

## **THE BEGINNING OF SUN CITY WEST AND OUR POSSE**

*By: Captain Neal Coffman February 24, 2009*

In 1971-72 Del E. Webb Corporation purchased 11,000 acres of land extending from El Mirage Road west to beyond Grand Avenue. Included was 1,800 acres known as "Lizard Acres", a ranch owned by the Gemmill and Wetzeler families. 1,000 acres was used to produce grain and alfalfa to feed cattle. Their feed lot covered 80 acres and they fed up to 40,000 head of cattle annually. The lot was known as the hotel of feeder cattle.

It was the Del E. Webb Corporation plan to develop Sun City West on a portion of this land (plus other acreage) with a projected population of 48,000 residents. Mr. John W. Meeker, President of the Corporation, envisioned Sun City West to be a retirement complex grander than any built before. He drafted a plan for a major golf course of professional caliber, a site for future professional golf association tournaments and a large entertainment complex grander than any built before. This site was to be in the center of Sun City West.

On February 15, 1978 the Corporation began developing Sun City West. The Hillcrest golf course was the beginning. The Del E. Webb crews excavated 2.5 million cubic yards of soil to create a lake and fairways. The soil was moved to form the areas where Meeker Mountain, recreation centers and the Sundome now stand. Hillcrest was opened in 1978, the recreation centers in 1979 and the Sundome in 1979 with a seating capacity of 7,169. It is the largest single floor theater in existence.

The Maricopa County Sheriff's Department recognized the need for law enforcement within Sun City West but was providing law enforcement in an 8,725 square mile area of Maricopa County (an area larger than the state of Massachusetts) and had neither the manpower nor finances to provide the residents with the protection they deserved.

Under the Arizona State Law, ARS 114441-78, the Sheriff has the authority to form a Posse to assist in law enforcement. Deputy Don Blankship of the Sheriff's Department was assigned to direct the organization of our Posse which got underway in late 1978 through early 1979. Mr. Michael Komar of the Del E. Webb Corporation, and members of the legal staff, were extremely helpful in drafting our charter, then submitting it to the Arizona Commission of Incorporation for approval and filing. This document was submitted to the commission on June 11, 1979 and approved and filed with the Sheriff's Department June 15, 1979.

Policies and by-laws were drafted and approved by the Sheriff's Department on June 29, 1979.

The formative years of our Posse were a challenge. In the beginning we had 12 members and quickly grew to 20 under aggressive recruiting. Four of our members completed Posse and advanced training courses, including the academy, and were certified Q.A.P. to carry weapons. Each was assigned as a Duty Officer and took one week of duty. They were on call 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

We used our own cars for patrol; magnetic decals on each front door which identified us as Sheriff's Posse. CB radios were used for communication with a telephone manned by the Duty Officer's spouse, who received and relayed calls from the Sheriff's office to the Duty Officer on patrol. We did not have a headquarters so we used a member's home and later a neighbor's garage.

Our first traffic control assignment came when Del E. Webb Corporation sponsored a five day LPGA tournament at the Hillcrest golf course in March, 1980. Attendance was above expectations and we were handling 2,000 cars per day. We were fortunate to have help from the Sun City Posse traffic department.

Shortly after the golf tournament the Sundome of Performing Arts facility was under way drawing capacity crowds. Our traffic control group, including help from the Sun City Posse, was handling 1,500-2,000 cars, in and out, per performance. In one season 104 performances were scheduled with celebrities. (Lawrence Welk, Bob Hope, Red Skelton and others.) Our traffic department handled all Sundome traffic for three years until the Arizona State University took over the Sundome.

In late 1981 we purchased our first patrol car from Sanderson Ford equipped with bar lights and radio for communications. Since we were short on money, we were given six months to pay for it. At the end of six months, we were still short of funds and advised Sanderson Ford by now it was a used vehicle and received a sizeable discount and paid in full. We also placed an order for a second car for delivery within six months.

Del E. Webb Corporation recognized the Sheriff's Posse services and its need for headquarters. They assigned a lot in the prefab construction yard on Dysart Road off of Bell Road. They provided a 12 x 60 foot trailer equipped with electricity and air conditioner. We then set up the first base radio station in connection with the Sun City Posse.

September 1983 we made contact with Mr. Fred P. Kuentz, President of the Del E. Webb Corporation, requesting a land site on which to construct a Sheriff's Posse building for headquarters. Mr. Kuentz advised in a letter dated September 14, 1983 that Del Webb would deed 3.6 acres at the intersection of R. H. Johnson and Stardust Boulevard for a community service center. We were assured the Posse was on the top of their list as a participant for the site. A ground lease was made and entered into December 5, 1985, between PORA Foundation, Inc. and the Sheriff s Posse of Sun City West. An agreement was reached for a 99 year lease at \$1.00 per year and the contract price of \$99.00 was paid in full.

Having the building site, the next challenge was to design a headquarters building with an efficiently arranged floor plan and the parking lot for 15 patrol cars. During the following months many floor plans were drawn to scale. Later a meeting was held in the PORA Foundation committee to discuss the selection of an architect. An agreement was reached to employ the firm Stover Associates, Inc. of Phoenix, Arizona. We submitted 12 plans to Stover for review and ironically our second plan, with some alterations, was agreed upon.

On March 27, 1987 an agreement was reached between Del E. Webb Communities, Inc. (called the contractor) and the Sheriff s Posse of Sun City West. The contractor was to furnish all the materials and perform all the work as shown on the drawings as described in the specifications entitled Sheriff s Posse of Sun City West, Arizona, prepared by Stover Associates, Inc., 219 East Lexington, Phoenix, Arizona.

Construction on the grounds and building began in April 1987, was completed in October 1987 and dedicated on November 12, 1987. Residents and local businesses contributed generously toward the building fund and moving day arrived. Posse members accustomed to cramped quarters could now spread out in their new home. The building included a state-of-the-art dispatcher room, other rooms and a large auditorium for general meetings.

It was agreed to pay the contractor for the actual cost of material and construction. Final payment was made in 1988.

Our primary function at the beginning was crime prevention, but as our membership numbers increased, we increased the number of services to the residents; i.e., block and vacation watches, home security services, W.A.Y. program and others.

Today we patrol 365 days per year, morning, afternoon and night shifts. The dispatcher and officers of the day relay emergency calls to the Duty Officer on the shift.

Our Posse at the close of 2008 had contributed 85,530 hours. 1979 through 2008 the Posse contributed a total of 2,003,181 hours. All Posse members are volunteers and receive no financial support. However, Posse members get rewards and recognition every day:

The feeling you get when you help a resident in need. Making a community affair a success by providing traffic control and other services. Getting a wave and a "thumbs up" from a resident as you pass in the patrol car. In past reviews, Sun City West has the lowest per capita crime rate in the country. Thank you Sheriff Joe Arpaio and personnel at District 3 for your support to our Posse and especially to our Commanders. We will continue the motto of MCSO "Protect & Serve" and above all the motto "People Helping People".

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