

Sun Cities Area Historical Society
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Case # 219

Interview with Lucille A. Rethford

February 14, 1992

Lucille is the archivist and founder of the Youngtown Historical Assoc.

Synopsis:

- Ben Schleiffer visited friends in nursing home and saw the sad life of the residents; came to Phoenix and wanted to something for the active elderly; talked w/Francis Greer and liked her ranch, with its pool and tennis courts, etc. She wouldn't sell to him, but she eventually became convinced of his plans and Greer, Schlieffer, and Elmer John formed a development company. Schleiffer was active in the community for five years.

- 1957, Dave Garroway's "Wide, Wide World" segment informed about people across the U.S. about Youngtown and he did a t.v. show from there. It was broadcast across the nation. Youngtown hadn't done much advertising until this.

- Everything in Youngtown done by the people (Rec Ctr, clubs, and gas lines). Del Webb bought neighboring lands. Youngtown proud to be the first retirement community; many people, Del Webb included, saw success of Youngtown and wanted to cash in on the profits of a retirement community.
- People in Youngtown loved the climate and the small little houses that were inexpensive. Elmer John was the first city manager.

- Pioneer club was the first major club; first hospital in Youngtown in 1958; then a post office, hardware store, and convenience store.
- Youngtown mainly consisted of farmers and blue collar workers from all areas and all climates; elderly volunteers help a great deal in the in Peoria schools; townspeople do what they can for church services.

- Youngtown had children living there despite an Arizona statue allowing residents to discriminate against age; Youngtown had no real Homeowners' Assoc., and was run by realtors who were willing to sell to young families. Some citizens did not want youth living there; Youngtown took it to court and won, no longer allowing children to move there. Some young families

remained, but houses cannot be sold to your people, as long as 85% of the town was age 55 or older. Federal Gov't allowed statutes to be enforced. Don't think Youngtown developers would want to make town any larger than it is.

- Youngtown's Mayor was from Youngtown; have a common council, basically volunteers' everything in town is done by volunteer work.
- Two churches in community: Methodist and Baptist.
- Youngtown has not lost its small town feel; good neighborhood watch on crime; Youngtown partnered Sun City to share a room in the Arizona Historical Society Museum, located in Tempe.

- Youngtown owns its own water company and sewers; have many more trees and lush yards than Sun City because owners could do whatever they wanted with houses and yards; within some guidelines.
- Youngtown listed on Historical Register as a culture, but not for its unique architecture.

C-219

Release Form

This interview agreement is made and entered into this 14th day of February, 1992, by and between Lucille A. Retheford (herein after called "Interviewee") and Melanie I. Sturgeon (herein after called "Interviewer".)

I agree to participate in a tape-recorded interview with Interviewer in association with her research on Sun City, this research being done under the supervision of the Arizona State University Graduate Program in Public History.

This agreement relates to any and all materials originating from this interview or subsequent interviews by the Interviewer, namely the tape recordings and the indexes and abstracts of the interview, and any other written materials, including but not limited to notes, transcripts, or any other materials prepared from the tapes.

In consideration of the mutual covenants, conditions, and terms set forth below, the parties hereby agree as follows:

1. Interviewee irrevocably assigns to the Sun City Area Historical Society and the Arizona Historical Foundation, co-owners, all his/her copyright, title, literary property rights, and interest in and to the Interview.
2. By virtue of this assignment, Interviewer and the Sun City Area Historical Society and the Arizona Historical Foundation will have the right to use the interview for research, educational, and other purposes, including possible p publication.
3. All materials from the Interview, including but not limited to transcriptions or other finding aids prepared from the tapes, may be copied, reproduced and/or published.
4. Interviewee acknowledges that he/she will receive no remuneration or compensation for either his/her participation in the Interview or for the rights assigned hereunder.
5. Interviewer and the Sun City Area Historical Society and the Arizona Historical Foundation agree to honor any and all reasonable restrictions on the use of the Interview, if any, for the time specified below as follows:

Signed Lucille A. Rothford Date 2/14/92

Interviewee: _____ (name)

(address)

Signed Melanie J. Sturgeon Date 14 February 1992

Interviewer Melanie J. Sturgeon (name)
1535 E. Hampton Circle (address)
Mesa, AZ 85204

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C 219

SUN CITIES AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Lucille Rethford

Interviewed 14 February 1992 by Melanie Sturgeon

Transcribed by Belva McIntosh 12 June 2007

This is Melanie Sturgeon and on behalf of the Sun Cities Area Historical Association and the Arizona Historical Foundation I am interviewing Lucille Rethford who is the archivist and founder of the Youngtown Historical Association. I am interviewing her in the building which houses the Historical Associations materials in Youngtown. It is February 14th, 1992.

STURGEON: Lucille, can you tell me something about the founding of Youngtown and how it was even conceived?

RETFERD: There was a gentleman from the east named Ben Schleifer who had visited a friend of his in New York, I believe it was. His friend was confined to a nursing home, so to speak. He had no choice of activity. All he did was sit all day. He was depressed. His health wasn't good. He was failing all the time. He complained to his friend, Ben Schleifer, that he had no options about how to run his life. That everything was totally done and dictated to him. He didn't want to live that way. It was on Ben Schleifer's mind for a long time. Then Ben Schleifer's health became bad and he came to Phoenix to establish a real estate business. At that point with that in the back of his mind, all the time that he wanted to do something, out here in the sunshine and the fresh air, for those people who still were able to get around. So they could have their own homes, modest homes, affordable homes and still do what they wanted to do. So he came out and talked to Francis Greer, a lady who had a cattle ranch out on the Agua Fria river. He thought it was a delightful place. It had a swimming pool, it had a tennis court. The ranch complex did. So he looked the area over and he asked her if she would be willing to sell it. She said, oh no, she didn't want to sell it. Said that she was still happy here, and active. He kept working with her until he told her that it would be a noble thing to do, to sell her property to him and be the mother, so to speak of this retirement community. It would be for people who were over fifty and no longer working, of modest homes that were affordable to everybody at that time. At that time her foreman or her superintendent for the ranch itself was Elmer Johns. He and Mrs. Greer and Ben Schleifer the land, let's see, what did they call it. I've got it here, but anyway I can get that for you later. They formed this

development company. I guess even then he was going to call it Youngtown because he thought that was very appropriate. I believe it was the Youngtown Development Company. So here were the three of them – the lady who was going to provide the land, the man who was going to manage and supervise the whole thing and Ben Schleifer who would be the main developer of the property. He is the one who had the idea. So that is how all that came about. That is how Youngtown came to be the way it is. And for five years then, Ben Schleifer was very, very active in this community. In 1957 Dave Garroway who was doing “Wide, Wide World”, a television program at that time, was informed about Youngtown. He was told there is a real strange community out in Arizona that is for people over fifty only and we thought you might enjoy hearing about it. So he brought his whole television crew and they did it right over here, on the other side of this club house. They set up their cameras and they had their dance and their picnic and just did the whole show here – interviewed the minister of that time and Ben Schleifer himself and the residents that were here. One of the ladies said, Dave, this is a very unique community. We don’t have any schools here. We don’t have any children. Then they went on to show some of the simple homes. And of course that went across national programs on TV. We have videos of it. The people who saw that in all areas who were ready for retirement decided, well we are going to go out there next summer. We are going to go out as soon as we can and take a look at that place. Prior to that all of the people who came here, on a personal reference basis, that put us definitely on a full United States exposure. So it wasn’t anytime at all before the whole town filled up, or practically filled up. All the lots were sold. They were ready to annex 320 acres south of here and about that time Del Webb came along and approached Boswell, and Colonel Boswell sold it to Del Webb because he was the source, really, of some very big money. The price was right. Mrs. Greer said (and it is published) I never will forget that being done to us because he had promised me that I could have it anytime I wanted it. But that’s how all that came about. So Youngtown became a very viable community at the beginning. It was a community that came about for two reasons. During the war all families were splintered, so to speak, and they went all to the West Coast and Arizona, even those people who were not in service, who worked in the war industries. It used to be that there was a nucleus of the family, the grandparents, the parents and the children. After World War II they had somehow fallen by the wayside and the grandparents decided that they didn’t want to stay in a cold climate. So they made their way out on vacations and they found Youngtown, so here they came. It is a cultural change. The mid-fifties are very significant to the culture of the United States and to the progress of the health and welfare and social systems of retirees and elderly people, and it has just gone from

there. Youngtown is very proud to be the very first one to be recognized as the very first fully retirement community.

STURGEON: I have some questions I would like to ask you. James Boswell made a tape at the Sun Cities Historical Society and he said there that Elmer Johns had been a land developer in California. That he had had dealings with him in California. Had you ever heard that?

RETFERFORD: No. When the Greers came here in 1946 or 47, they came from St. Johns Arizona and they had 27000 acres there and ran 2800 cattle and he was their superintendent all those years. And our clubhouse that we have of course is the original ranch building and on the chimney is the T lazy V that is brought down from St. Johns and put on the chimney here. No, Elmer Johns was the Greer foreman for many, many years.

STURGEON: I had heard that then after he had finished with this community and I had read it in a couple of newspaper accounts went up into Northern Arizona between here and Flagstaff and started another retirement community and had not been developed very well. I think he called it Circle Town.

RETFERFORD: I was not aware of that. I didn't know he had anything to do with that. We have never heard that before.

STURGEON: I will have to find the source. I've got it in my notebook. Maybe you could ask someone, maybe someone would know.

RETFERFORD: Mrs. Schleiffer is still living. And many of the people who worked with Ben in the National Council of Senior Citizens, all those people. And his health became bad not very long after he left here.

STURGEON: He was asked to go back, I believe, and speak and be on a panel for the President of the United States. Do you know why?

RETFERFORD: Well, of course, he was known as the developer of Youngtown and he worked with all of these people who were into the aging movement. National Council of Senior Citizens or something – anyway he was honored as a developer.

STURGEON: When Youngtown first started then it doesn't sound like they did a tremendous amount of national advertising. So they grew slowly until the Dave Garroway show presented them nationally.

RETFERFORD: Well in 1955 I think they had 700 homes built – well the first winter they had about forty homes built. By Christmas of 1954. Then the next year they had built 700 more. And it just snowballed from there. That would be all through '55 and '56. It never did slow down. It was steady all the way because of people communicating. They would send letters to their home and they would publish it in their home newspaper and we have endless clippings from Cleveland and Chicago and Detroit and Utah and Montana. We have them from all over the country. It was all done by word of mouth. It just happened so fast. Then of course when Dave Garroway put his program nation wide it filled up immediately, almost overnight. We had our full complement by 1960, when Sun City started.

STURGEON: Are you aware that some of the people on the Del Webb staff had watched that show and that was one of the reasons that they were really intrigued with the idea of a retirement community?

RETFERFORD: Del Webb himself, Del Webb came out and made a tour of Youngtown and he said I believe there is money to be made in this approach and therefore he – of course he was a very, very rich man and he had influential and moneyed friends and they all got together. Of course they were some heavy hitters in terms of any kind of approach to living with all the social aspects involved, especially social aspects. So what they did was come on out and all the homes on the South side of Grand Avenue, almost all of them, especially the ones here on 111th Avenue, just across the street from Youngtown. They are Youngtown homes. Their floor plans are the same. There is no difference in them. And even the outside of it, they are the same homes. And so that is what he did. He just copied Youngtown with one big exception. Youngtown had to create all its own social activity. They had all their own garden clubs, they had all their own dance clubs, card clubs. They swam at the lake – they fished at the lake, they did everything themselves. We had septic tanks when we came here. We didn't even have gas yet. So people had to cook on hot plates and things of that nature until they got gas. They did it. The people did it. No developer did it. We did it. In other words everything was done by the people, socially, utility wise, administration and all of that. But when Del Webb went in he took all that responsibility away from the people and he said I want to make this a place for people to play. He wanted them to be active constantly. Well, that is wonderful but at the time there was still a place for both. There were those who had the

money and wanted to play and didn't want any responsibility, they had discharged their responsibility on their jobs, so that is the kind of community Sun City is and Youngtown is the working community.

STURGEON: So the people in Youngtown, when Ben and Elmer and that group set it up, they didn't have the gas lines – what was their function?

RETFERFORD: No, no water lines. Their function was just to lay it out. They did the streets and they contracted to have the homes built.

STURGEON: They didn't build them themselves though.

RETFERFORD: No, they contracted them out.

STURGEON: They must have had floor plans though.

RETFERFORD: Oh my yes. Now, this building – see right up here, this y1, y2 and y3, y4. Now this building was used as a headquarters between the crafts people. When I say crafts I mean the trades people, the plumbers, the electricians and the cement workers, the brick builders. All of those people had to come to a central area to look at plans to see what it was the foreman was going to tell his people to do. So each one of these areas had tables with plans for the different floor plans of the houses. Yes, we had about four different floor plans and in 1960 – well before Sun City even went in we put some condominiums in which were very nice, they still are. All of the homes were built to last. They are all of block, some of them are slump block, some plain cement block. They are on concrete foundations. They are tiled, really ceramic tile and they all of them have patios, some have porches, some do not. The homes have been modified now, they have been upgraded. Almost all of the homes have been. The basic floor plan is still there and they did have them and right down here close to us is the very first house that was ever built for a model home. The daughter of the people that bought the first home, right on the corner of Alabama here, the daughter lives in Sun City. She is very supportive of us. But it was a community where people created it. All those vital juices when they were working were still being used, and in that way they were able to have an active way of life, mentally and physically.

STURGEON: So basically they were doing in Youngtown all the things that Mr. Webb was advertising. Your community was already doing it.

RETFERFORD: Well, so to speak. They were providing everything. It was already turnkey, ready to go in. And ours was a little bit different. When we first started we didn't have sewers, we had septic tanks and we didn't have gas for a long time.

STURGEON: They must have done a little bit of promotion. When people were talking about it to their friends did they say this is a place where you can come out and still be active?

RETFERFORD: Oh yes. Well for one thing they raved about the climate and then they said we have the most gorgeous little home, it is so easy to take care for and it is so inexpensive. The homes that were first sold here in 1954 were less than \$7000 and we have endless bits of material that were used by the sales. There was only one sales representative here. She is still here. Katherine Doone. She is still here. She lives here. There is one other pioneer who lives here. Just those two ladies. That's all. The rest of them are all gone.

STURGEON: Some of them moved over to Sun City, didn't they. I was reading the first Sun City directory that came out in 1960-61. There were fifteen or twenty people who had listed their address the year before as being Youngtown.

RETFERFORD: Well, I never really researched that. But I know there were some, but it works both ways. We have people who come here and they didn't realize how quiet it was and something I hesitate to mention –

STURGEON: Do you want me to turn it to pause and you can tell it to me off the tape?

RETFERFORD: Please.

STURGEON: When the community got started and you had maybe 700 people here when did they start organizing clubs and doing that sort of things and when did they decide they needed a government or some way to run things.

RETFERFORD: It started immediately. Actually Elmer Johns was our first City Manager so to speak or it was a Community Manager. Of course we weren't a town, we weren't a city or anything else, we were just a community, sort of a village concept. He was the man who coordinated things that had to be done, but it was the citizens themselves who came up with the idea, we are going to have to get the septic tanks out of here, we need to have sewers. So they went back and forth

because that cost everybody some money. They did run a bond program and each one of us were levied so much to pay for the sewers and the water system. We didn't have much of a water system either. So we had a good well and good water but sometimes people at the furthest reaches didn't have any water. The pressure might all be down by then. So that needed to be corrected. So yes, when we first started the "Pioneer Club" was probably the very first big club they had. They started off with pot luck dinners, right off the bat with even as few as fifteen people. It went from there to the dances and sing-a-longs. Of course there was always swimming in the lake and fishing in the lake and they went there for picnics and people would have their own relatives come out to the lake to swim. We didn't have swimming pools except Mrs. Greer. They took the swimming pool out. I have never heard why. And I never did get to talk to Mrs. Greer, so I don't know why they took that out and they put the cactus garden in. I think it had to do with utilizing their water in a little more efficient way. But our clubs really started immediately. Just immediately. By Christmas they had a big celebration. Everyone came to Mrs. Greer's home at that time. She didn't turn that building over to the town until they were incorporated. She maintained this as her home. But they did meet in the park out there on her patio.

STURGEON: She was right in the middle of town then.

RETFERFORD: Oh you bet. This is it. This was her club house – her ranch house and that building over there where the police department is, that was a cow shed.

STURGEON: So you are actually sitting in the middle of the ranch buildings here then.

RETFERFORD: There is the self-guide which you may take with you. I have it in that packet there. When they had began having the business kind of thing, there were never any arguments between residents. We didn't even have to worry about having any police protection until, I believe it was 1958 and then it was only one sheriff's deputy who made the rounds here or he would be called in case somebody needed some extra attention. But we didn't have that problem at all. Everybody just worked together. It was a beautiful kind of thing.

STURGEON: One of the very early letters that I read before Sun City was even probably thought of was an older couple who wrote a letter saying that they were sorry but they were having to move out because they were getting old and they had been promised when they moved here that there would be some medical facilities

and there weren't and so they were having to leave because they were getting old. Was that a problem in the early days when you didn't have anything here at all?

RETFERFORD: It must have been very early. Because they didn't have a hospital in Peoria either, they would have had to go clear to Glendale. We had our first hospital in 1958, however, a big hospital. It kept growing. It became quite a very large hospital. In fact it was where all the Sun City people came to. But early on, somebody came out from the mid-west and came with bad health they would have to travel all the way in to Glendale in order to have attention. It could have very well happened.

STURGEON: Did you have businesses set up in the community in the first couple of years? Stores, grocery stores?

RETFERFORD: No, we had a hardware store only early on. The Post Office had a corner of the hardware store. Then there was a little - not a deli - in those days it wasn't called a deli, just a little quick, you know, bread and milk sort of thing, sort of a milk store. We didn't even have grocery stores. They had to go into Peoria to buy groceries.

STURGEON: Have they ever looked at the demographics of Youngtown in the early years? What group of people came, were they blue collar, white collar workers?

RETFERFORD: No, a great many of them were farmers. They were farmers and they were blue collar workers, yes, factory employees, there were a few accountants. After I came here I worked, when I say worked, it was voluntary work for the town, for a CPA. But he is gone now. But he is the one also who brought about the sewers. We had retired policeman. We had nurses, school teachers, a lot of people out of the automobile industries and farmers.

STURGEON: So, where did they mostly come from? From the mid-west or did you have a lot from California?

RETFERFORD: No, we had almost nobody from California. Most of ours came from the cold climates, from Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, lot of West Virginia people, Ohio, back in the cold country, Nebraska.

STURGEON: When Ben got his idea for Youngtown, had he looked at things going on in Florida, because at that time they were having some, like little suburbs, sort of, of larger cities, where developers were selling –

RETFERFORD: I am not aware if he did. Not aware of it at all. He may well have. But, he could have before he ever moved here, I don't know.

STURGEON: I was just curious because one interview that I read in, I think it was an Arizona Highways or something where they interviewed him, he had said that he knew that older people could come out here because he had looked really carefully at it and he could tell you how much social security people were getting, so he must have been aware of trends that were going on.

RETFERFORD: Oh, yeah. This is that Arizona Highways article right there. You can take that with you also. I wasn't aware because when he came out it was because of his own bad health. Then he went back and visited his friend. He came out here and went directly into the real estate business. Then he went back to visit his friend and at that point a germ of an idea hit him. He came back and it wouldn't let him rest so he decided he would try to do something with it. This is the first I had heard that he had investigated anything in Florida.

STURGEON: Well, I don't know if he had, I was just asking. But I know that he was aware of people getting social security because he knew that they could support themselves when they came out here. And I guess because I am an historian I am looking at things that are going on in the whole country you know, like cultural things or things that sociologists were looking at so I was just curious because at that time sociologists really believed that you couldn't put a group of old people together in a community and they were really debating it in the academic world so I was wondering if he looked at any of those things.

RETFERFORD: Exactly. That was a sort of a – you know – senior citizens and even today and then, more so then I think than now. There was a stereotype that they were ready to lay down and die and I think that Ben recognized that that was not the case. He was a brilliant man. And I am sure that in his real estate dealings he had occasion to be involved with what social security was paying to retirees.

STURGEON: Youngtown seemed to have been very supportive of some of the school bond issues and much more willing to pay school taxes or be involved in the communities surrounding in that way than Sun City has.

RETFERFORD: Well we are not in a school district here. Only a part of the town, what is west of 115th Avenue is in the El Mirage district, the Dysart district. And those people do pay taxes. They are assessed just like anybody in the Dysart district. The rest of the town is in the Peoria district. We have about 73 children in both schools. Most of them in the Peoria schools. We are assessed an amount for each child who goes there per year. I don't know, the last I heard, I don't know what it is right now, but the last I heard it was about \$3700 per child that we have to pay, their tuition. We are very supportive of education factors. Of course we all have to pay the Junior College taxes. That is levied on all of us. But now I must say in defense of Sun City as well, the work that they do with young people in both Dysart and Peoria, and especially Dysart, is just tremendous. I don't know what it would cost the school system if they had to pay all those people, because they couldn't even run that kind of a system. These people devote so much of their time to help these disadvantages students to learn. Even learn to read, learn good study habits. They provide the patience and the understanding to get these people through and pretty soon they begin to think. Between the churches and the people who are retired from the teaching profession, and the sociologists, they do a tremendous amount of work with the students. Sun City is criticized so strongly by the press in so many – well – it is isolated – I shouldn't say it is all the press trashes them, but they do have that reputation that they do not deserve. Because what they don't put out in money they put out in effort and devotion.

STURGEON: Were the people in Youngtown involved in El Mirage also?

RETFERFORD: Not as much. There are two reasons for it I think. Our average age is so high. It is 73. Most of our people – a good many of them – since we have 75 children and we only have 2500 and something people here. There are a goodly number of them who are over 73. They really don't have the mobility to go and do things. There are churches that do garments; they adopt families. They do the moderate things that everybody does in terms of helping charities. But in terms of the big commitments that some of the Sun City people do, no we don't do that. It isn't because we don't want to, it is just that we do have limitations.

STURGEON: Why are there so many children in a community that is age restricted?

RETFERFORD: Well, now that is a whole other story. That is something that we are very proud of. There were several reasons for that condition in Youngtown. In the early 70's there was the philosophy that there would be no such thing as discrimination in the 60's and the 70's. And of course the rest of the world thought

primarily no discrimination between races. The feminists didn't even enter it then. But then somebody decided, probably ACLU, decided that well there is going to be no discrimination on age and housing either. Well it just so happens that we have an Arizona statute that has been on the books for a long time that says a community that is developed, advertised and sold as a retirement community for people over the age of fifty without children, that is valid in Arizona. So therefore we can do it and it is legal. But along with that philosophy of discrimination a lot of people said, oh I'll be sued. Somebody comes along and wants to buy my home and has children, I don't dare not sell it to them because I will be taken into court. You couldn't convince them otherwise. There was no way. I was here then. Some of those people got real radical with the children. That caused a lot of problems. One family caused all the terrible reputation we got coast to coast. Anyway, then the other thing was our town was run by real estate people. Our Mayor and half the council or more, the majority of the council were real estate people. Sun City had a Home Owner's Association that absolutely were adamant about not having children over there. And it worked. And of course the homes were more expensive, there were many more of them to sell, and these people over here if they didn't want to lose a dime, so, OK, I can't sell you anything in Sun City, but I can sell you something in Youngtown. So what happened is we got a lot of young people. These were inexpensive, the overhead was low. The low income people could come and have a reasonable, a moderate house and be able to afford it. And of course young families with children, they are starting out in the world and they need affordable housing. So it was wonderful and it was safe, they didn't have to worry about their children being abused. So here they came. So then these people got so radical, one of them even tried to run a car into one of the teen-agers. They were taken to court and the people won it. The other people won it. The people who were charging the retiree with it. They lost their home; they lost everything they had because of that. Well, that reputation hit us all. So we went along for about approximately eight or nine years with that condition. Then the citizens really began to get alarmed because we had entirely too many then. We were losing our retirement status. We were going to have to go back into the school districts, we were going to have to do all kinds of things that we had never intended to happen. So the Civic Association got together. We wanted Sun City to do it. They are the ones who had all the money and could go to court. The county said it's OK, and we can keep them out that way and we aren't going to do anything. Now that is the one place where I take issue with Sun City. There was little Youngtown with 2300 people at the time and Sun City is sitting over there with 40,000 and we took it to court. And I worked with it myself so I know all about it. We produced all of the backup information and cited the Arizona Statute and we won. Now, the reason the young people are still here, we are not heartless.

They were grandfathered in when the change was made. These people want to be here until it becomes time to sell their home. Then they cannot sell it to anymore young people. Now this is their home – just because they are the victims of circumstances you don't put them out of their home. That is why they have a goodly number of them. We do have another one where a developer got to us. We have a little ghetto here. There are little flimsy apartments that, he gave us a hard luck story and said that he wanted to get his loan and after he got his loan, and he went by all the rules for senior housing, very small, not near big enough for families. Of course this is a single family residential community and so he gave us the hard luck story and the council let him do it. And after he got his loan and started building he says to heck with you. I'm not going to sign anything. So consequently we got an awful lot of children in one two story complex. But it is sad to think that they did that, I think, because it is no place for children. Let's face it, we don't abuse them, but at the same time we don't have that warm interchange that we normally would have with our own family. We all have children and great grandchildren. I've got thirteen great-grandchildren. I love them all. I only see them twice a year and occasionally they come out here. But this isn't fun. They don't like to come here. After they go to the lake to see the ducks and maybe go throw a ball around the park, well that's it. So this is not a place to raise children except from the standpoint of safety. From that standpoint it is wonderful. But that is how come we – and then the federal government got into it in 1988 and said that none of these state laws are valid unless – you had to have 85% people over 55. Well we had 50 on our books so we had to go back and change our statute to age 55 and make the survey, and everybody had to produce their driver's license, social security thing or something to prove their age. You know, one person in the household, nobody under eighteen and we stacked up 92%. In addition to that you had to have health facilities, recreation facilities, other aspects of retirement living. Well we made the cut, no question about it. So we are perfectly legal now under all systems.

STURGEON: So you had some real struggles then.

RETFERFORD: Oh we did. And they are recent. The early problems that Youngtown had were because we could control everything that was going in those days. And it is just like now days all – I don't care what it is – whether it is business or any other aspect, there are so many controls imposed by the State, the County and the Federal Government. You can't run your own business. You have to just fight it through and qualify everything you do. So we are still at it. It keeps us all on our toes.

don't know – I think it was a brooder house the way it smelled when we were cleaning it up. But anyway all of these buildings were – there is a big building over on the other side of the club house that was the tenant houses for the ranch. It was all a ranch complex, every bit of it. None of it is new. Now it has been enlarged a little bit but it is all part of the complex including that library building over there. We have a bigger water tank. We used to have a water tank right out here but it was much smaller.

STURGEON: Now did you do the same thing

(end of side A – something lost)

start of side B)

RETFERFORD: less than a year after they came – two of them. One Methodist and one Baptist. I hate to answer that question. I don't know. I know they had to build them and a lot of that was done with volunteer labor. I don't know whether they bought the plat or – I wouldn't doubt if that wasn't part of this complex. I wouldn't doubt but what Mrs. Greer gave it to them. I wouldn't be at all surprised.

STURGEON: Basically the churches are all right here.

RETFERFORD: They are both right there together.

STURGEON: And those are the only two churches that you have?

RETFERFORD: Yes. We have the Mennonite meeting houses – well they moved to private homes, but other than that those were the only formal churches that we have.

STURGEON: In talking to the pioneers in Sun City one of the things that most of them mentioned is that they find it somewhat bad that the community has gotten so large. They have lost that small town enthusiasm they had in the first few years and that is something that they pointed out as being something that they really enjoyed. So you, I assume, have not lost that because you are small.

RETFERFORD: Oh, we like the small town. We feel like we are in control of what happens here, what goes on here. We don't have a structured block watch. Where there are enough of the older residents distributed around town that we all know exactly who to go to if there is a problem. So if we see somebody – that is

another reason why we are so – everybody is very alert to any fast moving cars at night. We don't hesitate to get on the phone and call the police department. We don't know whether there is anything wrong or not, but they tell us if there is any questionable activity going on let us know so we can check it out before something does happen. So we have a real strong community watch and the reason I bring that up is that – yes, we are glad we are small enough to be able to be concerned about each other as well as being in control of our own destiny.

STURGEON: Can you think of anything else that I have not asked you that might be germane to the discussion.

RETFERFORD: Oh my. Of course you know, people who are involved with this kind of history thing can talk forever about various things and aspects involved. I will say that we have a very good relationship with Sun City. I don't know at what level or more than one level you have spoken to in Sun City -

STURGEON: Almost everyone I have spoken to in Sun City says that you have a great relationship.

RETFERFORD: We do have. Right now one of our Youngtown residents is being groomed to be President –she is President elect - of Meals on Wheels. And I serve as corresponding secretary of Meals on Wheels. I keep Jane Freeman of the Historical Society over there informed about everything going. We went to a meeting not long ago – every year we have National Historic Preservation Week – which is run by the Arizona Parks Department. A couple of years now I haven't seen anybody from Sun City and I happened to mention it to Jane Freeman here a while back and she said, how come I don't know about that. And I said, I don't know but I am going to see that you do. So I called them and said, would you please put her – the Sun City Historical Society on your list. Now we are going to have a room, Sun City and Youngtown, have a room the Arizona Museum over in Tempe. Do you know Michael Duchesne? We are going to be working – it is not ready of course – they have too many things going right now, but when they are ready we are going to have a little niche. Sun City will have the major part of it because they are just so much more complex now. We are there to let it be known that we are the first. We started it all. We are very proud of that. And it doesn't bother us at all, we are not a bit paranoid about Sun City. They might have been at one time but not now. Our council works with all the members of the Maricopa County Government and Alliance of Government. They, the Northwest Community Council, we are very much integrated into that and work with it. Our town attorney – he just gets practically no money. He is almost a volunteer. He is

the unofficial historian of Peoria. He is doing the incorporation papers for Sun City – Cal McBride. But we have a very good working relationship with the Sun City people. I think, if we had to deal with Del Webb I don't know how that would gel but person to person we have a great respect for each other.

STURGEON: I know that is what I found in the interviews that it is just the management, company things that I find were in conflict but not the citizens at all. This is just a very speculative question but do you think that if Elmer Johns and the construction group had been able to buy say 2 or 3000 more acres do you think they might have done that and made this a much larger community.

RETHEFORD: I know they would have liked to have had 320 more acres. They wanted the area south of us. We are annexing land into the river bed, well next to it, you are only allowed so much but we have annexed between Sun City and the Agua Fria there to Olive Avenue. But way down the road somewhere there will be some development. They haven't even got that out of the flood plain yet so no telling when that will be, if ever. I don't know whether they would have – they did want the – Mrs. Greer wanted the 320 acres. But she never did go beyond that and I think they didn't want to do anything more then they had the ability to work with. I just wonder. Knowing the limitations or what could be the potential limitations of retirees if in their best judgment they would have wanted to expand too much.

STURGEON: When I was driving around the community I noticed down on that end, down near Grand and I don't know if that is part of Youngtown but there seemed to be a large development of new homes or new apartments. Is that part of Youngtown?

RETHEFORD: On this side of Grand Avenue, on the south side of Grand Avenue, those white buildings, the Spanish Gardens, those are the condos that I was telling you about. They are still very nice, they have their own swimming pool.

STURGEON: They looked new. They didn't look like they were very old.

RETHEFORD: Well, they were built in 1958 or 9. So they have got some age on them but they were well maintained and built well in the first place. And the ones across the street, those are also condos and they were built of block and they are new, relatively. They are gray I believe. The white Spanish Gardens is an old one. Now just down right on, way down on Tennessee Avenue off 113th, that is that

STURGEON: So you own your own water company?

RETFERFORD: Oh yeah, we own everything.

STURGEON: You own everything. What about electricity?

RETFERFORD: Well, of course that is – we own the right-of-ways, but we have APS.

STURGEON: But you own all the water –

RETFERFORD: We own all the water and all the sewers.

STURGEON: Because I thought it was quite delightful to drive around and see all the trees and the green. I drove around the lake area.

RETFERFORD: Our lake area is gorgeous. That's got a nice walk around it – they can fish there and we are hoping one day we will have a family of swans. We have two, but they aren't very compatible I don't think. We have a lot of ducks and they are delightful when you go a little further down the road and see the little ones paddling around. But they try to keep those mud hens weeded out. Of course they can't disturb the mallards – the actual wild life. The other ones are just trash ducks, the little old black mud hens.

STURGEON: But your community didn't do what Sun City did then, you didn't say you have to plant x many trees in your front yard, your house can't be the same color as the house next to you – you didn't do any of that – you just had your house and you could do anything you wanted.

RETFERFORD: That lot belongs to us. We can park our recreation vehicles as long as it is behind the building. We can do anything we want to in our backyards. We can hang our clothes out if we wish. There are places over there where you cannot have clothes lines of any kind. You can only have a certain kind of storage shed, if you are allowed a storage shed. They don't even have places to put their wood for their fire places. They are too structured. Now we looked over there before we ever moved to Youngtown. We decided that it was not for us. Because we are such independent people. You couldn't even have your home upgraded over there. You had to take what they had.

STURGEON: You could upgrade it later if you did it yourself.

RETFERFORD: Yes, but if they knew it you wouldn't do it, you couldn't do it. You might be able to put in a tile bath, but you better keep it quiet. That is why we didn't go there. You had to take their model homes – no changes. Just like that.

STURGEON: But here you could just take the basic model and do whatever you wanted?

RETFERFORD: Well, we built our home like we wanted to. We have a custom home.

STURGEON: So you didn't have to follow the models that they gave you if you didn't want to.

RETFERFORD: No. Ours is different entirely. It is a different kind of place. We had to follow the standard guidelines for zoning – all that sort of thing – back so many feet, you know.

STURGEON: So when they had the model homes in the beginning, they didn't say, you have to build one of these model homes.

RETFERFORD: Well, that was for the money – it was an inexpensive home in the first place. But you could turn that home anyway you wanted.

STURGEON: But you didn't have to buy one of the models is what I am saying. If you came in here you could say, I really don't any of those models. I am willing to pay a little bit more.

RETFERFORD: No, you would have to buy the lot and have somebody else build it. That little pink house up there in that top picture. That one is the same house that you see all over, except that they turned it long-ways. They modified the windows a little bit and that is just exactly the same house that you look at head on.

STURGEON: Elmer Johns came and lived here didn't he?

RETFERFORD: Oh, yes. I have his picture. Elmer Johns is the one right there in the middle. His is right on the corner as you go to the lake. It wraps kind of around the corner. It is one of these homes except it has an addition on each end.

STURGEON: Did Ben live here?

RETFERFORD: No, Ben never did live here.

STURGEON: Why didn't he live here, do you know?

RETFERFORD: Well, he still lived in Phoenix. But he was out here regularly.

STURGEON: And Mrs. Greer, did she stay here all the rest of her life too?

RETFERFORD: She built a new home up on Duluth, she built a real nice home up there. She built this one. When she turned this over for club house use she built a little house that the library is in and lived there for a while. She wanted to be over right on the river bank and so that is where she built her last home. There is an article in there that will tell you all about it. You will find that real interesting. Everybody could modify their windows, they could do anything they wanted to do with it but they had to take the basic square footage and the like. A lot of the homes have just the insides of the cement block, a lot of the homes are furred with the dry wall inside of that. Some are, some aren't. It is a little more fuel efficient when you have it on. But we are just so proud of our little community and the things that everybody has done and continue to be. Even our new retirees who come in, the young retirees, of course they have considerably more money than we had when we first came, not a whole lot, I'm not saying that at all, but their retirement is so much better. Actually it has been good for Youngtown. They still have that feeling of this is what we want, that is why we came. Yet they have a progressive way of thinking about things, which helps us, the old timers, to modify what we think. We don't have an opportunity to get set in our ways and say we don't want to be told anything. We are not that way.

STURGEON: So you are going to have your 40th anniversary in three years – no two years.

RETFERFORD: Yes, in '94. We have already laid the ground work to be put on the National Register of Historic places, from the cultural standpoint. We will not be from the terms of architecture of anything of that nature. But as a culture we will be considered. There is no question in my mind – I may not live that long – to 2004, but if I don't I hope that somebody will pursue it because I keep reminding all of our new retirees as they come in. Don't forget. I've got all that information ready for you to use when that time comes.

STURGEON: You should get it written up now all ready to go.

REGHERFORD: Michael Dushamen, he is well aware of it. We have already turned it in.

(conversation ended)