02 million has come in. But the \$1.1 million will vanish if the association can't raise \$980,000 more.

Kellam is getting worried.

"We still have \$980,000 yet to go, and it really has slowed down," he said. "We've come a long way, but nothing has come in now for a bit."

Money is being raised to overhaul the Sundome to attract Broadway-type shows. Construction plans call for raising the roof of the stage, taking it from 38 feet to 75 feet of "fly space," allowing the Sundome to usher in shows, such as *Phantom of the Opera*, that require lofty ceilings and room for extravagant scenery stages.

The remodeling would add an orchestra pit, new dressing rooms,



Tom Tingle/The Arizona Republic

Sundome improvement plans call for raising the roof of the stage, adding an orchestra pit, new dressing rooms, more storage, a green room, lighting and several more restrooms.

more storage, a green room, air-conditioning, lighting and several more restrooms.

Without these changes, association members fear attendance will drop, making the center no longer self-sufficient. And that could mean the Sundome would have to shut down.

The facility, which was built by Del Webb and later donated to Arizona State University, opened in 1980.

Kellam said ASU officials have told him that closing the Sundome is a possibility if the performing arts center cannot bring in enough money through ticket sales and donations to stay in the black.

Since mid-November, the Sundome association has only raised about

— Please see **CONTRIBUTIONS**, Page 7

OVER

Contributions slow in Sundome drive

— CONTRIBUTIONS, from Page 1

+ \$270,000. With only about seven months left to meet the Dec. 31 deadline, Kellam said their efforts are taking a new tactic.

This summer, members of the association will be concentrating on obtaining donations from businesses.

Hefty donations can yield a public relations benefit, said Sharon Arnold, vice president of the ASU Foundation.

Donors of \$750,000 can have the Sundome stage named after themselves or their business.

Drop down \$100,000 and you'll get one of the star dressing rooms.

Some companies have seen the value of this option and already have put their money down. They are nameless for now, but the courtyard fountain has been taken, and so has the curtain.

If you've got \$2,500 to spare, you can have one of the star pavers at the entrance of the Sundome. You can put in your name or use as a tribute to someone else.

Anyone with donations or questions may call 584-3118.

With only a few months to go, Arnold is keeping up her spirits. Is

she confident?

"We really are," she said. "We feel this is doable."

Kellam said the pressure needs to say on. And there are signs things could improve.

He recently got word that Lending Hands, a local charitable group, will be giving them a donation.

Lending Hands' board president, Sig Sampson, said the group, which provided medical services to the community, is dissolving and wanted to distribute its funds to worthwhile groups in Sun City West.

He said it will give the Sundome association a check for \$15,000.

If businesses and individuals follow suit, Kellam said, they'll be able to reach their goal.

For now, he's just trying to get more people to understand what the Sundome means to the Valley, not to mention the West Valley.

"We have to do it," Kellam said. "It's irreplaceable. It would be terrible to have this close."

Connie Cone Sexton can be reached at (602) 444-7118 or at connie.sexton@pni.com via e-mail.

Thursday, Jan. 28, 1999 Daily News-Sun, Sun City, Ariz.

Familiar voice from the darkness

Sundome announcer is longtime pro

By BRUCE ELLISON
DAILY NEWS-SUN

The 200 or so red-jacketed volunteers at the Sundome are familiar sights to patrons of the huge auditorium. They answer questions, help visitors find seats, assist the wheelchair-bound to their places.

But few would recognize Paul Nakel, also a Sundome volunteer, if they saw him.

Just let him open his mouth, though, and they'd notice — for Paul Nakel, a backstage volunteer, is the man known as "the voice of the Sundome."

For five years, it's been his mellifluous tones that you hear as each program begins, welcoming you and reminding you that "by Arizona law, smoking is prohibited throughout the Sundome."

"In addition, because of contractual arrangements with the performers, the unauthorized use of cameras, tape recorders or video cameras is prohibited..."

Nakel's voice suits the venue in which it is heard, fits his audience. It is respectable, clear, unambiguous, mellow and mature.

It should be. Nakel, who's not missed a scheduled performance in almost five years as a volunteer announcer, is a pro, a man who began his radio career in Cleveland in the 1930s and retired to Sun City West



Mollie J. Hoppes/Daily News-Sun

Paul Nakel lends his voice to the Sundome for the Performing Arts. He has served as the announcer for the Sundome for the past five years.

almost 15 years ago.

Nakel does his announcements from a microphone crammed against the wall in a small hallway leading to an office backstage at the Sundome, his notes taped to the wall, a small light over them.

Now 79, he began his career at WHK in 1938, later moving to the Elyria-Lorain area where he became general manager of WJMO.

Among the pleasures of his job, he says, is meeting the folks he once met years ago — from Edie Gorme to Frank De Vol and Victor Borge.

He's a polka fanatic and a member

of Cleveland's Polka Hall of Fame. The Hall says he helped shape Cleveland into the nation's polka capital.

He's also a member of the Broadcast Pioneers and a member of the Broadcasters Hall of Fame, inducted in 1992.

These days, he takes great pleasure from his scheduled appearances in the Sundome.

"I have a schedule, just like the performers, and I adhere to it," he said. A few of his messages are on tape, in case of illness or a planned

trip away from Sun City West, where he lives with his wife of 56 years, Beatrice.

"For all the rest, I'm there live," he said.

Sundome director Smokey Renehan said Nakel "does a wonderful job for us. He really is the appropriate man to serve as the voice of the Sundome."

With the \$5 million campaign under way to raise money for Sundome renovations, Renehan hopes to be able to give Nakel and other backstage volunteers — and paid staffers — a better place to work.

"It's unfortunate that he and others have to work in such cramped quarters," she said.

"The remodeling will improve working conditions for all of us."

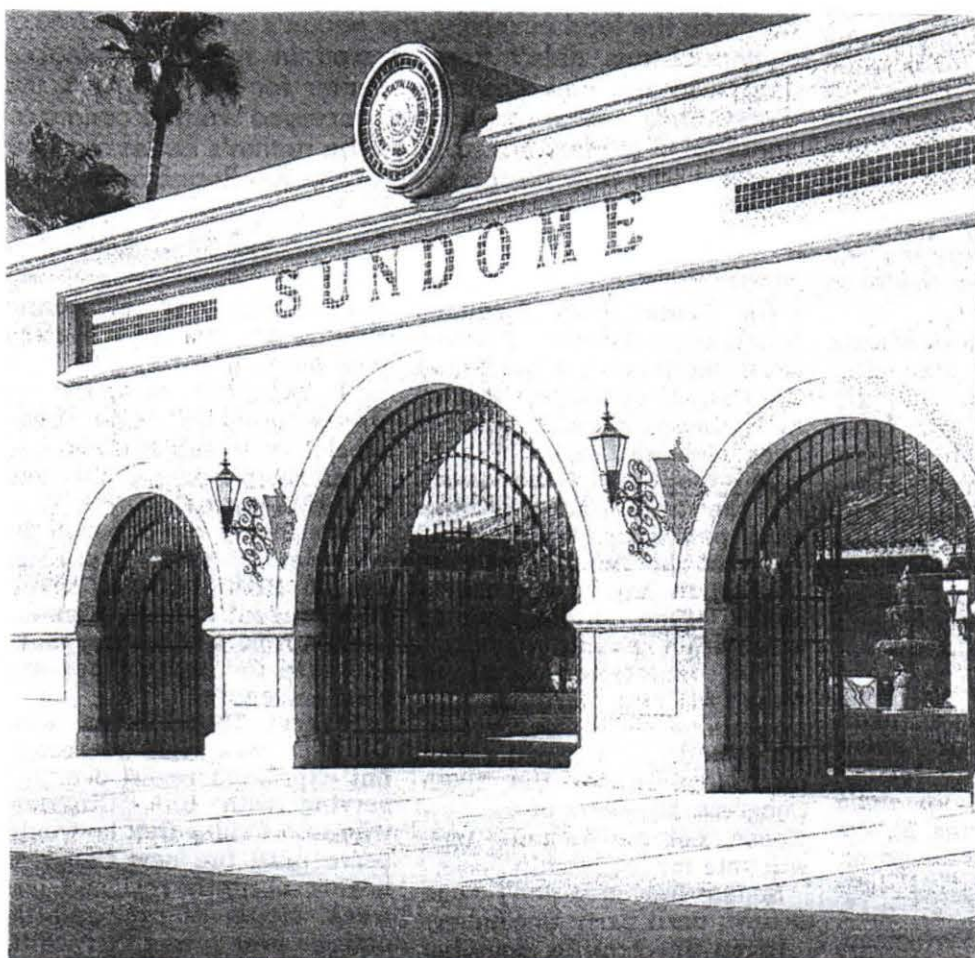
Among the plans are extensive backstage and stage renovations that will add dressing rooms, bigger storage and staging areas and a fly-loft for scenery.

That will make possible larger Broadway shows of the kind that now visit ASU's Gammage Auditorium in Tempe.

Perhaps even more important to regular Sundome patrons is the addition of dozens more restrooms — some already under construction outside the cross-aisle exits.

The Sundome Performing Arts Association is heading up the drive, which needs \$1.1 million by the end of this year to meet a \$1.25 million matching grant challenge.

For information on that campaign, call the Sundome at 584-3118.



Submitted photo

A year-long, \$5-million fund raising campaign for the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in Sun City West already has garnered \$2.65 million in cash and pledges.

Sundome drive gets \$1.1 million charge

By **BRUCE ELLISON**
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Significant improvements to the Sundome to allow bigger and better shows are just \$1.25 million away from reality, officials said Friday.

A year-long, \$5-million fund raising campaign for the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in Sun City West already has garnered \$2.65 million in cash and pledges.

At a luncheon Friday, Sundome officials said an anonymous donor in

the West Valley pledged another \$1.1 million to the effort — if local residents and other supporters can come up with the last \$1.25 million by the end of 1999.

The gift is the largest ever made to the Sundome since the \$10 million auditorium was donated to Arizona State University in 1984 by Del Webb Corp. which had built it and originally operated it.

The gift was announced by L. Birt

► See Sundome target, A5

6VEE

◀ From A1

Kellam, the Sun City West resident who heads the fund-raising campaign as vice president of the Sundome Performing Arts Association.

The renovations, planned to begin in the year 2000, will provide significantly more restroom space for patrons — and also will double the backstage capacity, add an orchestra pit, flyloft and additional dressing rooms and scenery storage areas.

That will allow room for the kinds of major productions that now cannot play the Sundome but can play at ASU's Gammage Auditorium in Tempe, Kellam said.

"Based on what I've seen, and the shows we may get, the Sun Cities area can become the cultural center of the West Valley," Kellam said, rivaling Scottsdale for both art and performance venues.

But Kellam had a note of warning as well. The performers who long had been Sundome staples because of the special appeal they held for its largely senior audience "frankly have been dying off. That means we book the same acts over and over," he said.

Without new shows and younger acts to appeal to the coming Baby Boom retirees, he suggested, the Sundome could be closed. And were it to close, it likely wouldn't be long until it was torn down, to become a hotel or high-rise condo project overlooking

Hillcrest Golf Course.

That can't be allowed to happen, he said.

"With the announcement of this gift, everyone in the West Valley can start counting the days to when we will be able to enjoy blockbuster entertainment in our community," said Smokey Renehan, the Sundome director who also is a Sun City West resident.

ASU officials declined to say just what might constitute the specific acts, but said the remodeled venue would be capable of handling such shows as Broadway's "Phantom of the Opera" which played twice at Gammage.

Kellam said that a pact between Sundome fund-raisers and ASU Public Events, the university unit that books the entertainment, guarantees that big shows will be split equally between Gammage and the Sundome, alternating venues in which gets first crack at the shows. "We will be on an absolute parity, guaranteed," Kellam said.

He and other officials said the \$1.1 million gift "kind of came out of the blue and rather shocked us" — but that it provides the needed impetus for a massive 14-month campaign that should bring in about \$100,000 a month to be successful.

Kellam said that Webb had funded the Sundome's operations for five years after giving it to ASU, and last year it

donated the parking area along R.H. Johnson Boulevard to the university, and pledged \$50,000 a year to the fund-raising effort for five years.

Board members also ponied up \$300,000 from their own pockets, Kellam said. Donations ranged from \$100,000 each to a few hundred dollars.

ASU operated the Sundome more or less on a break-even basis until August 1996 when a vicious early evening storm swept the area with 115 mph winds.

"I don't think you know this, but that storm literally picked the dome up off the Sundome and moved it, then set it back down," Kellam said.

"It cost the university more than a half million dollars to fix, and the university is self-insured meaning the regents had to come up with that much cash from the budget."

The Sundome is the largest single-level theater in the world. Its capacity of 7,036 seats exceeds the seating capacity of Radio City Music Hall in New York by 1,500 seats. It can accommodate 127 patrons in wheelchairs.

Designed with the senior population in mind, the entire Sundome has just 10 steps, five on either side of the stage. Its parking lot, always available free of charge, can hold 3,000 vehicles. Shuttle service from the lot to the entrances is also provided free by ASU.

OCTOBER 29, 1997

Fund-raiser a roof-raiser at Sundome

Higher ceiling, storage, orchestra pit in plans

By **Connie Cone Sexton**

The Arizona Republic

SUN CITY WEST — Officials at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts say it's time to put on a really big show.

Really big. *Broadway*-style big.

But to attempt it now would be like trying to squeeze an elephant into a Volkswagen Beetle.

There's just no room.

So Sundome officials have a plan — nothing short of raising the roof. It's all part of a \$5 million fund-raising campaign that's being waged by Arizona State University — which owns the Sundome — and the Sundome Performing Arts Association.

Even though the campaign was officially announced Thursday by ASU officials, \$2 million already has been found — \$1 million raised by the Sundome association, another million coming from the ASU Public Events budget.

That leaves \$3 million that ASU officials hope will come from the public — both individuals and business partnerships.

The Sundome's campaign is a tiny slice of the much larger \$300 million fund-raising campaign ASU is attempting for its three Valley campuses. It's the largest such campaign in state history. About \$120 million — 40 percent — already has been raised.

Sharon Arnold, assistant director of development for ASU, estimated that it will take about two years to raise the money for the Sundome improvements before construction can begin. She estimates that renovations will take about nine months but said she expects that the theater will still be able to have a limited season.

Besides raising the ceiling, which will allow for much larger sets and stage productions, they also want to add an orchestra pit, increase storage space and build more restrooms for men and women.

"We're going to try to make the Sundome equal to Gammage," Arnold said of the auditorium on ASU's main campus in Tempe. "We want the improvements so that some of the elaborate, sophisticated productions there — and elsewhere around the Valley — can also be taken to the Sundome."

OVER

OCTOBER 29, 1997

Sundome fund-raiser seeks cash to raise roof

— SUNDOME, from Page 1

For example, if the improvements already were in place, Sundome patrons wouldn't have to let shows like *Showboat*, *Phantom of the Opera* or *Les Miserables* pass them by.

The Sundome opened in September 1980 with more than 7,000 seats. Despite being the largest single-story auditorium in the country, its staging is designed for smaller venues, Arnold said.

"It was not built with the intention of being able to handle these very technically demanding shows — but that's the way of the future," she added. "So in order to stay up with the times, it's time for this type of change."

Sundome director Smokey Renehan said the theater's programming is being updated to retain and build its audience.

"We are fully aware that the northwest Valley is growing by leaps and bounds and that we have families out there," Renehan said.

"Little by little, we're trying to broaden our programming by adding a Family Series. And we're expanding culturally."

The Family Series of shows includes such programs as Nutcracker on Ice (Dec. 27) and Nickelodeon's Gullah Gullah Island Live (Feb. 21).

Last year, the Sundome had its first Cinco de Mayo Festival, and this Saturday, it will present Ballet Arizona's *Los Dias de los Muertos*.

"It's hard to get people outside the Sun Cities community to realize that the Sundome is for everyone," Renehan said. "Some have the impression that it's for seniors only."

Like Arnold, Renehan hopes that expanding programming and the theater itself will draw in new patrons and retain loyal fans: "I want to see us encompass all the different age groups and different types of performances."

Birt Kellam, vice president of the Sundome Performing Arts Association, said attendance has been holding steady the past few years

but said many longtime ticket holders aren't going as often.

Like himself.

"We need to get fresher venues, and the solution is to go to the larger show," he said. "It's time to put the Sundome on the lips of everyone."

Kellam believes that support for the Sundome changes is out there. A total of \$300,000 was donated by the association's 18 members.

The members raised \$700,000 more quietly, talking one-on-one

with people in the community, Kellam said.

"But now with this fund-raising announcement, we're now eager to keep it going," he said. "The money will predominantly have to come from individuals because ASU has been talking to the large corporations (for the overall campaign)."

Connie Cone Sexton can be reached at 444-7118 or at connie.sexton@pni.com via e-mail.

Turning point

Sundome site for new ballet based on legend

By LANCE W. EVANS
Features editor

The tradition of the Day of the Dead, or *Días de Muertos* is indelibly etched into the Mexican culture.

At 7:30 p.m. on Nov. 1, regional residents will be given a new look at the legend when *Días de Muertos*, premieres at the Sundome. The work, to be performed by Ballet Arizona, was co-commissioned by a number of groups. Subsequent to its Sundome premiere it will tour other venues in the state.

The ballet performance will signal a number of firsts:

- The first world premiere ever at the Sundome.
- The first ballet to be performed at the Sundome.
- The first time Ballet has appeared at the Sundome.
- The first time the Phoenix Symphony, which will provide live music for the event, has ever appeared at the Sundome.

Michael Uthoff, artistic director of Ballet Arizona, choreographed the work, but he said "it is a real team effort, made possible by the blending of talents of many gifted people."

Other contributors to the ballet's concept are: Eugenio Toussaint, music; Berta Hiriart, libretto; Monica Raya and Rafael Cauduro, scenic design; Judanna Lynn, costumes; and Joshua Starbuck, lighting.

In the work Ballet Arizona has created an all new, full-length dance theater extravaganza, inspired by the traditional Mexican holiday.

The ballet tells the story of a Mexican girl who fears losing her heritage when her family moves north to America. A magical story told through vibrant dance, vividly colorful costumes, dramatic props and a grandly intriguing set, this unique world premiere with a slightly macabre name is really a celebration of life which will delight the entire family.

The origins of Day of the Dead date long before the arrival of the Spanish conquerors in Mexico. The celebration is a combination of various traditions belonging to indigenous groups of Mexico and the Spaniards who practiced Catholicism.

It just so happened that the festivals celebrated by the indigenous people of Mexico for the little children who died and the festival for the adults who died, were celebrated at the same time of the year as the Catholic celebrations of All Saint's Day and All Soul's Day.

Although the Spanish priests tried to stop these native group's celebrations of the dead, the traditions of the indigenous people were too strong. With time, these Catholic traditions were combined with the indigenous practices.

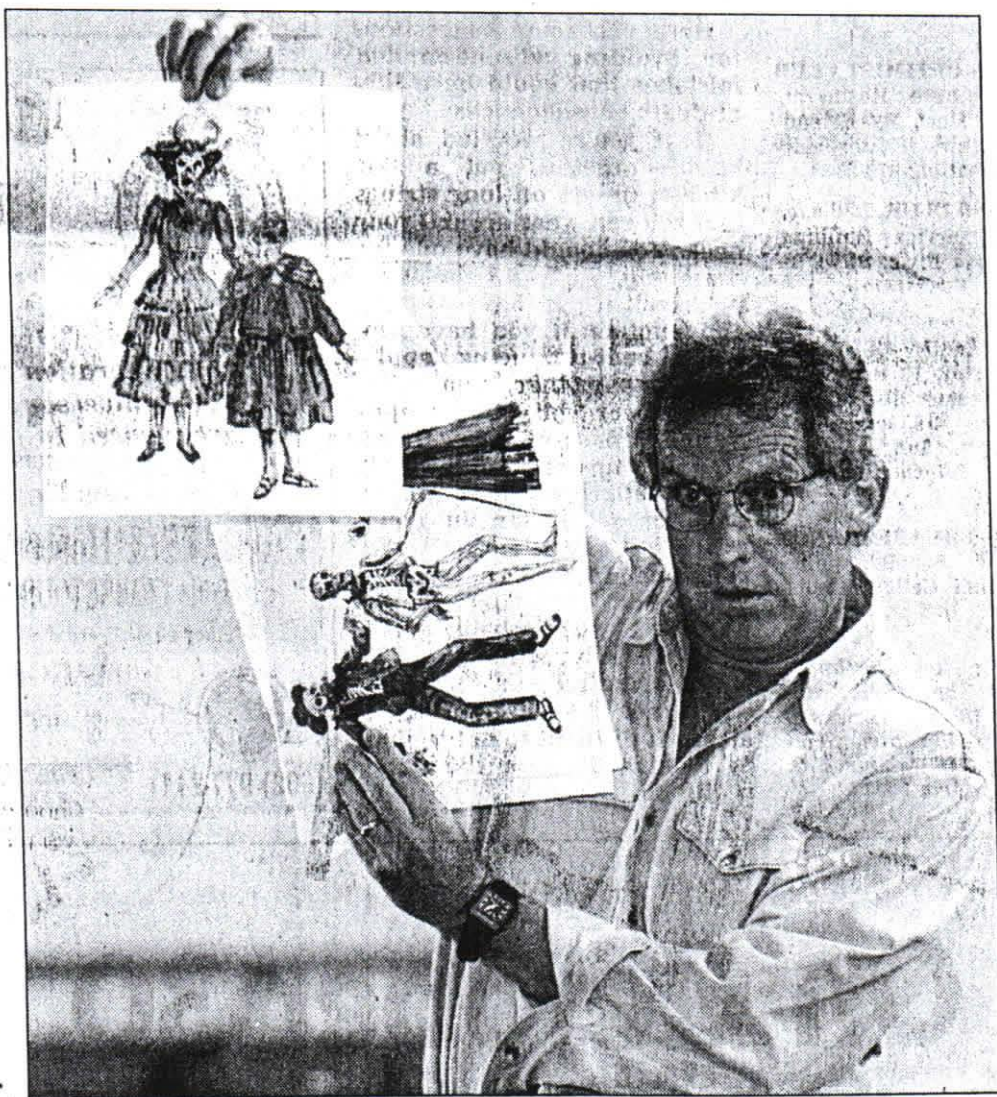
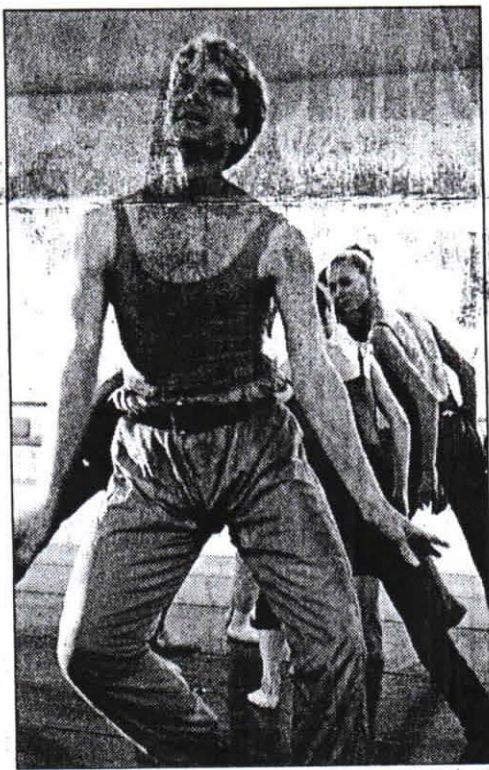


Photo by Nancy Engerbertson for the Daily News-Sun

Michael Uthoff, artistic director of Ballet Arizona, holds up sketches of costumes for characters in "Días de Muertos," an original ballet he has choreographed. The work will make its debut Nov. 1 at the Sundome.



Submitted photo

Andrew Needhammer and other members of the company rehearse a number from "Días de Muertos."

The Mexican holiday, the Day of the Dead, is celebrated in Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries on Nov. 1-2. On this holiday, families come together to remember their ancestors.

Celebrations often vary from region to region, and from rural to urban

areas. Although this celebration deals with death, it is far from being a sad or morbid holiday. In fact, it is a time of rejoicing and commemorating the lives of loved ones who have died.

They return to see that all is well and that they have not been forgotten. It is a time for the dead to feast on their favorite foods, to hear the music that once made them happy, and to be with the people they loved. In the United States, misconceptions sometimes arise about El Día de los Muertos because of differing cultural attitudes about death, misinterpretation of the meaning of various symbolic objects and because it is celebrated at the same time of the year as Halloween. During the Day of the Dead, Mexican people believe that the souls of the dead return to earth for a friendly visit to their old homes one day of the year.

Tickets, priced at \$16, \$22, \$28 (half-price for children under 12 and all students with I.D.), are on sale now at ASU's Sundome Box Office and all Dillard's ticket outlets. For more information or to charge tickets by phone, call ASU's Sundome Box Office at 975-1900 or Dillard's at (602) 503-5555.

The Sundome is located at 19403 R.H. Johnson Blvd., Sun City West. Tickets for the event are \$16 to \$28. For more information call 975-1900.

Sundome to get \$5 million face lift

Broadway shows will be possible

By **BRUCE ELLISON**
Staff writer

Arizona State University officials have kicked off a multi-year fund-raising campaign that will renovate the Sundome in Sun City West to accommodate Broadway shows and other large productions.

The campaign seeks to raise \$4 million, to join \$1 million already in university hands for the work, which will see a much bigger and higher stage and backstage area, and much-enlarged restrooms.

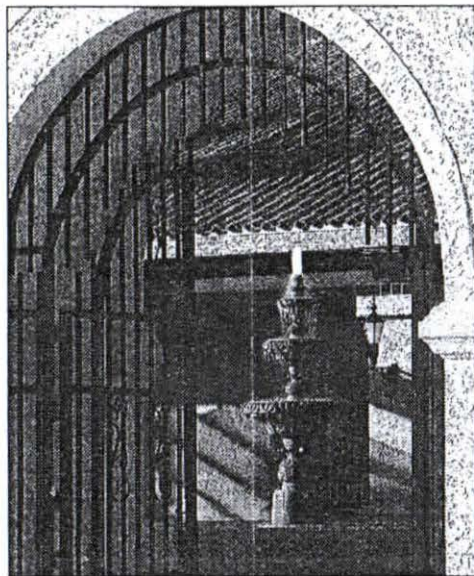
Dressing rooms for stars, an orchestra pit, and fly space for scenery storage are among the improvements planned for the 19-year-old theatre, which is the largest all-on-one-floor venue in the nation.

It accommodates more than 7,000 patrons at once, with no stairs or balconies.

The plans have been in the talking stage for years, and were hinted at in June when the Sundome slapped on a \$1-per-ticket surcharge for facility improvements. But complete information on the changes, and the fund-raising campaign, were disclosed last week when ASU President Lattie Coor outlined a \$300-million university-wide fund-raising effort dubbed the "Campaign for Leadership." The Sundome accounts for about one percent of that goal.

Del Webb Corp. already has kicked in \$750,000 to the campaign, giving the university additional land on R.H. Johnson Boulevard for additional parking, and \$250,000 in cash.

Webb built the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts, with con-

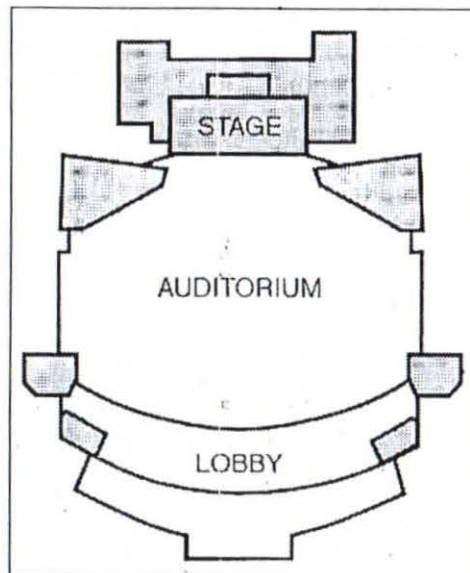


The fountain in the courtyard of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in Sun City West is featured in a brochure explaining the changes for the Sun City West venue. The shading in the sketch illustrates areas inside slated for expansion and improvement.

struction starting in 1978, soon after Sun City West was begun by Del Webb Corp. The developer in 1984 donated the theater to Arizona State University, which has run it as part of its public events department.

Coor called Webb's gift a strengthening of the university's relationship with the West Valley, and said the developer "is a great partner" in the plan to serve the entire community.

The Sundome hosts regular performances by known stars — everyone from Johnny Mathias to Victor Borge to Itzhak Perlman. It is used for vacation travelogue shows, for the Sun City West Variety Show, and for the Sun Cities Symphony Orchestra, among other things. It also has hosted business meetings and high



Submitted art

school and college graduations.

In recent years, ASU has tried to expand the Sundome's reach beyond the Sun Cities marketplace, bringing in performers who would appeal more broadly to the Northwest Valley, much as ASU's Grady Gammage Auditorium in Tempe hosts a wide variety of events for all ages.

But because the Sundome lacks an adequate and technologically sophisticated backstage area, it cannot host such Gammage shows as "Phantom of the Opera," or "Les Miserables."

"In addition, many star performers beloved by West Valley audiences are reluctant to perform in theaters lacking the kinds of sophisticated enhancements required by contemporary stage," the university said

in its fund-raising materials.

The \$5 million in improvements will change all that. Some of the changes — such as a six-fold increase in the number of lobby-area women's toilets — will be immediately visible to Sundome-goers. Others, such as the flyloft, will be all but invisible, but necessary.

When the campaign is completed and funds are available, ASU will remove the existing stagehouse — everything behind the proscenium arch — and craft entirely new staging facilities. The stage will be increased by 30 percent in area, and fly space doubled.

A full-fledged orchestra pit will be added in front of the stage. Chorus dressing rooms with 50 positions, star dressing rooms for four persons, a crew room, green room, wardrobe area, maintenance shop, storage and assembly areas will be added as the Sundome expands back toward Hillcrest Golf Course.

New stage rigging, air conditioning, dimming and additional lighting will be installed.

The lobby restrooms will be enlarged, and so will the cross aisle restrooms near the stage area. New plumbing fixtures will meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and two unisex toilets will be added at each end of the lobby.

If all goes well, ASU officials have said, the Sundome may have a short season in 1999-2000, with about nine months out while the renovations are carried on. But the timing will depend on how well fund-raising goes, and that, in turn, will depend on a host of Sun Cities area volunteers in the Sundome Performing Arts Association.

Sundome Exceeds Fund-raising Goal



Dick Bloechl (l.), president of the Sundome Performing Arts Association; Sam Gett, chair for the Sundome Annual Campaign; and Susan Buffington, program coordinator, celebrate the successful completion of the 96/97 Sundome Performing Arts Association annual campaign.

Photo, Lu Urdang

The Sundome Performing Arts Association has exceeded its \$150,000 fund-raising goal. A total of \$207,000 has been received from individuals and businesses. New Directors's Club and Lifetime members added significantly to this total.

The annual campaign was supported by the Del Webb Corporation, Ken Meade Realtors and Associates, Freed's Fine Furnishing, Dean Adams Insurance, Ford's World Travel, the Holland American Line, Arizona Automobile Association Travel Agency, Delta Air Lines, and 21 participants in the Northwest Valley Chamber of Commerce's Sundome Sale-A-Thon. In addition,

The Madison annual Gala Benefit Dinner enjoyed increased attendance this year.

"I am thrilled by the success of the campaign," said Sundome campaign co-chairperson Sam Gett. "Del Webb's donation was especially generous. We are very pleased with the response from all of the people in the West Valley, particularly the Sun Cities' residents who contributed so wholeheartedly."

We feel very encouraged by the enthusiastic participation of the residents and the community businesses," said Rae McMillan, campaign co-chairperson and

Sundome
Continued on Page 3

Sundome Exceeds Fund-raising Goal

Continued from Page 2

senior vice president of Northern Trust Bank.

The proceeds will be used to increase the comfort and enjoyment of the more than 300,000 Sundome patron each year. Plans are under way to renovate and add restrooms to the facility.

"ASU and the Sundome Performing Arts Association are committed to providing a state-of-the-art facility that offers diversified cultural programming, including the annual Variety

Show and the Sun Cities Symphony, as well as a home for school graduations and trade shows," said Dick Bloechl. "We had terrific support from the community and are well on our way to being the performing arts center of the West Valley."

To become a member of the Sundome Performing Arts Association or find out how your business can become a contributor, call 584-3118.

Sundome volunteers clock 100,000 hours

The Sundome Center for Performing Arts and Arizona State University Public Events held a volunteer recognition luncheon last month to celebrate reaching the 100,000-volunteer-hour mark.

"This is exciting and noteworthy," said Jae Paselk, volunteer coordinator, during the April 19 luncheon.

"At the nationally established rate of \$10 an hour, the volunteers have saved the Sundome a million."

The founder of the group, Helenmarie Flory, was invited in 1987 to join the SPAA board specifically to organize a volunteer group for the Sundome.

By March 1988, she had 12 volunteers who distributed programs. "We called ourselves the Dirty Dozen," she recalls.

Since that time, the tasks have grown to include ticket-taking, ushering, selling candy and soda, staffing the membership table and information desk, driving the shuttles and directing parking.

Both men and women comprise the group of 250 volunteers.

Mr. Paselk, who has chalked up more than 5,100 hours, followed Ms. Flory as volunteer coordinator in 1993.

"To me, the Sundome is a showplace, a definite point of interest that enriches the community," says Mr. Paselk.

"I heartily thank the volunteers for their dedication and support and I'm looking forward to being with them at 200,000 hours."

For information on volunteering, call 584-3118.



Photo by LU URDANG

Volunteer coordinator honored

Richard Bloechl, president of the Sundome Performing Arts Association, recognizes Jae Paselk, Sundome volunteer coordinator, for her leadership and dedication.

Sundome stops seeing red as renovations pay off

By TIFFANY M. ENGELMANN
Independent Newspapers

Red marks on homework or tests in school usually indicate errors and are received with frowns rather than happy faces.

Financial records for a business are quite similar.

For years, red marks plagued the financial records at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts and, at one point, the facility was in

jeopardy of being closed.

But for the past five years, the red marks have slowly transformed into black marks, indicating a profitable shift for the Sun City West landmark, owned by Arizona State University.

Happy faces and a positive outlook for the future have resulted from the change.

"Our operational budget has been in the black for the last three or four years," says Bob Lawless, the direc-

Bob Lawless/
"Our operational budget has been in the black for the last three or four years. We are no longer in danger of being closed."



tor of the Sundome. "We are no longer in danger of being closed."

Renovations, a commitment from

the community and better planning for performances all helped contribute to the positive financial shift, Mr. Lawless says.

"The number of shows, timing and improvements all go together," he says. "But there just is no one magical thing."

The Sundome has been equipped with a new sound system, which should make the quality of sound

See ■ SUNDOME, Page 3

Over

better throughout the auditorium. "We are trying to make sure the quality of sound is better and goes out as well to each end of the auditorium," he says.

The facility has also been equipped with infrared hearing devices, which come in the form of headsets for patrons to wear. And if patrons don't want to strain their eyes or bring binoculars to see the performers on stage, the Sundome now has a video enhancement system. Large screens are on each side of the stage to visually bring the performers closer to the audience.

All these improvements, which cost an estimated \$450,000, have increased the enjoyment of the audience members, Mr. Lawless says.

The funds for the renovations came with help from ASU and the Sundome Performing Arts Association, a community fundraising group.

"Having good equipment helps because good artists don't want to play in a ramshackle environment," Mr. Lawless explains.

And future improvements are to come, he says.

ASU is considering revamping the stage, which would allow for Broadway-type touring shows and other theatrical performances.

Presently, the stage at the Sundome cannot accommodate the elaborate scene changes and other technical requirements for such shows, Mr. Lawless says.

Whether or not the project is undertaken, says Mr. Lawless, is entirely up to ASU and local contributors.

"They have to determine if they

want to take on the responsibility and the obligation to raise that kind of money," Mr. Lawless says.

Colleen Jennings Roggensack, executive director of ASU Public Events, says the university will work to help raise the money to attract these types of plays and performances, offering more options for the theatergoing crowd in the west Valley.

The cost to renovate the stage would be about \$5 million dollars, she estimates, and hopes the money can be raised in three to five years.

The improvements would bring Sundome up a notch in the performing arts ranks, she adds.

"The Sundome will be the premier performing arts center for the west Valley," Ms. Jennings Roggensack says.

ASU is committed to the improvements of the Sundome and will work to increase the Sundome's presence in the area, she says.

Revamping the stage, however, will not determine the future success of the Sundome, she says. If stage renovations cannot be made, the Sundome will carry on as is and will persevere, she says.

The vision of the Sundome is to continue to attract audience members of all ages, from "cradle to grave," she explains.

With the growth in the area, people need a place to go for live entertainment and quality performances, Ms. Jennings Roggensack says.

The perception that the Sundome is the stepchild to Gammage Auditorium in Tempe is simply false, she says.

"I have many well loved children, or they are all stepchildren," says Ms. Jennings Roggensack, who oversees Sun Devil Stadium, the University Activity Center, Kerr Cultural Center and all the public events buildings at ASU, along with the two performing arts

facilities.

"The Sundome is equally as important to us as Gammage is and all the other facilities," she adds.

Mr. Lawless and Ms. Jennings Roggensack agree the Sundome's future looks bright.

"I see a good, strong future for the Sundome," Mr. Lawless says.

Ms. Jennings Roggensack adds, "The Sundome will be the performing arts jewel in the west Valley."

Dec. 31, 1992-Jan. 6, 1993

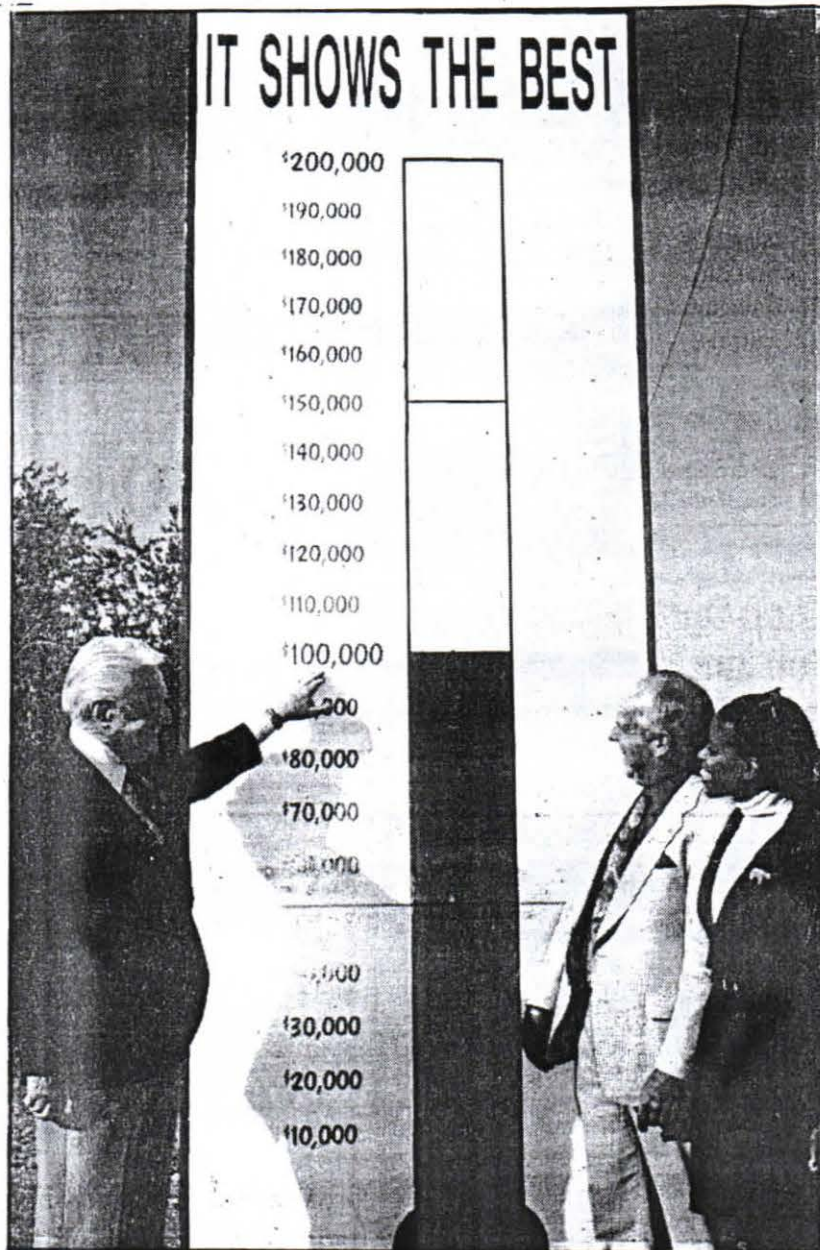
Sundome Campaign Hits \$110,000 Mark

The Sundome fundraising campaign, led by Citibank vice president Joe Davisson has raised \$110,000 so far. The goal is \$200,000.

Contributing to the campaign is Freed's Fine Furnishings with stores in Sun City, Sun City West and El Mirage. "For the second year in a row, we held a five day Sale-A-Thon and donated two percent of our gross revenues to the Sundome," said Dick Johnson, Freed's president. Johnson presented a total of \$5,288, a slight increase over last year.

"We were looking for a project to benefit both Sun City and Sun City West and felt the Sundome was a common denominator," noted Johnson, a three-year member of the Sundome Performing Arts Association (SPAA) Board. "The Sundome has come a long way, now standing on its own two feet with the help of the community. We're very proud to be a part of that success," he said.

The Sundome campaign runs until April 15th. Those wishing to contribute may send their tax deductible donation to: SPAA/Sundome Center, 19403 R. H. Johnson Blvd.



(From left) - Don Heyl, SPAA president had accepted \$5,288 from Freed's president Dick Johnson. Colleen Jennings-Roggensack, executive director of Arizona State University Public Events watched the financial thermometer rise.

Photo, Lu Urdang

Sun City West, AZ 85375. provides the donor with a variety of "perks". For information, please phone the Sundome, 548-3118.

May 14-20, 1992

THE WESTER

Volunteers Save Sundome \$324,000

by Marie Scotti

Arizona State University's Department of Public Events recognized their Sundome volunteers with a luncheon held at the Sundome Center on Tuesday, May 5.

Bob Lawless, Sundome manager, reported that since March 1988 when the program was launched, 32,429 3/4 hours have been recorded by volunteers. "At \$10 an hour, this group of volunteers have saved the Sundome \$324,000". Bob has been utilizing the expertise of Sundome volunteers to help him analyze shows that will draw the largest audiences.

Dr. Brent Brown, vice-president, ASU University Relations, expressed his thanks on behalf of the University. "I'm not certain that the Sundome still would be operating and functioning without the kind of support we have received from the Sundome



From l. Chuck Roach, SCW General Manager and Webb Vice President; Helen Marie Flory, VP, SPAA and Don Heyl, President, SPAA participated in the Sundome Volunteer Recognition Program.

volunteers," he said. "Volunteers made it happen".

Dr. Brown said he was thankful for the fund raising activities of the 1991-92 Sundome Performing Arts Association under the leadership of Joe Davisson, chairman. Davisson reported that the fund has surpassed its

goal and raised \$328,000.

Volunteer activity at the Sundome has increased dramatically during the 1991-92 season. Under the direction of Volunteer Coordinator/SPAA VP Helen Marie Flory, volunteers have reduced operating costs in several areas.

VOLUNTEERS

Continued on Page 3

Volunteers Pile Up The Hours

Continued from page 1

"I'm truly proud of my volunteers," said Ms. Flory.

The volunteers have assisted as ushers, distributed house programs, served as ticket takers and staffed the information booth for each Sundome performance. VP parking is manned by volunteers. Letters of acknowledgment and membership card distribution to SPAA members are also prepared by the volunteers. They also find time to staff the annual telephone fund-raising campaign.

Don Heyl, president, Sundome Performing Arts Association (SPAA) expressed the thanks of the SPAA Board to all the volunteers. He said, "You can't buy the kind of help we get here".

Certificates were presented to those volunteers who have contributed more than 1,000 hours since the Volunteer Program was started in 1988. Helen Marie Flory was recognized for 7,400 volunteer hours, Lucille Hudgens with 1,800 hours and Mary Digangi and Jae Paselk with 1,500 hours each.

Millie Mate was credited

with 800 volunteer hours, while Dorothy Dettmer, Anne Joseph, Helen Landgraf and Jan North were honored for accumulating 500 volunteer hours each.

Pat Edwards, Sundome staff, was the event coordinator for the luncheon and handled the arrangements. The Sundome staff congratulated all the volunteers and said "Thank You" for the many hours of wonderful support and friendship.

Sept. 3-9, 1992

THE WESTER

Sundome Performing Arts Center Opened 1980

Story,
Marie Scotti

Del E. Webb Development Company issued its first press release on October 4, 1977, which made mention of "a 7,000 seat theatre".

Sun City West construction was not yet underway. That began the first of the year and on Jan. 4, 1978, the Del Webb Company reported a large theater was a part of its master-plan.

In May of that same year the company released the projected cost of this massive theater undertaking...more than \$5 million. On Nov. 6, 1978 Sundome construction began.

Del Webb named Don Tuffs as the Sundome's entertainment director. Tuffs got involved in the Sundome through assisting in the booking of Sun City's Sun Bowl's Lecture and Fine Arts series.

John W. Meeker is the man who made it all happen. He was the Del E. Webb Development Company president. He built a dream into reality. It was from the success of

SUNDOME

Continued on Page C2

More than 300,000 persons have walked through the main gates of the Sundome to enjoy many kinds of entertainment. One of the most popular stars was Lawrence Welk who, with his orchestra, appeared at the grand opening of the Sundome Sept. 13, 1980. Autograph seeking fans, at that performance, attested to his popularity.



SUNDOME

Continued from Page C1

the Sun Bowl in Sun City that Meeker formulated yet another vision. Planning actually started in 1977.

The Sundome was constructed over a two-year period by the Del Webb Corporation, and is the nation's largest single-level performing arts theatre. The official dedication and grand opening took place the weekend of Sept. 13 and 14, 1980, with the renowned Lawrence Welk and his orchestra performing to near-capacity crowds.

The superbly engineered and equipped facility features high-tech audio and lighting systems and acoustically treated walls and floating panel ceiling, elements which enhance a performance for both patron and performer alike. There is a Handicapped Section providing seating for 78 wheelchairs. There is a dance floor of 5,700 square feet (space for 500 couples), which is also used for seating, and an orchestra pit for additional performance area. Patrons with telephone-type induction hearing aids receive all audio signals from a closed-circuit broadcasting antenna buried in the theatre's floor. A limited number of these hearing aids are available free of charge at the Information table for use during performances. There is parking space for 3,166 vehicles.

The facility has received numerous awards for its innovations and engineering concepts, and has been recognized for its barrier-free design, special wheel-chair sections and unique closed-circuit broadcasting system, for the hearing-impaired.

In December 1984, in response to the Arizona State University's Centennial Campaign, the Del Webb Corporation donated the Sundome to ASU, adding yet another jewel to the ASU performing arts crown.

Today the Sundome draws more than 300,000 patrons annually, a statistic reflective not only of the public's desire to see great performers,

Sundome pays tribute to volunteer corps

Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY WEST — Proving that what goes on behind the curtain is just as important to a production as is what happens on stage, the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts turned the spotlight on its volunteers Tuesday.

Honored at a recognition luncheon were 77 volunteers who have given 100 or more hours of their time during the past year to Sundome, which is supported by the Arizona State University Department of Public Events and the Sundome Performing Arts Association.

Many Sundome volunteers not only contributed their time and job skills in the past year, but opened their pocketbooks during the six-month SPAA fundraising campaign that netted a record \$328,000.

Special recognition went to those volunteers who have contributed more than 1,000 hours since the Sundome Volunteer Program was launched in 1988.

Included were SPAA Vice President and Volunteer Program Chairman Helen Marie Flory with 7,400 volunteer hours, Lucille Hudgens with 1,800 hours and Mary Digangi and Jae Paselk with 1,500 hours each.

Millie Mate was credited with amassing 800 volunteer hours, while Dorothy Dettmer, Anne Joseph, Helen Landgraf and Jan North were honored for accumulating 500 volunteer hours each in the past four years.

Paying tribute to the volunteers were Bob Lawless, Sundome manager; Brent Brown, vice president of university relations; Don Heyl, SPAA president; and Flory and Pat Edwards, ASU events coordinator.

Lawless said that since the Sundome volunteer program was launched, 32,429 3/4 hours have been recorded by volunteers.

"At \$10 an hour, this group of volunteers has saved the Sundome \$324,000. That's a tremendous contribution," he said.

"I'm not certain that the Sundome would still be operating and functioning without that kind of support," Brown said.

"You can't buy the kind of



Mike Garrett/Daily News-Sun

Helen Marie Flory and Don Heyl are in the limelight during a luncheon honoring volunteers at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in Sun City West.

help we get here," said Heyl.

Flory said she may be something of a "military lady" taskmaster as Sundome volunteer chairman "but I don't ask anybody to do any more than I do."

One question oft-asked of the volunteers by media and university personnel is "Why do so many do so much for so little?"

Most say they've been volunteering for many years and simply added the Sundome to their list of worthy causes.

"I've volunteered for about 15 years in mental health programs and served on various boards and found that volunteering was a very fulfilling vocation," said Lynette Amel, honored for 400 hours of volunteerism. "When you lead such an active life you feel so much younger."

"When we came to Sun City West in 1981 I decided to vol-

unteer at the (Walter O. Boswell Memorial) hospital. Then I thought the Sundome would be a very interesting place to volunteer. I also want to keep the Sundome open and operating."

Amel said she hasn't found a more interesting or wonderful group of people to work with than in the Sun Cities.

After working for a living for most of her adult life, said 200-hour volunteer Sophia Costa, contributing something positive to her community on a free basis is very enjoyable.

"The Sundome needs me, and I have enough money to live on," said the Sun City West resident. "Why take money I'd make from a job away from someone who has small children and needs the income? And I love it. I'm always meeting people, and there's such camaraderie here."

Apr. 30-May 6, 1992

THE WESTER

Sundome Campaign Tops \$300,000 Goal

The 1991-92 fund raising drive for individual and corporate memberships has increased from 1500 to 1906, and \$323,288 has been pledged or donated.

In a joint statement, Don Heyl, president of SPAA, and Joe Davisson, chairman of the annual fund raising campaign, said "With the full support of all those who think of the Sundome as part of our lives, and our Sun Cities communities and including residents of the Northwest Valley; our business community, along with an increased syner-

gism of ASU and our dedicated board of directors, and our hardworking Sundome volunteers, we have succeeded in this crucial endeavor". Reaching this goal will ensure the continuance and expansion of quality programs at the Sundome.

Davisson stated that campaign highlights include: Del Webb Corporation of \$50,000 to kick off the campaign. Northwest Chamber of Commerce "Sale-A-Thon" resulting in an excess of \$10,000 donation, with Freed's Fine Furnishings leading the way with \$5,084 donated.

Sun City Area Association of Realtors selecting the Sundome as their 1992 project with Ken Meade Realty donation of \$5,448 resulting from Ken Meade matching the donations of his 200 sales agents. (They had 100% participation) Also, Madison House Gala Dinner raised \$5,000.

A major contribution to success was the constant awareness created by the media throughout the campaign. We especially wish to salute the Daily News Sun for their weekly column; also The Wester, and the Sun Cities Independent, and

Arizona Republic. Special thanks are in order for those businesses that allowed us to display thermometers at their locations during the campaign, notably Dulaney Eye Clinic; Dean Witter Brokerage; Grand Shopping Center; and Crossroads Towne Center (Ships Ahoy Travel Agency).

With the increased cooperative effort that now exists between ASU and our SPAA board of directors, it has resulted in strong SPAA involvement in Sundome operations, bookings, pricing, programming and marketing policies.

Nation's largest single-level theater

Sundome brings family entertainment to the West Valley

by Vicki Culver
staff writer

Sun City's Sundome is the nation's largest single-level theater, taking up 108,000 square feet.

The theater, located on 19403 RH Johnson Blvd., held its first event on September 13, 1980. Since then it has been the venue for thousands of concerts, plays and family programs.

According to Michele Robins, information specialist for ASU public events, which manages the Sundome, the Sundome is typically used for musical events, dance ensembles, comedians and high school graduations.

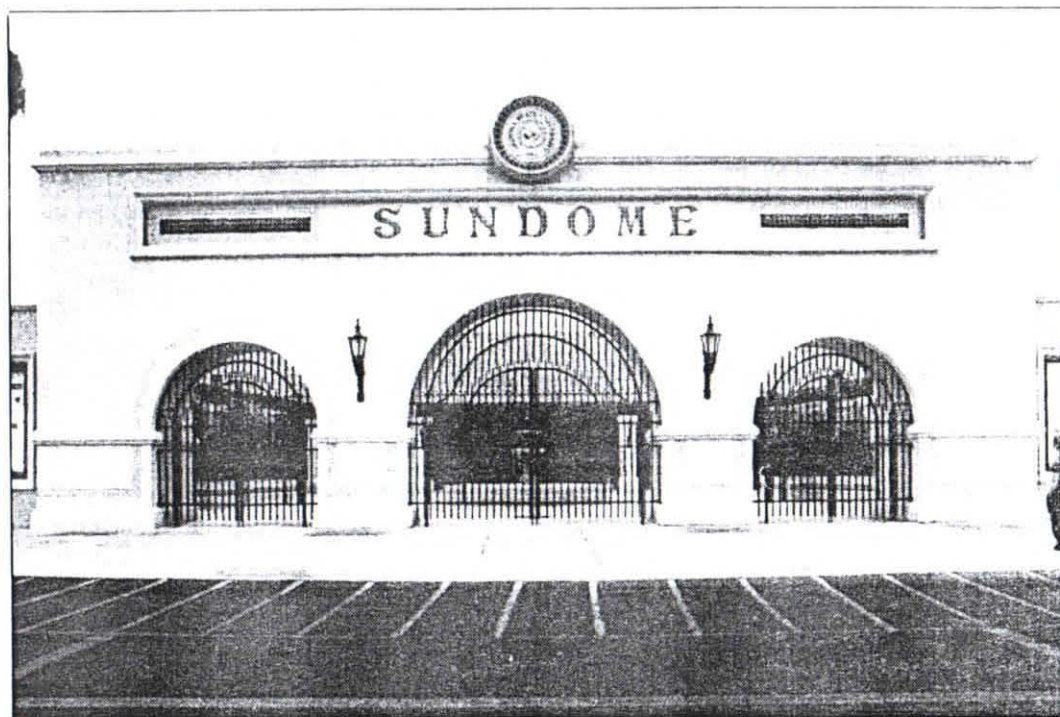
It is also available for rental. In the past, large companies have used it for conventions and car shows.

"It's mission is to program events for the entire West Valley," Robins said, "and to provide family entertainment that the whole family would want to go to."

Among the family entertainment this season will be Ray Charles, Ann-Margaret, the Glen Miller Orchestra, Andy Williams, BJ Thomas, Rich Little, Ann Jillian, Phyllis Diller and a special performance of Cinderella for children in the Peoria school district.

In addition, for the first time ever, there will be an ice show featuring previous world champions held at the Sundome. Robins said "a lot of ice" will be shipped into the venue and the stage will become an actual ice rink for the entire show.

The Sundome is equipped with 78 wheelchair positions for event viewing and each seat has its own headset that can be plugged in to aid in hearing. In addition, free parking for 3000 vehicles is available.



View photo by Jim Palmer

Family entertainment

Is the focus of the West Valley's Sundome. The Sundome, managed by Arizona State University

Public Events, hosts everything from high school graduations to ice shows.

Merchants pitch in for Sundome

By BRITT KENNERLY
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY — Behind the bright lights and the performers at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts is a bevy of supporting financial players.

Such support is critical: The Sundome's operating budget is more than \$1 million each year. Del Webb Corp. donated the venue to Arizona State University in 1984, and with tight university budgets, donations make up the difference when it comes to keeping the Sundome at the entertainment forefront.

From the volunteers who pass out programs to Northwest Valley merchants and residents who financially support the Sundome Performing Arts Association, it's a team effort, said Joe Davisson, chairman of SPAA's 1992-'93 fund-raising effort.

Mike Tarr, president of Theater West of Sun City West, said he and other members of the 250-plus-member theatrical troupe were happy to be able to donate \$5,000 to SPAA in November.

"We're very fortunate, and we'd like to help ASU and the Sundome," he said. "Our members voted unanimously to make this contribution, and



Britt Kennerly/Daily News-Sun staff

Joe Davisson, left, chairman of the Sundome Performing Arts Association's fund-raising campaign, and Mike Tarr of Theater West discuss Theater West's financial support of SPAA.

we certainly hope we can do it again next year."

SPAA hopes to repeat the success of last year's fund-raising efforts with events such as the Nov. 16-22 Northwest Valley "Sale-A-Thon." This year, as in years past, participating Northwest Valley merchants will donate a percentage of their sales during a seven-day period.

Freed's Fine Furnishing will again take part in the "Sale-A-Thon," as will Mallaro's Crestview Restaurant and Setterberg Jewelers.

Funds also come from people such as Realtor Ken

Meade, who matches individual donations from his sales associates, and Madison House of Sun City West, which each year hosts a black-tie gourmet dinner, with proceeds going to SPAA.

Sundome drive remains on target

Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY WEST — The Sundome Center for the Performing Arts Association continues to add an average of about \$8,000 a week to its campaign total, now up to \$110,000.

The \$300,000 target goal is more than one third of the way there with nearly four months remaining in the campaign.

Campaign Chairman Joe Davisson credits the publicity surrounding fund-raising efforts to SPAA's early success.

SPAA public relations co-chairmen are retired Trenton State College President Clayton Brower and Martha Moyer, Del Webb Communities manager of community and public relations.

"We are fortunate to have two people of that caliber and they have made a real difference for us," said Davisson.

He said Brower is a real mover and shaker in the community and is responsible for publishing the SPAA newsletter. Soon after retiring to Sun City West from Trenton State several years ago, Brower became ac-



Brower

"We are fortunate to have two people of that caliber and they have made a real difference."

Joe Davisson
campaign chairman

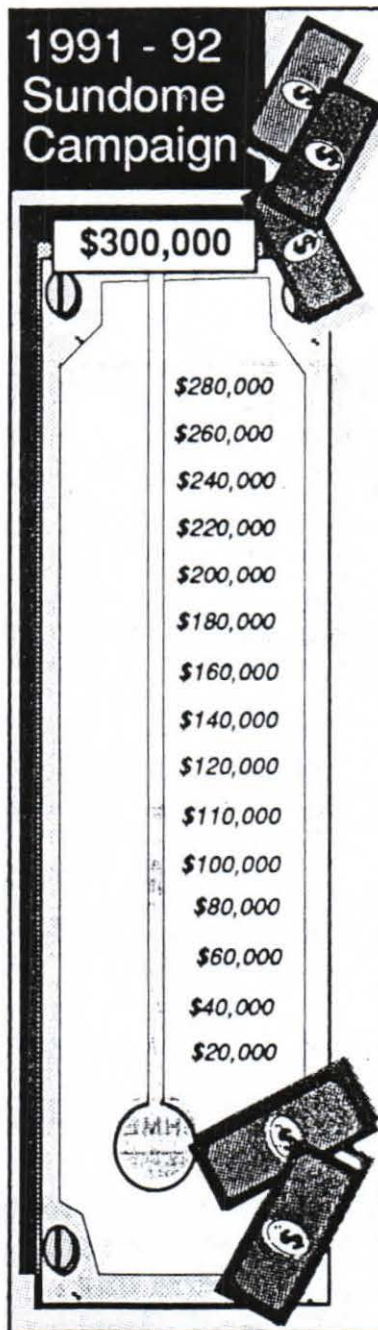
tively involved in the community.

An SPAA board member, Brower serves on Arizona State University West's Cultural and Academic Affairs Committee and is former president of the Sun City West Racket Association.

"Martha is also extremely well-qualified and is the type of person we need to publicize our campaign," said Davisson.

Moyer is Webb's representative on many boards.

She serves on the Sun Cities Art Museum board, the Sun Cities Area Community Council board, the Dysart Community Center board, the Sun City Ambassadors board, the Governing Board of the Recreation Centers of Sun City West, the Sun Cities Historical Society and the Sun Cities Area Children's Foundation.



Daily News-Sun

Nov. 12, 1991

\$50,000 From Webb Opens Sundome Drive

The Sundome Performing Arts Association (SPAA) has launched its \$300,000 fund raising campaign for the 1991-92 season. Showing its support for the cultural arts facility, Del Webb Corporation has donated \$50,000 to SPAA's goal and has set the pace for the campaign.

In making the donation,

years of uninterrupted entertainment programming.

SPAA, comprised of Sun Cities area residents and business persons, was established to help raise funds that are needed to cover operating costs, as ticket sales generally account for only 76 percent of the Sundome's budget.



Fred Dunikoski, SPAA Bd. president (l.) and Joe Davisson, SPAA fund raising chairman (c.), accept \$50,000 from Del Webb vice president, Chuck Roach. Del Webb Corporation is the first major donor in the SPAA '91-'92 fund raising campaign.

(Photo by Lu Urdang)

Del Webb's Sun City West executive vice president and general manager, Chuck Roach said "The Sundome is a critical component of the entertainment and cultural offerings of the Sun Cities, and the entire west Valley. Especially this year, we all need to make that extra financial contribution to the Sundome to ensure

This year Sun City West banker, Joe Davisson, is serving as campaign chairman, charting the direction for this aggressive agenda. "With the Sun Cities full support, your dedicated SPAA board of directors and volunteers will be working with Arizona State University to succeed in this crucial endeavor," said Davisson.

WEST VALLEY

The Voice of Sun City West

Oct. 3-9, 1991

Sundome starts fund campaign

By MIKE GARRETT
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY WEST — The Sundome Performing Arts Association kicks off its 1991-92 fund-raising campaign today, already at 16.7 percent of its \$300,000 goal.

The Del Webb Corp. got the ball rolling with a \$50,000 contribution.

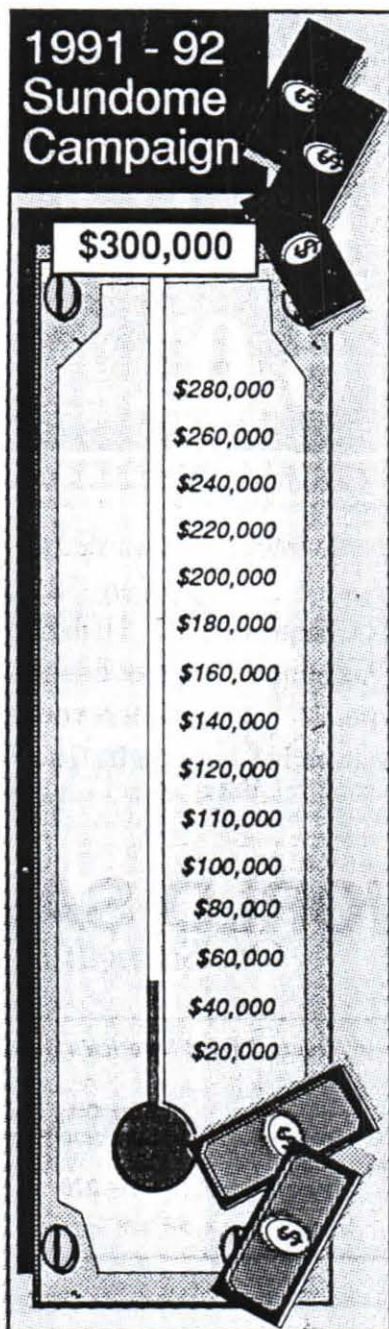
Campaign Chairman Joe Davisson said Monday that \$300,000 is the "bare minimum" SPAA members feel is needed to ensure that the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts remains open in the face of significant Arizona State University budget cuts by the state. ASU owns the Sundome.

"We could have selected a lesser amount than \$300,000 but that's the bare minimum we have to raise in order to be successful and guarantee that the Sundome continues," said Davisson.

"Anything less than that and there would be a question of keeping it open. We've done a complete analysis on the amount needed and that's what we came up with."

Last year SPAA raised \$218,000 after setting a target

See Sundome, A5



Daily News-Sun

Oct. 1, 1991

Northwest COMMUNITY

\$300,000 sought for Sundome

Del Webb donation
launches fund drive

By Lori Baker
Staff writer

SUN CITY WEST — Del Webb Corp. has donated \$50,000 to the Sundome Performing Arts Association to help kick off its \$300,000 fund-raising campaign for the 1991-92 season.

"The Sundome is a critical component of the entertainment and cultural offerings of the Sun Cities and the entire West Valley," said Chuck Roach, Del Webb's Sun City West executive vice president and general manager.

"Especially this year, we all need to make that extra financial contribution to the Sundome to ensure years of uninterrupted entertainment programming."

The future of the Sundome, which is owned by Arizona State University, came under fire during the last legislative session. There were threats that the 7,000-seat center would be closed because of proposed cutbacks in ASU's budget. Del Webb, which built the Sundome, donated the performing arts facility to ASU in 1984.

But after residents in the Sun Cities and other northwest Valley communities lobbied hard for the Sundome, a \$260,000 subsidy for the facility was approved for this year. However, legislators warned that they will keep a watchful eye on the Sundome to chart its progress toward becoming self-sustaining.

The SPAA, made up of Sun Cities area residents and businesses, helps raise money to cover about 25 percent of the Sundome's annual operating costs. Last year, the SPAA raised \$218,000, said Joe Davisson, vice president and manager of Citibank's Sun City West branch, who is serving as campaign chairman.

"It has been determined by our finance
See SUNDOME, Page 3

SUNDOME

From Page 1

committee and ASU that \$300,000 is the bare minimum we need to raise for the Sundome to continue to operate this year and for years to come," Davisson said. "We're confident that once people know there is a need, they will help."

The SPAA, which has about 1,500 members, conducts an annual fund-raising and membership campaign to ensure that the Sundome's programming is not only retained but expanded. The Sundome will host more than 100 events this season, including Neil Sedaka on Sunday and Roger Williams on Dec. 22.

"With the Sun Cities' full support, your dedicated SPAA board of directors and volunteers will be working with Arizona State University to succeed in this crucial endeavor," Davisson said.

Besides Davisson, members of the SPAA steering committee that will coordinate fund-raising activities are Fred Dunikoski, Don Heyl, Bill Edgley, Jim Rude, Helen Marie Flory, Roach, Jim Bailey, Ron Caya, Pamela Meyerhoffer, Colleen Kelly, Don Tuffs, Jan Mittelstadt, Martha Moyer, Clayton Brower, Edwin Martin and Sharon Arnold.

In addition to seeking contributions from individuals, the SPAA will raise money through ASU's telethon shown on KAET-TV, Channel 8, and by soliciting service clubs, corporations and the real estate industry.

More information about becoming a SPAA member or contributing to the SPAA campaign is available by calling Pat Edwards at the Sundome at 584-3118.

1991-92 season lives for Sundome

Fred Dunikoski wants you to know that the Sundome is alive and well. "Ongoing and here to stay," was the way the president of the Sundome Performing Arts Association board put it last Thursday during a short program at the big, big theater in Sun City West to announce the Sundome's 1991-92 season.

Was there ever any question that the Sundome would not have a 1991-92 season? Well, I and some other folks around here didn't think so but evidently the board members of the SPAA, fund-raising arm for the theater, did.

What happened this spring and early summer was that the governor and the state Legislature were pulling hard on the purse strings, so that it looked like the budget for Arizona State University was going to be squeezed, and with it, the Sundome budget.

Why the Sundome? ASU operates the Sundome, providing about 25 percent of its annual budget of about \$1 million. Ticket sales make up about 50 percent and the SPAA contribution, another 25 percent or so.

On top of that, Dunikoski said, his group had raised "only" about \$218,000, falling short of a goal of \$230,000, as its contribution for the operation of the Sundome in the 1990-91 season.

Now, you might say, heck, they weren't that far off, considering that the nation was preoccupied with a war at the time and the economy wasn't behaving all that well.

But it was a great concern for SPAA, which takes pride in not only meeting but exceeding its fund-raising goals. The shortfall, along with the legislative ax-wielding on the budget, dampened the fund-raising efforts and worried the fund-raisers. Dunikoski said he wasn't all that enthusiastic about going out into the community and asking for money while the budget fight was raging.

EDITOR'S VIEW



JOE
CALDERON

Did he really have reason to worry? Would ASU really have pulled the plug on the Sundome? Dunikoski believes so.

Happily, the shows will go on for 1991-92. Dunikoski's enthusiasm and confidence are sky-high again, he says, so much so that SPAA is committed to raising \$300,000 for the Sundome's coming season. Those guys just don't quit!

On Thursday, the Sundome folks brought the local media together for a light lunch of taquitos and chimichangas on the stage of the Sundome to tell us about the season. It's an impressive, diverse program, and I'll leave it to the entertainment writers to fill you in.

But Fred Dunikoski had some even more interesting things to tell us.

He said that SPAA is going to be announcing in a few weeks an agreement with a major national corporation for an official sponsorship that will greatly help the fund-raising effort.

And he said the ASU Foundation office has put together a professional fund-raising program for the Sundome, which should make life a lot easier for folks like Dunikoski.

Another positive step is that the Sundome is going to offer lower ticket prices. That doesn't mean that you're going to be able to sit up front for back-row prices. But those back-of-the-house tickets are going to be more affordable. For example, you'll be able to pay as little as \$7 to see Barbara Eden and \$5 to see the "Mostly Duke" salute to the Duke Ellington era.

My hat is off to ASU and the Sundome, and to Fred Dunikoski and his SPAA, for helping to deliver another season.

Joe Calderon is Northwest Community editor.

Daily News-Sun, Sun City, Ariz. Friday, Aug. 16, 1991 Community A3*

Sundome fund-raisers set sights at \$300,000

By BRITT KENNERLY
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY WEST — Despite Arizona State University's last-minute budget confirmations and many rumors to the contrary, the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts will raise its curtain Sept. 20.

The ASU Office of Public Events and the Sundome Performing Arts Association will formally announce the Sundome's "The Show Must Go On" season at 1 p.m. Wednesday in the Sundome, 19403 R.H. Johnson Blvd. The season kickoff is a Johann Strauss waltz program by the Vienna State Orchestra.

A free movie, "Field of Dreams" and door prize drawings for season tickets to the Sundome's Celebrity and Best of Broadway series are scheduled for the open house. Representatives from ASU and Sundome association will be available for questions about individual shows and new, lower ticket prices. The movie will begin at 2 p.m.

"We will make an upbeat announcement at the open house, letting everyone know the show will go on as scheduled," said Fred Dunikoski, Sundome Performing Arts Association president. "We will continue to serve the public, and the timing was such that we didn't want to delay letting them know the schedule any longer."

At a Thursday board meeting of the Sundome Performing Arts Association, spirits were high and fund-raising goals for the university-owned amphitheater were set, Dunikoski said.

"We set the fund-raising goal at \$300,000," he said. "That's a horrendous leap from last year's goal of \$230,000, but we think it demonstrates the community support we have for a vital cultural entertainment center."

Professional fund-raisers from ASU's foundation office, which

raises funds for the university, will assist the Sundome association in its lofty goal, Dunikoski said.

"This is the first time in the history of the Sundome that we've had professional fund-raising help," he said. "We'll be setting up an action plan, with the involvement of many board members."

The action plan, Dunikoski said, will include charting specific directions and actions of fund-raising goals, coordinating fund-raising events and electing a theme for the drive.

"They'll be guiding us, giving us an outline or road map to a successful campaign," he said. "The major fund-raising campaign will kick off Sept. 15. It's all been going rapidly. We didn't get the go-ahead until the first of July and everything had to be accomplished since then."

Rumors about whether the Sundome would even open its doors this fall were rife during lengthy negotiations of ASU's 1991-92 budget and because of the \$260,000 deficit incurred by the Sundome last year, Dunikoski said.

"We've had considerable support, a great deal of concern and some disbelief," he said. "People just didn't believe that the Sundome was teetering on the possibility of closing. We were that close."

Sundome patrons were getting concerned when advance sale brochures for regular series weren't received until mid-July, Dunikoski said.

"The response has been tremendous in spite of the fact that we were late, in spite of negative publicity," he said. "The results are as good or better than in previous years."

Familiar names on the 1991-92 Sundome slate include Mel Torme, The Fifth Dimension, Barbara Eden, Victor Borge, Al Hirt and pianist Roger Williams.

Additions to the schedule are in the works and should be finalized by Sept. 1, Dunikoski said.

Part of the problem with the rumor mill, he said, is that there are still misconceptions about the university's handling of Sundome financial concerns.

"There are still comments that the state is subsidizing the Sundome," he said. "But in effect, the Sundome is the only state university building where the utility cost is broken out and shown as a direct cost item."

"At any other building owned by ASU, Northern Arizona University or the University of Arizona, all utilities are in the overall school budget and not lined out as an expense against the facility. That's not the case at the Sundome."



Survey to help Sundome broaden its audience

By Lori Baker
Staff writer

A survey about the Sundome Center for Performing Arts is expected to provide vital information about how the Sun City West facility can broaden its audience.

The questionnaire, which is being sent to about 47,000 households in the Peoria Unified School District, is included in the fall report to the community about the district's activities.

Survey results will indicate what types of entertainment events district residents would like to attend at the Sundome. The poll is being conducted by the Peoria Educational Enrichment Foundation, a non-profit group that raises money for mini-grants for Peoria district teachers to conduct special classroom activities.

Sundome officials said the survey results, which will be tabulated in September, will be used to broaden the Sundome's audience.

"It's extremely beneficial that they're (the Peoria foundation) doing the survey because the Sundome reaches out beyond the Sun Cities," said Fred Dunikoski, president of the Sundome Performing Arts Association, which raises money from the community for the Sundome.

"It's been one of our targets to bring the entertainment programs to the west side of the Valley and to direct programs to children and families."

To ensure the Sundome's future, the SPAA is working to increase



File photo

A survey mailed to Peoria Unified School District residents should give the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts information to help it broaden its audience base.

revenues for the northwest Valley's largest indoor performing arts facility.

Earlier this summer, proposed cuts in Arizona State University's budget threatened the Sundome's existence.

Although the Legislature approved enough money for this year

so ASU can keep the Sundome open, legislators said they expect the facility to work toward self-sufficiency. ASU will pay about \$260,000 this year toward the Sundome's \$1 million annual operating costs.

The Peoria foundation this year plans to sponsor two shows at the

Sundome. In past years, the foundation sponsored musicals.

"We're not committing to any particular production right now. We're doing the survey to give the Arizona State University staff who administer the Sundome a clear picture of our community," said Ron Caya, executive director of the

Peoria Educational Enrichment Foundation and the Peoria district's director of arts education.

The foundation will purchase tickets at a group rate, which would make the price more affordable to families.

There will be a drawing from the questionnaires returned. The first winner will receive four tickets to the Good Times Series at the Sundome, and the second winner will receive four tickets to the Sundome's Best of Broadway Mini-Series.

Among other things, the survey asks what type of music, dance and theater the respondents enjoy. The survey also asks how often respondents have attended events at the Sundome and what type of events they attend.

The survey seeks to determine how respondents hear about events at the Sundome and what obstacles prevent them from attending Sundome events. Among the possible obstacles listed are parking, location, price, lack of information on shows or a lack of interest in shows.

Demographic information such as age, sex, marital status, educational level and occupation also will be obtained.

Meanwhile, an announcement of the Sundome's 1991-92 season is expected Aug. 16. About 100 events are expected to be included in the lineup.

The Sundome will open its season Sept. 20 with the Vienna State Orchestra.

Sundome future uncertain

Funding reprieve saves ASU facility for present

By Lori Baker
Staff writer

SUN CITY WEST — Overwhelming support from northwest Valley residents for the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts convinced legislators to subsidize the center again this year, but its future remains uncertain.

When legislators proposed cutbacks in ASU West

funding earlier this year, university officials said the Sundome in Sun City West might have to be closed.

The Sundome, which is owned by Arizona State University, is slated to receive \$260,000 from the university budget to operate during the 1991-92 fiscal year. The rest of its \$1 million operating budget will come from ticket revenues and community donations.

Sun Cities residents were joined by people from west Phoenix, Glendale and Peoria in lobbying legislators for the subsidy to operate the west-side center, which presents about 100 events a year.

"The support was not just coming from the Sun Cities but from the whole west side, including ASU West students," said Sen. Jan Brewer, R-Glendale. "That is what convinced legislators."

A footnote in the Senate's version of the budget would have barred a state subsidy for the Sundome, but the footnote was removed in the legislative process, and the budget approved by the Legislature included enough money for ASU to allow the university to continue subsidizing the Sundome.

But state Sen. Bob Denny, R-Litchfield Park, said he opposes the "use of taxpayers' money for entertainment" because some of his constituents either can't afford tickets or choose not to go to the Sundome. Denny's district takes in west Phoenix, Buckeye, Tolleson, Litchfield Park, El Mirage, Surprise, the Sun Cities and Wickenburg.

"I don't think it's an appropriate use for taxpayers' money," he said. "The university's money is supposed to go for education, not entertainment."

Brewer called the footnote "an attack on the Sun Cities."

"There was a big push to attack the Sun Cities because the Sundome is located out there," she said.

Both Denny and Brewer said the Sundome needs to be self-sufficient but disagreed on how quickly.

See SUNDOME, Page 3

"The support was not just coming from the Sun Cities but from the whole west side, including ASU West students. That is what convinced legislators."

Sen. Jan Brewer
R-Glendale

From Page 1

SUNDOME

"I want to get the Sun City groups together with legislators from districts 15, 17 and 19 and work on this so the Sundome isn't losing money," Denny said. "Something is wrong with the way it's being managed."

Brewer said she wants the community to work toward making the Sundome self-sufficient, but she didn't say how quickly she expects results.

"With a little more direct management from people in that area, I think we'll see tremendous results," she said. "I'll be monitoring

the Sundome."

Community groups are taking the legislators' warnings seriously.

The Sundome Center for the Performing Arts Association has already raised \$210,000 for the Sundome's next season and is continuing its fund-raising, said Fred Dunikoski, board president.

The association also has formed a task force to study ways to increase Sundome revenues by broadening its audience, changing ticket prices and trying new programming, he said.

"We're hoping that we can elicit

the support not only from the residents on the west side but the business community that has enjoyed increased business because of the Sundome," Dunikoski said.

Dunikoski said that although the community will work harder than ever to raise money for the Sundome, he believes the performing arts center should receive state money to pay for its utility bills, which run about \$260,000 a year.

"The Sundome is the only university-owned building in the state that does not have its utilities paid out of the university's general

fund," Dunikoski said. "In the Sundome's case, paying the utility costs is not a subsidy. It's something that should be done automatically."

George Cathcart, director of information services for ASU, said many performing arts facilities in the Valley depend upon government assistance.

"The university has always recognized it has a role to play in enhancing the cultural life in the Valley," he said.

Sundome future uncertain

Funding reprieve saves ASU facility for present

By Lori Baker
Staff writer

SUN CITY WEST — Overwhelming support from northwest Valley residents for the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts convinced legislators to subsidize the center again this year, but its future remains uncertain.

When legislators proposed cutbacks in ASU West funding earlier this year, university officials said the Sundome in Sun City West might have to be closed.

"The support was not just coming from the Sun Cities but from the whole west side, including ASU West students. That is what convinced legislators."

**Sen. Jan Brewer
R-Glendale**

The Sundome, which is owned by Arizona State University, is slated to receive \$260,000 from the university budget to operate during the 1991-92 fiscal year. The rest of its \$1 million operating budget will come from ticket revenues and community donations.

Sun Cities residents were joined by people from west Phoenix, Glendale and Peoria in lobbying legislators for the subsidy to operate the west-side center, which presents about 100 events a year.

"The support was not just coming from the Sun Cities but from the whole west side, including ASU West students," said Sen. Jan Brewer, R-Glendale. "That is what convinced legislators."

A footnote in the Senate's version of the budget would have barred a state subsidy for the Sundome, but the footnote was removed in the legislative process, and the budget approved by the legislature included enough money for ASU to allow the university to continue subsidizing the Sundome.

But state Sen. Bob Denny, R-Litchfield Park, said he opposes the "use of taxpayers' money for entertainment" because some of his constituents either can't afford tickets or choose not to go to the Sundome. Denny's district takes in west Phoenix, Buckeye, Tolleson, Litchfield Park, El Mirage, Surprise, the Sun Cities and Wickenburg.

"I don't think it's an appropriate use for taxpayers' money," he said. "The university's money is supposed to go for education, not entertainment."

Brewer called the footnote "an attack on the Sun Cities."

"There was a big push to attack the Sun Cities because the Sundome is located out there," she said.

Both Denny and Brewer said the Sundome needs to be self-sufficient but disagreed on how quickly.

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From Page 1

SUNDOME

"I want to get the Sun City groups together with legislators from districts 15, 17 and 19 and work on this so the Sundome isn't losing money," Denny said. "Something is wrong with the way it's being managed."

Brewer said she wants the community to work toward making the Sundome self-sufficient, but she didn't say how quickly she expects results.

"With a little more direct management from people in that area, I think we'll see tremendous results," she said. "I'll be monitoring

the Sundome."

Community groups are taking the legislators' warnings seriously.

The Sundome Center for the Performing Arts Association has already raised \$210,000 for the Sundome's next season and is continuing its fund-raising, said Fred Dunikoski, board president.

The association also has formed a task force to study ways to increase Sundome revenues by broadening its audience, changing ticket prices and trying new programming, he said.

"We're hoping that we can elicit

the support not only from the residents on the west side but the business community that has enjoyed increased business because of the Sundome," Dunikoski said.

Dunikoski said that although the community will work harder than ever to raise money for the Sundome, he believes the performing arts center should receive state money to pay for its utility bills, which run about \$260,000 a year.

"The Sundome is the only university-owned building in the state that does not have its utilities paid out of the university's general

fund," Dunikoski said. "In the Sundome's case, paying the utility costs is not a subsidy. It's something that should be done automatically."

George Cathcart, director of information services for ASU, said many performing arts facilities in the Valley depend upon government assistance.

"The university has always recognized it has a role to play in enhancing the cultural life in the Valley," he said.

Sundome gets \$260,000 subsidy from state

By Susan Felt
Staff writer

PHOENIX — Arizona State University West emerged from the state budget battles bruised but not mortally wounded, as had been feared.

"It's been sort of a roller coaster ride," ASU West Provost Vernon Lattin said of this year's state budget-making process, which at one point would have axed almost 30 percent of the school's budget request.

But the final version of the Legislature's \$3.5 billion state budget includes \$27.4 million for ASU West to spend in the 1991-92 fiscal year. And of that amount, \$260,000 is earmarked for the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in Sun City West.

"I think given the fiscal situation in the state, we came out with a reasonable budget," Lattin said.

"The campus will be able to

offer students minimal services, and we'll be able to fund the positions we've searched for. I'm pleased, given some of our other options."

One of those options was a budget Gov. Fife Symington recommended in April. That budget would have reduced the state allotment to ASU West another \$2.4 million below the estimated \$12.6 million that the Joint Legislative Budget Committee earlier had recommending slicing from the school's original request for \$39.9 million.

Word of Symington's proposal angered ASU West supporters, including many west-side legislators. They complained that Symington's budget would deal a lethal blow to the vulnerable 3-year-old campus that is being built from the ground up at 47th Avenue and Thunderbird Road.

In addition, Lattin said, the

additional cuts could have meant closing the Sundome, since \$260,000 of the campus budget was earmarked to subsidize the performing arts center.

Supporters also complained that the youngest of the state-supported universities was taking the biggest hit.

For instance, ASU's main campus would have lost another \$3 million under the governor's budget, only \$600,000 more than ASU West.

West-side legislators rallied to restore money to the campus, which has about 4,100 students taking junior- and senior-level undergraduate and graduate courses.

The final state budget adopted early Saturday morning restores the \$2.4 million that Symington's spending plan would have cut, which means that ASU West can hire 20 faculty members it had

been recruiting, according to Barry Bruns, vice provost for planning and budget.

Originally, the budget called for about 40 new faculty slots, which Lattin said are critical to offering complete degree programs at the west-side campus, thereby eliminating the need for area residents to commute to the Tempe campus.

"We're not going to be able to bring up the number of complete degree programs we wanted. There is no doubt that development will be slowed down," Lattin said.

Three buildings opened this spring, completing the first phase of construction for the campus.

About \$5 million of ASU West's budget is earmarked for the campus's annual lease-purchase payment to finance construction.

"We have all the buildings opened, but not all the facilities will be fully operational," Lattin said.

Sundome left out of budget

Footnote holds clue to funding

By DAN BURNETTE
Daily News-Sun staff

PHOENIX — All state funding for the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in Sun City West could cease July 1 under a provision of the Senate-proposed budget.

The Senate budget was passed May 2, but the existence of the footnote on funding for the Sundome has only come to light this week. The footnote would prohibit Arizona State University, which owns the Sundome, from providing any further state funding for the performing arts center beginning with the new fiscal year on July 1.

The state provided \$260,000 to the Sundome for the 1990-91 fiscal year, during which the Sundome had \$1,525,000 in total expenditures and transfers, according to documents from ASU. The university additionally transferred \$171,400 to the Sundome during the fiscal year. Subsidies to the Sundome in 1990-91 totaled \$758,400, including the state appropriation, the transfer from the main campus, \$220,000 loan from the capital replacement reserve and

\$107,000 in gifts and grants.

The state funding is being threatened as legislators and Gov. Fife Symington wrangle over the state budget. An internal report from the Arizona State University West Campus, obtained by the Daily News-Sun on April 10, said a proposed 2 percent cut in funding for ASU West could force the regional campus to close the Sundome.

Jim O'Connell, director of public events for ASU, has said if funding is cut the closing wouldn't occur for a couple of years. O'Connell has said the 1991-92 season would continue as planned. The number of programs might be reduced in 1992-93 unless other sources of funding could be found to replace the state funding.

Rep. Bob Williams, R-District 15, said the footnote to prohibit state funding for the Sundome will be removed by the time the budget comes up for a final vote.

"I am confident that will be removed," said Williams, who lives in Sun City West. "The governor supports that."

Williams said he has suggested
See Budget, A6

OVER

Budget proposal cuts state funds for Sundome

—From A1

ted putting the Sundome into ASU's general budget so that "it won't be hanging out on its own as a line item" that makes it more politically vulnerable to elimination.

Rep. Nancy Wessel, R-District 19, said she also believes the provision to stop state funding to the Sundome will be eliminated from the bill.

Wessel said she has been assured by Rep. John Wettaw, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee and a member of the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, that the footnote will be stricken from the bill before the final votes are taken on the budget. Wettaw, R-District 2, could not be reached for comment on Thursday or this morning.

Rep. Kyle Hindman, a Republican who represents District 15 along with Williams, said it will be tough getting the footnote on the Sundome removed from the budget.

"The Democrats see the Sun Citizens demanding funds for the Sundome as the height of hypocrisy, and it puts a lot of fiscally conservative Republicans on the spot," Hindman said.

He speculated the Sundome eventually will be removed from state funding, but Hindman said it shouldn't be done abruptly.

"The Sundome performs a great community service, but if

it's determined that these kinds of things shouldn't be publicly supported, then the funding should be tapered off gradually," Hindman said. "These kinds of cuts should be made fairly across the board. You've got Gammage Center over in Tempe on the main (ASU) campus that gets state funding, and that should take budget cuts, too, if they have to be made."

Among the Republican opponents of state funding for the Sundome is Rep. Doug Todd of District 27. Todd wrote his opinion on the Sundome in a May 13 letter to the Northwest Valley Chamber of Commerce's executive director, Tom McCanna, and president, Colleen Kelly.

The letter read: "In response to your letter of April 19th, I find it incredible, to say the least, that you say you are distressed over the closing of the Sundome — you (Westiders) who represent the very bastions of conservatism in government spending and who scream at the top of your voices over any little waste of taxpayer dollars. Please note that I say closing, and not possible closing, for I have long advocated dumping that thing to anyone who thinks that it is such a wonderful asset."

"The true facts have finally come out concerning that money hungry monstrosity in Sun City that has been soaking up tax-

payers' dollars by the millions ever since the University got shucked into accepting it as a donation (write off for your friend Del Webb). As far as I am concerned, those dollars could have been used on the main campus to keep English classes open or help College of Business Administration maintain accrediting or 50 other things that are needed to meet basic requirement of the students who got stuck with another tuition raise (tax increase) this year and will not see one cent of it in State General Fund University appropriations.

"If you think that I shed a tear for that total waste of taxpayers dollars, brother please rethink your position."

Rep. Bob Burns, R-District 17, said he thinks continued state funding for the Sundome is an uncertain proposition.

"The governor has stated that he doesn't want to be known as the governor who closed the Sundome," said Burns, whose district includes portions of Sun City, Peoria and Glendale. "I hope he won't settle for a complete cutoff (of funds next year to the Sundome)."

Fri., April 26, 1991 The Arizona Republic/THE PHOENIX GAZETTE 3

MetLife's Sundome show packs 'em in

By Julia Jones
Staff writer

SUN CITY WEST — Faced with a dilemma, MetLife fell back on a standard Hollywood solution:

"We'll put on a show, and everyone will come!"

And sure enough they did, 6,500 of them.

The near-capacity crowd gathered at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts last week to hear NBC's "Today" weatherman Willard Scott pull a few funnies and to listen to the music of the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra.

The event was the MetLife Family Reunion, the company's effort to locate holders of Metropolitan Life Insurance industrial policies.

Those were the "nickel-and-dime policies Metropolitan agents sold door-to-door," said Jeanne O'Connor, MetLife director of personal insurance, planning and customer services, based at the company's corporate headquarters in New York City.

"We're trying to get in touch with folks who might have had those \$500 or \$1,000 policies in the '20s and '30s, and many times we have good news to share, that their policies are now worth \$1,500 or \$2,000," O'Connor said. "We know there are 5.5 million industrial policyholders out there somewhere."

The Sundome program was the ninth stop (and the only Arizona stop) on a national campaign that started three years ago, O'Connor said.

"Many of the people we're talking to have pleasant memories of their insurance agent coming to their homes each week to collect the premium, so this is a nostalgic experience for them," she said. "The insurance man was like a member of the family then, since he came to call so regularly, and he'd stay for a cup of coffee."

"We're trying to get in touch with folks who might have had those \$500 or \$1,000 policies in the '20s and '30s, and many times we have good news to share, that their policies are now worth \$1,500 or \$2,000."

Jeanne O'Connor
MetLife official

"It's incredible to think back on a time when a man would actually go door-to-door for \$1 a visit, and that people would open their doors at night and actually let him in," she said.

"With the reunions, we're getting back to the family idea of MetLife customers."

Scott, spokesman for the project, knows all about the family feeling, O'Connor said: His father was a career Metropolitan agent in Alexandria, Va.

That's true, Scott said, and appearing at the reunions has been a real treat. Scott got his start in show business appearing first as Bozo the Clown and Ronald McDonald. "That's a tough job in Washington, D.C.," he said, "with all those clowns in Congress."

The reunion campaign was launched in Norwalk, Conn., O'Connor said, then went on to play in Tulsa, Okla.; Fort Myers, Fla.; and Hollywood, Fla.

When people in the northeast retire, they tend to stay where they've always lived, O'Connor said, so the company first tries to track policyholders by mailing notices to their last known address, and very often, they're right there, still at that same address.

"But in retirement areas, like

Arizona and Florida, we hold these events to draw attention to the program," she said. "We know that not too many industrial insurance policies were sold in Arizona, but so many people moved here when they retired that it made sense to look here. People just forget to tell their insurance agent when they move."

The company, which changed its name officially to MetLife about a year ago, realized in the mid-1960s that statistically speaking it should be seeing an increase in the number of claims.

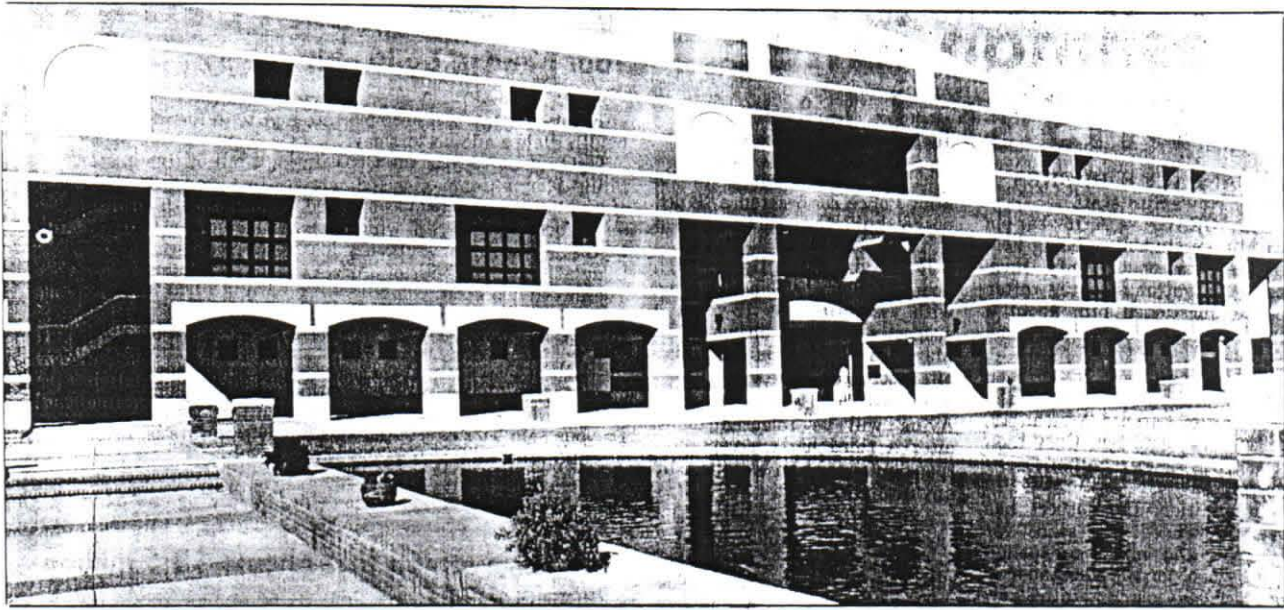
"People either forgot there was a Metropolitan policy, or the beneficiary didn't know there was one, or they didn't come forward because they assumed the policy had expired or was worthless," O'Connor said. "But they don't expire, and we've had people who've come forward who really need the money for operations and such. So it's been extraordinarily gratifying to me, personally. The company just wants to meet its corporate obligation to these folks."

MetLife stopped selling industrial insurance in 1964, O'Connor said. "It didn't make sense any more; people needed more than \$1,000 in insurance."

Those who missed the Sun City show can check their status with MetLife by mail, O'Connor said.

"Even if people just think they might be policyholders," she said, "write to us with the policy number if it's available, the name and address, date of birth, Social Security number and the policyholder's address and city in which the policy was probably sold." Inquiries may be sent to MetLife Family Reunion, 1 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10010.

"We have located more than 300,000 policyholders since the program began, and we're anxious to make it 300,001," O'Connor said.



News-Sun photo

BUDGET CUT TARGET — The Arizona State University West campus is the target of more than \$2.6 million in

proposed Joint Legislative Budget Committee cuts for 1991-92, which could stop campus growth.

Sundome holds economic punch

Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY WEST — Any move to close the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts would have a significant and negative economic impact on Northwest Valley businesses and home values, say Northwest Valley business and real estate officials.

Tom McCanna, executive director of the Northwest Valley Chamber of Commerce, whose annual Better Living Expo is scheduled Oct. 19 in the Sundome, said a possible closing would affect the entire Northwest Valley business community.

"My question is, why the Sundome? What else is being cut across the board?" he asked.

"The Sundome is a draw for people all over the state, not just the local communities," said McCanna. "For shows like John Denver, we (chamber office) get calls all the time from people in Flagstaff and Kingman wanting to know about local lodging and restaurants."

"If they close it down, what's going to be the draw to get people to come out here?" said McCanna. "Right now I don't know what we're going to do to get this turned around. It's possible that the Sundome could go

back to Webb."

"The Sundome is a pearl. And anytime you take the pearl away, you end up with a string," he said.

Nancy Gray, executive vice president of the Sun City Area Board of Realtors and SCABOR President Marilyn Radford were equally concerned.

"The thought of the Sundome closing — what a tragedy. I fear it will have a negative impact on property values in the area and of course it would have the most impact on Sun City West property values," said Radford in a prepared statement. "The Sundome is a draw to the area, and if we lose it we could lose some new residents."

"The solution appears to be twofold," she said. "One, we need to do whatever we can to convince the state Legislature and the governor to provide Arizona State University with the funds it needs."

"Two, we must convince the ASU Board of Trustees that the Sundome is a vital part of our community and its continued operation is a link to all our continued economic growth and economic development."

Radford said she would call upon the 700 members of SCABOR to call or write their

legislators. "The crisis is upon us and we cannot sit back and wait to see what happens. We must take action to ensure that the Sundome stays open."

Gray said the SCABOR board has not met to discuss the issue, but its three-member executive committee has been made aware of the situation and concurs with Radford's remarks.

"We would love to be able to have the time to do an economic-impact study (of the Sundome). But there's not enough time available to us," said Gray, who is a member of the Sundome's board of directors.

"With the Legislature closing its session at the end of this month, we haven't had the opportunity to do the kind of study we need to do as a board."

"The Arizona Association of Realtors has been informed and is doing the necessary research they need to do at the Legislature and advising us on this."

"We have a diamond out there," said Gray. "It would be a shame and tragic to see it close. It has been such a vital part of the community."

Northwest Valley business people agree the impact on secondary businesses would be tremendous, especially on local

restaurants and hotels.

Mike McMenamy, manager of Lo Perchio's restaurant, 124th Avenue and Bell Road, said the loss of Sundome business would definitely affect his business.

"It wouldn't close us but obviously it goes without saying that Sundome nights are some of my busier nights," said McMenamy. "People are out and about and a lot of them want to eat before the Sundome shows."

"I think it (closure) would be a detriment to the community and a detriment to my business."

Dee Malaro, co-owner of the Crestview Vacation Headquarters restaurant (Webb still owns the building) didn't want to speculate on how much of her total business is dependent on traffic from the Sundome.

"I can't give a percentage of our business that is dependent on the Sundome," she said. "We rely mostly on local residents for patronage rather than strictly the Sundome. It's an extra perk."

"Sometimes it hinders us because we are so close and they (Sundome patrons) fill up our parking lot and cut off our regular customers."

Trivia captures decade of memories

Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY WEST — Designed to host a wide range of activities, Sundome Center for the Performing Arts has offered area residents 10 years of varied entertainment.

But even the most enthusiastic season-ticket holders might have trouble providing information in some trivia categories. Sundome officials have offered the following historical highlights, some of which are truly trivial.

• • •
Highest number of tickets sold for show: 7,142, the Judds.

• • •
Lowest number of tickets sold for show: 530, Evo and Jemmy Bluestein.

• • •
Highest fee: \$165,000 for two performances by Bill Cosby.

• • •
Ex-presidents who were Sundome guests: Gerald Ford.

• • •
Former astronauts to perform: James Lovell.

• • •
Television news and political personalities who were Sundome guests: Jules Bergman, Tom Brokaw, William F. Buckley, John Chancellor, Walter Cronkite, Hugh Downs, David Horowitz, Ted Koppel, Irving R. Levine, Edwin Newman, Louis Rukeyser, Eric Sevareid, Howard K. Smith and Mike Wallace.

• • •
Performers with colors in their names: the Black Watch, Blackstone the Magician, Evo and Jemmy Bluestein, Les Brown, Stumpy Brown, John Browning, Joel Gray, Jennifer Green, Alan Greenspan, Red Army Ensemble and Margaret Whiting.

• • •
Performers with cities in their names: Morey Amsterdam, John Denver and Tony Orlando.

• • •
Performing groups with cities in their titles: Buffalo Guitar Quartet, Oakland Ballet, Peking Acrobats, Phoenix Boys Choir, Phoenix Symphony, Sun Cities Symphony, Tucson

Boys Choir, Victoria Symphony, Vienna Boys Choir and Vienna Symphony.

• • •
Only artists allowed to smoke on stage: George Burns, Bill Cosby and Alan King.

• • •
Performers named Williams: Andy, Don, Robin (film presenter) and Roger.

• • •
Performers named Jones: Doug (film presenter), Jack, Shirley and Tom.

• • •
Performers with two first names: Rex Allen, Steve Allen, Ray Anthony, Eddy Arnold, Roy Clark, Paul Harvey, Woody Herman, Carol Lawrence, Steve Lawrence, Jerry Lewis, Loretta Lynn, Rose Marie, Anne Murray, Jan Murray and Mark Russell.

• • •
Performers who were truly "stars": Kay Starr.

• • •
Performers who were truly "amazing": Amazing Kreskin and "Holland and the Amazing Dutch" (travel film.)

• • •
Performers who were truly royalty: Count Basie Orchestra, Paul Duke, Dukes of Dixieland, Prince Kawshi (with Aloha Hawaii) and Queen Elizabeth II (the boat - travel film.)

• • •
Brother groups who performed: Flying Karamazov, Gatlin, Knudsen, Mills, Osbourne, Osmond, Smothers and Statler.

• • •
Sister groups who performed: Albericci, Andrews, King, Lennon and McGuire.

• • •
Husband and wife groups who performed: Steve Allen and Jayne Meadows, Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash, Vic Damone and Diahann Carroll and Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gorme.

• • •
Parent and child groups who performed: Pat and Debby Boone and the Judds.

OVER

Center cost \$10 million to build

Daily News-Sun staff

The Sundome Center for the Performing Arts was designed and built by the Del E. Webb Corp. Construction on the \$10 million complex started Nov. 8, 1978; the center was dedicated Sept. 13, 1980.

The Del Webb Corp. deeded the theater to Arizona State University in 1984, and the gift stands as one of the largest ever presented to the university.

Trivia lovers may be interested to know that at the Sundome:

- Has the largest seating capacity in the nation for single level theaters at 7,169.
- The interior dimension is 320 feet wide by 225 feet deep.
- The interior area encompasses 108,000 square feet.
- The height of the room, from ceiling to floor, is 40 to 52 feet.
- Seating is based on continental design, with 40 inches between rows.

- The handicapped section includes seating for 78 wheelchairs.

- The dance floor has space for 500 couples, employing 5,700 square feet, which is also used for seating, orchestra pits or additional performance area.

- Side and rear walls are "soft" and absorb sound. Walls to the right and left of the proscenium (the wall that separates the stage from the auditorium) are "hard" and reflect sound.

- The 4,800-watt Yamaha audio system features speaker clusters above the stage and above the center cross aisle.

- The front-row-center audio experience is created by suspended sound "clouds," acoustically treated walls and a floating panel ceiling.

- Patrons with telephone-type induction hearing aids receive audio signals from a closed-circuit broadcasting antenna buried in the theater's floor.

- There is parking space for 3,166 vehicles.

Ex-Webb officials share memories

By TIFFANY MEANS
Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY WEST — As if recounting stories of a childhood home, former Del E. Webb Corp. officials weave tales of the 10-year-old Sundome Center for the Performing Arts.

John Meeker, eight years after resigning as president of the company that built the Sun Cities, remembered the excitement surrounding the Sundome's conception.

Conception

From a conference room at a Phoenix office, Meeker explained that Webb knew before the construction of Sun City West that the community would need a performing arts center that could accommodate a range of activities.

With pre-set requirements that the building be one-level and easily accessible, officials explored proposals from the traditional to the eccentric.

"We had an architect that approached us about an air-supported structure," Meeker said. He described the structure as a large-scale version of moon-walk bubbles that children climb into and bounce in at amusement parks.

Although the floor would not have been inflated like those at the parks, the roof would have been similarly supported by air currents.

Meeker shook his head and said that Webb representatives visited an existing air-lock structure in Iowa and decided one aspect of the innovative design would be inappropriate for a retirement community.

"Everyone had to pass through the air-lock and they almost got knocked down while entering," Meeker said.

However, Webb still wanted a unique building to attract people to the community as the Sun Bowl amphitheater had done in Sun City. The company settled on the conventionally built Sundome, the largest single-story theater in seating and square feet in the United States.

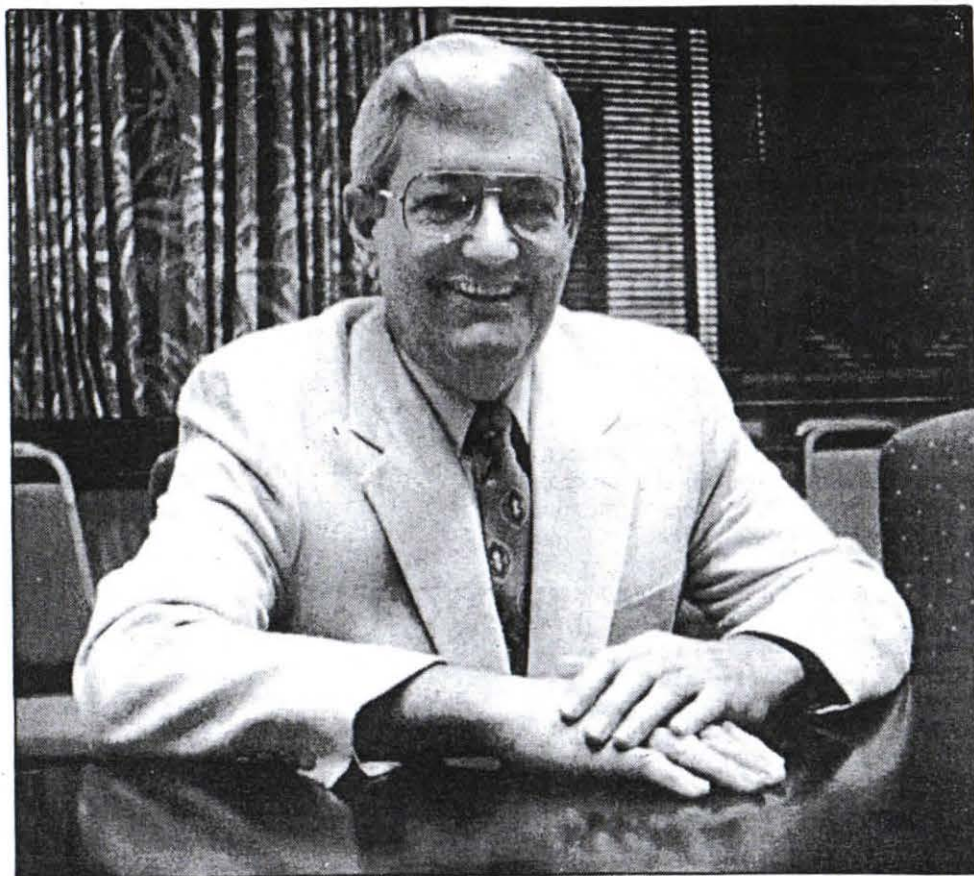
Meeker's involvement with the building continued, even to the selection of the chairs. He likened them to those found in theaters with high-priced loge, or deluxe, seats. Meeker sat in each chair sent for consideration and finally selected the winner.

"We didn't buy the cheapest chairs," Meeker said. "We bought the seats that were the most comfortable."

Apparently those who attended the Sundome's grand opening agreed with Meeker's selection. In the words of one critic, "Patrons' posteriors were sunken in utmost luxurious, air-conditioned comfort. ..."

Meeker said that all of the details, from the high-tech lighting and sound

See Center, page 8



Daily News-Sun photo by Patrick Knight

HE HAD A VISION — John Meeker, former president of the Del E. Webb Development Co., was a strong advocate for the building of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts.

OVER

Center fulfilled Webb expectations

—From page 7

systems to the spacious rows and extra aisles, combine to make the Sundome an asset to the community and the Valley.

"It met our expectations and exceeded them in my view. It's a heck of a fine facility," Meeker said.

Construction

Another former Webb official, Harold Crum, also is familiar with the work that went into the construction of the Sundome.

From his home in Scottsdale, the man who was vice president and general manager of Webb's Phoenix contracting division during Sundome's beginning, reminisced about the challenges involved.

"I think there was probably a lot of interest in the building because it was different," Crum said.

From a construction perspective, the Sundome presented challenges in three areas: design, fabrication and erection. The scaffolding necessary for work on the ceiling drew particular attention, including an article in a national magazine.

"To get access to all of the work, we built scaffolding over the whole thing at one time," Crum said. "It was unusual, but necessary because of the schedule and the complexity of the ceiling."

He tried to describe the ceiling in laymen's terms, saying that the many off-set areas in the ceiling designed to artistically accommodate light and sound equipment created difficulty for ceiling workers.

The absence of steps in the lobby and seating areas made sloping the floor to correct specifications a difficult task as well.

However, experienced construction workers lessened the potential for problems. Construction superintendent Jack McAllister was chosen because of his work on the Angels Stadium in Anaheim, Calif., and the terminals at Kansas City International Airport, Crum said.

"The Sundome wasn't unique in the world," he said. "But it was a challenge."

When asked to recall his favorite performance, Crum paused.

"You know, I don't know if I've been to a performance," he said. "We had board meetings in it several times."

Operation

Don Tuffs, Sundome general manager from the grand opening until Webb donated the Center to Arizona State University in 1984, remembered countless performances.

"How many hundred do you want
See Stars, page 9



Daily News-Sun photo by Patrick Knight

MR. SUNDOME — Don Tuffs served as general manager of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts from its grand opening until 1984, when the Del Webb Co. sold the center to Arizona State University for \$1.



Submitted photo

STAGE JITTERS — Don Tuffs, former general manager of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts, said that the only time he was nervous about a visitor's arrival was before Gerald Ford's Oct. 12, 1981, lecture.

Stars drew crowds to Sundome Center

—From page 8

me to tell you about?" Tuffs asked.

Although he left Webb in January 1989, Tuffs' job at an insurance company hasn't moved him far from the Sundome. Looking out his office window, he can see the familiar landmark across R.H. Johnson Boulevard.

"One of the interesting things about the Sundome is that it has hosted operas, lectures and a complete circus with a high-wire trapeze and elephants, lions and tigers," Tuffs said.

He has squired entertainers of all types from the hour of their airport arrivals to their departures so that the Sundome could host quality performers.

"My favorite of all time is Red Skelton," Tuffs said. He explained that he never cared for Skelton until the comedian came to the Sundome. Skelton's shows had sold out two weeks before their dates, but he still came four days ahead to visit community residents and patients at local hospitals.

"He is probably one of the most genuine performers I've ever met. He is the only one I can recall who has really taken the time to reach out to the community, with no other reason

— the tickets were gone," Tuffs said.

Tuffs volunteered to talk about the Sundome guest that made him nervous. On Oct. 12, 1981, six days after Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's funeral that Gerald Ford attended with other former U.S. presidents, Ford addressed a Sundome audience.

"I had to meet Gerry Ford and have a private dinner with him. The security for Ford at the Sundome was extremely tight," Tuffs said.

The audience for the address had to pass through metal detectors. German shepherds trained to detect handguns and gun powder trotted through the aisles.

"The whole thing was a little overwhelming. But Gerry Ford immediately puts you at ease," Tuffs said. "He's just an everyday type of guy and super person."

Now, six years after his Sundome responsibility ended, Tuffs continues to take an interest in the operation he directed from its grand opening until its transfer to ASU.

"The Sundome is still recognized as having the finest acoustics of the largest theaters in the world today," he said.



Submitted photo

CELEBRITY FORUM — Gerald Ford is the only former president to have lectured at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts. More than 5,000 people attended his lecture.

Remembering the Grand Opening ...

By BRITT KENNERLY

Daily News-Sun staff

SUN CITY WEST — What do Lawrence Welk, U.S. Sen. Dennis DeConcini and 5,639 concertgoers have in common?

They were all in Sun City West for the grand opening of the Sundome the evening of Sept. 13, 1980.

Reporters and photographers from

the Daily News-Sun were on hand to capture the festivities for stories detailing the unveiling of the theater and the performance of the "Maestro and His Champagne Music."

A Sept. 19, 1980, Daily News-Sun article described the events of the evening in vivid terms.

Capturing the expectant mood of concertgoers as well as the little

nuances that, combined, make any opening night a test of nerves, the article began with a description of the crowd, which began to assemble in the Sundome courtyard two hours before the show.

"Even with reserved seating, there were people in the Sundome courtyard at 5:50 p.m. waiting to get their first glimpse of the Southwest's largest theater," the story said. "The bubble-maker was not expected to take the stage until 8 p.m."

Quotes from concertgoers were sprinkled throughout the article.

"Can you believe this place? I had no idea it was going to be so glamorous," commented one woman.

Sun Citian Connie Kroll, then Sundome's head hostess and ticket-taker supervisor, said, "Everyone is thrilled with the vastness of it. Everyone is extremely complimentary."

Phrases like "It's magnificent," "Isn't this something?" and "I'm so proud to say I live here," were heard from patrons mingling in the lobby prior to the performance, the article said.

Lawrence Welk took the stage after opening remarks by Jerry Svendsen, Del E. Webb Development Co. vice president and public relations director;

DeConcini; and John W. Meeker, president of Del E. Webb Development.

The "spellbound and appreciative audience directed its undivided attention to the show on stage for an hour and a half," the story said.

It was at intermission, however, that "attuned ears" could hear discreet whispers in the lobby.

The article said, "One woman sitting on one of the foyer benches politely pinched a friend's elbow. The friend leaned over. 'Can you believe there are only four stalls for all these women?' the woman asked. 'It looks like they thought of everything except enough restrooms' came the reply."

It was obvious the majority of patrons was not aware there are four sets of restrooms in the building. There were no signs directing patrons to the facilities.

The article concluded with a description of a satisfied crowd leaving the theater.

"As the crowd filtered out through the Sundome's portals, one man summed up the evening. 'It's just been ... wait a minute, let me see if I can get it right ... Wunnerful! Wunnerful!'"

OVER



Submitted photo

MUSIC MAESTRO — Lawrence Welk and entourage starred at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts opening night Sept. 13, 1980.

Plaza del Rio becomes SPAA corporate sponsor

By MIKE GARRETT
Daily News-Sun staff

PEORIA — Arizona State University's public events department and the Sundome Performing Arts Association have added a new corporate partner.

The 185-acre masterplanned Plaza del Rio campus at 94th Avenue and Thunderbird Road and its general partners, Dr. Harold Gries and Sharon Harper, announced an agreement Tuesday with ASU and SPAA to sponsor with at least three upcoming events in the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts.

Plaza del Rio will contribute to ASU's corporate fund-raising campaign through sponsorship of the Big Band Festival Jan. 29, the Jack Daniels Original Silver Cornet Band Feb. 27, and the Myron Floren Orchestra Concert Dance March 19, said ASU Public Events Director James O'Connell.

He said Plaza del Rio was the first corporate sponsor of a Sundome event last year when it sponsored the Phoenix Symphony Orchestra's performance with pianist Dayton Grafman, accordionist Myron Floren and the stars of the Lawrence Welk Show.

"The willingness of Dr. Gries and Mrs. Harper to extend this relationship is an important endorsement and a promising means of support," said O'Connell at a press conference at Freedom Plaza life care center.

He stressed that the Sundome is not just for Sun Cities residents just because it's located in Sun City West, especially with the rapid growth of Peoria and the Northwest Valley.

"Nothing could be further from the truth. The Sundome is the performing arts center for the entire Northwest Valley region and we will occasionally bring in an act that will appeal to the entire Valley, even the entire state," said O'Connell.

He said the new three-way partnership will help raise the Sundome's profile both Valleywide and nationally.



News-Sun photo by Mike Garrett

NEW KIND OF COMBO — Lucy Hays and her Mello-tones, a five-piece combo led by vocalist Hays, entertain Freedom Plaza residents Tuesday after the announcement that Plaza del Rio would sponsor three upcoming events at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts by contributing to ASU's corporate fund-raising campaign.

New SPAA President Fred Dunikoski said he perceives his duties as more of a "volunteer" in the new partnership to attract more volunteer members — "grassroots people who are willing to support the Sundome through SPAA membership."

"Our members' enthusiasm in working with the Sundome will help bring the community some of the finest programs available," said Dunikoski. "It is ASU's responsibility to bring in the talent."

But we as a board who live, work and associate in the community need to bring them your (residents) wishes as to what you would like to see there."

He stressed that the Sundome is also available for various civic and charitable organizations to use.

Harper talked about the importance of community involvement and outreach in the arts.

"Community spirit, volunteerism and caring is the fabric that weaves vitality into a community. At Plaza del Rio it is specifically those qualities that we value very much, the involvement, the rapport and the recommendations of our residents that brings our community together."

Harper said Plaza del Rio has chosen to support the Sundome because it brings such talent and creativity to its approximately 700 residents but agreed with O'Connell it should become the performing arts center for the entire Northwest Valley.

Gries recalled a couple of years ago when then SPAA President Joe Davisson came to Harper and him and said serious consideration was being given to closing the Sundome for lack of funds to support it.

"Sharon and I were shocked when we heard that," said Gries. "The Sundome was a very important structure to have in the Northwest Valley. It transcended parochialism and was an opportunity to bring the arts to a community in a facility that everyone could be proud of."

"In that year when there was a real possibility of closing it down, Sharon and I felt that we would try to do what we could to keep that from happening by putting together some means of supporting the Sundome to make it even better than it already is."

O'Connell put it into another perspective when he said the Sundome and ASU's public events staff consider Sun Cities area retirees the future of the facility. "You perhaps don't hear this enough at your age. But you are the Sundome's future and we are delighted to be associated with you."

Harper said Freedom Plaza and Casa del Rio residents have been enthusiastic and supportive of Plaza del Rio's Sundome connection.

"Our residents tell us they will really be supportive by attending these three events and a lot of them will be going to the other Sundome events too. We will provide the busses to take them."



BUBBLE BIGGIE
Lawrence Welk played the grand opening of the Sundome on Sept. 13, 1980. He was virtually mobbed by adoring fans as he tried to leave the theater.

Sundome prepares to mark 10th anniversary

Something big is in the air and it bears the number 10.

When the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts begins its 10th season in September with the John Denver show, it will be the first act in a season-long celebration of a decade of beautiful music, first rate celebrity performances and theatrical dazzle.

The Del E. Webb Corporation began construction on the Sundome in November 1978.

On Sept. 13, 1980, dedication took place with Lawrence Welk as the opening act.

Deducting expenses and Mr. Welk's fee of \$65,000, the Sundome made \$14,800 on that initial show.

During the 1980-81 season, other performers and shows included "4 Girls 4" with Rosemary Clooney, Rose Marie, Helen O'Connell and Margaret Whiting; Tennessee Ernie Ford; Don Ho; Ed Ames; The Mills Brothers; Peter Duchin; Pearl Bailey; Red Skelton; Pete Fountain; Paul Harvey; Bob Hope; Pat Boone; The Osmonds; Jim Nabors; Victor Borge; Robert Goulet; Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gorme; Bobby Vinton and Steve Allen and Jayne Meadows.

Quite an impressive bill, and many of these same performers will be appearing in the 10th anniversary 1990-91 season.

Highlighting the gala celebration will be Bob Hope and George Burns with The Manhattan Rhythm Kings on Nov. 2.

These comedy superstars are favorites in the Sun Cities. Bob Hope has played to sold out audiences four times and George Burns has delighted crowds in three previous performances.

Also starring in the 1990-91 season will be The Stars of the

Lawrence Welk Show; Glenn Yarbrough; Lou Rawls and Lainie Kazan; Diahann Carroll and Vic Damone; Pat Boone and Florence Henderson in a Christmas Show; Mel Torme and The McGuire Sisters; Englebert Humperdink; Steve Allen; Tommy Tune and Glen Campbell.

And by all reports, this year's Sun City West Variety Show, set for Nov. 29-30, will be the biggest and best ever.

When Del Webb Corp. decided the facility to Arizona State University in 1984, it was one of the largest gifts ever presented to the University.

With a 4,800 watt Yamaha audio system, seating for 78 wheelchairs and a computerized lighting system, the Sundome is not only the entertainment centerpiece of the retirement communities it serves, it is also a tremendous draw for the rest of the Valley.

While waiting for a show, patrons can view the 75-foot mural over the central portal in the lobby.

Sun City artist Fred Kabica took four years to paint the panels, which depict evolution and progress in the universe and on this planet.

Mr. Kabica died in 1980, a few months after his mural was placed in the Sundome lobby.

There are regular weekly tours of the Sundome conducted by Warren Norman, who can tell visitors the interesting facts and backstage tidbits regarding the history and stars of the Sundome.

The Sundome Performing Arts Association, with support from individuals and the business community, raises funds to support the quality entertainment at the Sundome, raising over \$200,000 for the 1989-90 campaign.

Fred Dunikoski, SPAA presi-

dent, says, the volunteers are the "unsung heroes" of the yearly drive.

"We've got some of the most wonderful, energetic and dedicated people helping us out."

Single tickets are currently on sale for the John Denver concert and the Dionne Warwick and Burt Bacharach show.

Series packages and special events are on sale by mail order only until Aug. 13.

Single tickets for all shows go on sale on Aug. 13.

Call the Sundome box office at 975-1900 for ticket information.

ASU - SUNDOME
19403 R.H. JOHNSON BLVD. SUN CITY WEST, AZ 85375

Designer/Builder:	Del E. Webb Corporation
Construction Began:	November 8, 1978
Official Dedication:	September 13, 1980

SUNDOME FEATURES

Seating Capacity:	7,030
Handicapped Seating:	Seating for 254 wheelchairs, including companion.
Type of seating:	Continental Design (40 inches between rows)
Interior Dimension:	320 feet wide by 225 feet deep
Interior Area:	108,000 square feet
Height (ceiling to floor):	40 to 52 feet
Dance Floor:	5,700 square feet (space for 500 couples). Also used for seating, orchestra, or additional performance area.
Wall Design:	Side and rear walls are "soft" and absorb sound. Walls at right and left of proscenium are "hard" and reflect sound.
Sound System:	EAW, CROWN, YAMAHA sound system. Sound system emanates from speaker clusters above the stage and above the center cross aisle. Suspended reflective sound clouds, acoustically treated walls, and a floating panel ceiling help create the front row center audio experience.
Audio Enhancement:	Sundome is equipped with state of the art multi. channel infrared hearing system. Patrons with infrared headsets receive all audio signals from six sending units located on either side of the stage. These headsets are available free of charge at the East Bar for use during performances.
Video Enhancement:	A video system was installed in 1995 to enhance performances. Two 15'x 20' retractable Video Matte screens are on either side of the stage. This system is especially helpful to those patrons seated to the rear of the auditorium. The system is not equipped to record events.
Additional Features:	A computerized lighting system, three follow-spot positions, and a moveable, oak-veneered orchestra shell.
Parking:	Free parking with space for 3,000 vehicles. There is handicapped parking available for over 100 vehicles with approved insignia or plates.

For rental information, call Larry Kovac at 214-5230.
For ticket information, call the Box Office at 975-1900.

FROM EVOLUTION . . . THROUGH PROGRESS . . . TO WHERE

Scenes from the evolution of the universe, life's progress on Earth and man's ultimate destruction of the planet are depicted on the 75-foot mural hanging over the center portal in the Sundome lobby.

Sun City Artist Fred Kabica took four years to complete his project (1970-74). He first drew ten separate panels and then painted them in sequence for this mural which is described below. Kabica died in 1980 several months after this mural was placed in the Sundome lobby.

The most vivid colors in Kabica's mural start at the left where planets, stars and other heavenly bodies detail the origin of the universe and the solar system.

Volcanoes erupt and spill lava into a blue-green sea while lightning bolts crisscross beneath a brilliant rainbow filled sky.

Dense vegetation surround dinosaurs in battle followed by apes in trees and the emergence of primitive man from a cave.

Mammals and birds surround a pond where a woman holds a child while above her floats a hand-shaped cloud.

The emergence of cultivated fields, towns, shops, Vikings, cars and monorails, while offshore oil rigs and factory smokestacks show the development of the industrial age.

Skyscrapers and a nuclear power plant flank a scene from the present, replete with fuel trucks, an armored tank, jets and a spacecraft amid a smoggy sky that blots out the sun.

At the base of the Omega Tower, Kabica illustrates famine, which could represent the famine that struck Ethiopia and South Africa.

Missiles blast off near a city left in ruin. A woman with a baby in her arms cries out, a man lies face down in the dirt. Bones and a burnt tree amidst a cracked and rutted landscape reveal the aftermath of nuclear war.

Underground are hydroponic gardens and people in radiation suits as spaceships depart Earth for unknown destinations.

FEBRUARY

Symphony-Shron Robinson	Sun. Feb. 1st 3pm	\$20,16,12
Nunsence Jamboree	Fri. Feb. 6th 8pm	\$28,22,16
Nunsence Jamboree	Sat. Feb. 7th 8pm	\$28,22,16
Nunsence Jamboree	Sun. Feb. 8th 2pm	\$28,22,16
Film - Ukraine	Tues. Feb. 10th 7pm	\$6
Branson - Mickey Gilley	Sun. Feb. 15th 2pm	\$24,18,12
Papago Chamber Ensemble	Wed. Feb. 18th 8pm	\$12
Nickelodeon - Gulltar Gulltar Island	Sat. Feb. 21st 3pm	\$20,16,14
Marcel Marceau	Sun. Feb. 22nd 2pm	\$24,18,12

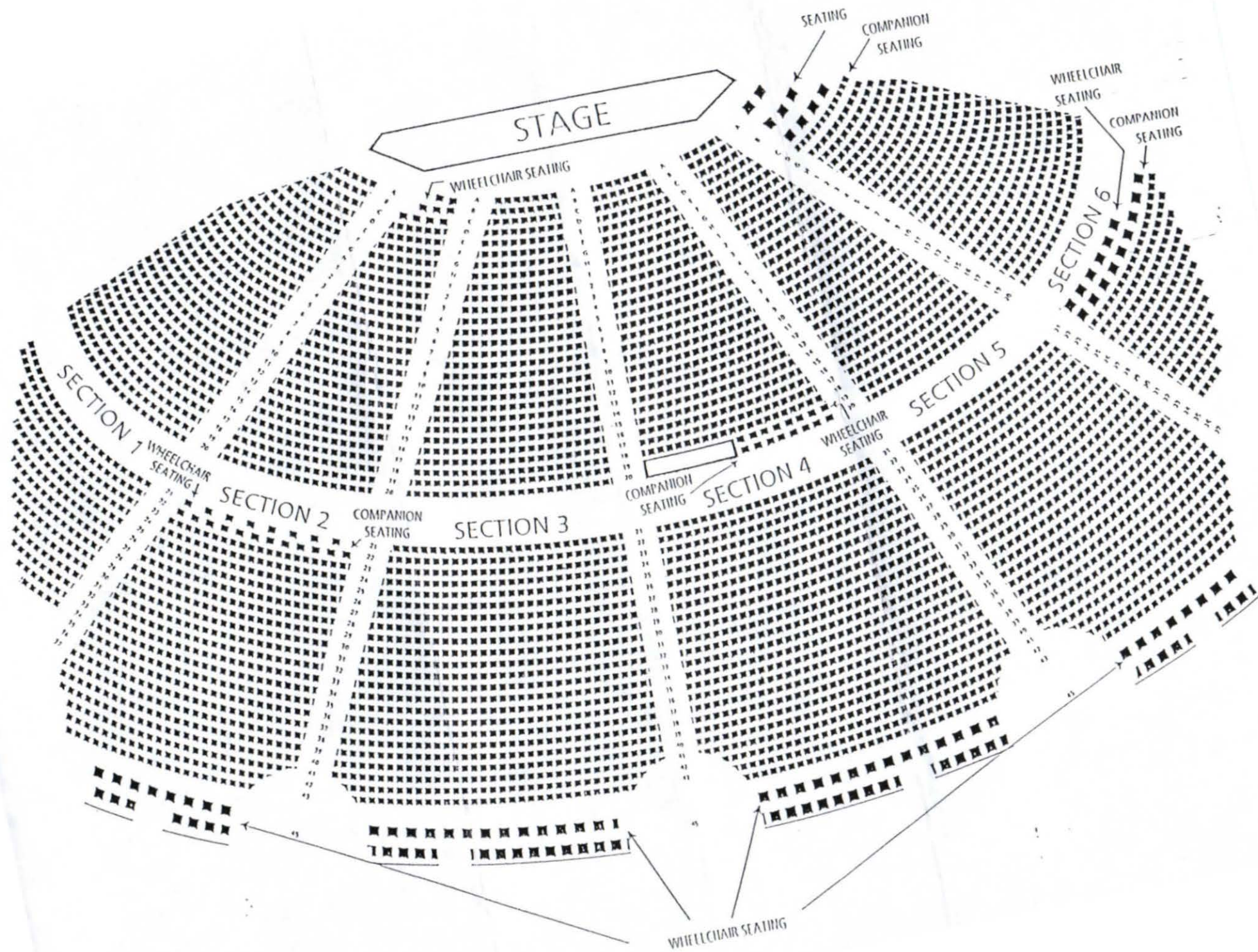
MARCH

Roger Whittaker	Sun. March 1st 2pm	\$26,20,14
Film - Puerto Rico	Tues. March 3rd 7pm	\$6
It's Magic	Sat. March 7th 3pm	\$20,16,11
Butterfield Young Artist	Sun. March 8th 3pm	\$20,16,12
Arpeggio	Wed. March 11th 8pm	\$12
Branson - Jennifer Wilson	Sun. March 15th 2pm	\$24,18,12
Irish Rovers	Tues. March 17th 8pm	\$24,18,12,7
Bravo Broadway III	Sun. March 22nd 3pm	\$20,16,12
Film - Argentina	Tues. March 24th 7pm	\$6
RTE Irish National	Wed. March 25th 8pm	\$20,16,11
Victor Borge	Sun. March 29th 2pm	\$26,20,14,9

SUNDOME SCHEDULE

APRIL

Symphony - Eugene Fodor	Sun. April 5th 3pm	\$20,16,12
Carousel	Sat. April 11th 3pm	\$28,22,16
Carousel	Sat. April 11th 8pm	\$28,22,16
Limelighters & Bros. 4	Sun. April 19th 2pm	\$24,18,12



Communiti

The Premier Monthly Lifestyle Magazine for the Northwest Valley

Volume 2, Issue 7, July 2013



INCommuniti® is a publication of EZ Web Printing, LC, published as a service to the community. All new submissions must be submitted the fifteenth of the month previous to the month it is to be published. Unsolicited materials cannot be returned unless accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope. This publication is published monthly and does not assume any liability for any products or services contained in the magazine and does not endorse any opinions expressed therein. The tradename InCommuniti® is registered. Reproduction in whole or any part of InCommuniti® without permission is prohibited. All Rights Reserved. Advertising & Editorial offices located at: 18700 N. 107th Ave., Ste. 8, Sun City, AZ 85373 Phone: 623.875.3386 Email: Contact@EZwebPrinting.com

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MAIN FOCUS NOW ON SILVER



Russ Claytor sits on a low stool in Toy-Ki Silver Craft's Club Room, patiently securing a stone in his wife's engagement ring.

He and Arlene celebrated 60 years of marriage last June. Some things stand the test of time, while others simply take a long time to happen. Claytor understands both. Recently — more than 62 years after being fired upon by Chinese soldiers in the Korean War — he finally was awarded his Purple Heart by Rep. Trent Franks (R-Ariz., Dist. 8).



Purpleheart — Toy-Ki Silver Craft Club member Russ Claytor, with his wife, Arlene, receives his Purple Heart from Rep. Trent Franks (R-Ariz., Dist. 8), more than 62 years after being wounded in the Korean War. Photo Submitted.

"One of the reasons I put in for mine was that I read something in the paper recently about someone just getting one from the Second World War," Claytor said. "My wife

said, 'You should see about getting yours.' She was the one who got me to contact Trent Franks.

"I never thought about it too much through the years," he continued. "I had my orders, and that's all I needed."

On Dec. 1, 1950 — his 18th birthday — Private First Class Claytor was with the Army's 7th Division, 32nd Regiment, at Choisin Reservoir. "We were fighting up through North Korea, and the Chinese came in and kicked our backsides," he said.

Enemy fire blasted through Claytor's left thigh, exiting through his right. The weather was excruciatingly cold, one of the coldest Korean winters in 100 years. "It was 42 below zero, and I walked out of there," he said. "The doctor said the cold weather kept everything down; I wouldn't have been able to walk otherwise."

While in the hospital, Army officers came in and showed the Purple Heart medal to Claytor and other recovering soldiers. "I think there were about 35 of us getting it, and they told us they'd have to take it back and get medals engraved (for all of the recipients)," he said.

The medal left his mind from that point. "For about three years after it happened, I couldn't think about it," he said. "We left quite a few truckloads of dead soldiers over there, a lot of good people. I guess it's no different for me than for anyone else who went through it."

continued on page 24

THE SUN "SETS" ON THE SUNDOME



The first performer at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts was Lawrence Welk. Welk, his dancers and musicians, played for more than 7,000 people on a hot summer night in 1980. Tickets were \$7. At that time, the Sundome was the newest and largest single-story performing arts center in the United States. The new retirement community of Sun City West became its neighbor. "It was terrific," said Don Tuffs, the first manager. "The exciting thing about the Lawrence Welk performance, folks were getting to see the entire show. All the acts had their costumes, everything you would see on the television show. There were many standing ovations."



Fast forward to current day when Tuffs stopped into the abandoned shell of the theater and his heart ached. Long ago the Sundome was stripped of its lights and sound system along with portraits of former stars, the theater was dusty and clammy. "It is disheartening to know it's coming down," Tuffs said.

The Sundome will be gone by the end of the summer.

Fry's Food Stores, which will anchor a new shopping center, plans to keep some parts of the theater — the iron gates around the facade, the Sundome mosaic. The grocery store will replicate the arched architecture. Jon Flora, president of Fry's,

said "We're trying to make sure we incorporate as much as we can from the existing building so there is a remembrance." The store may display some of the Sundome's pictures of its most famous performers like the ones at the top of this page. The Sundome's fate has stirred nostalgia in some... cherishing romantic memories... but brings relief in others.

Rarely in the black. The Sundome's early star-studded years helped sell thousands of houses in the area, but financially, the center rarely broke even. Primarily designed in 1978 as a concert hall, it never quite worked as a theater that could attract lucrative Broadway touring companies and pull in audiences from around the Valley. The combination of an inconvenient location, increasing competition and its struggle to reach younger consumers constantly kept the Sundome in the red. The dome's sheer size, 7,169 seats, is too large for a performing-arts center. That's a lot of seats to fill. There were not enough retirees to keep the Sundome full on a regular basis. Another problem was seats on the outer edge did not have a view of the full stage. So, the middle section would fill up and then ticket sales would fall off.

Some Sun Cities residents are angry that Sun City West did not experiment with other uses to find a formula that might have kept the Sundome alive. They fear that new businesses intended to surround the new Fry's grocery store will bring in too much traffic. "We enjoyed many performances at the Sundome," said one Sun City West resident.

But Katy O'Grady, Sun City West's general-services officer, said many residents are glad to see the Sundome finally go. "It's become an eyesore," she said. "People are eager to see something new, something that will be kept up."

The Recreation Centers of Sun City West has received the demolition schedule from the developer. They have mobilized equipment to the site and set up a water meter and tower. Demolition on exterior buildings and landscaping continued through month's end taking down the south patio entry. The main building is set to be demolished between July 10 and 20, with crushing equipment going to work on July 15. Between July 22 and Aug. 15, the developer plans to remove the concrete floors and footings and begin backfilling.