

## **Chamber History**

(Typed by the past Secretary January 1992)

**February 6, 1964:** Founded as the Youngtown Business & Professional Organization

**August 6, 1976:** Incorporated as the Youngtown Chamber of Commerce

**April 5, 1984:** Name changed to the Northwest Valley Chamber of Commerce and serves the communities of; Youngtown, El Mirage, Sun City, Sun City West and Surprise.

When it was the Youngtown Business and Professional Organization we met at the Golden Rooster Restaurant for lunch. When it became the Youngtown Chamber of Commerce, John O'Keefe was elected President.

One of the most active members from the very beginning until the time of her death, was Mrs. Greer. It was her land that was purchased to build the town of Youngtown, the first retirement town built in the US

Another Chamber pioneer was Ray Askew who rode his bicycle all over Youngtown convincing each business person that they would benefit from membership.

Meetings were moved to the 2nd floor of the Valley View Hospital meeting room where we met for many years. When we outgrew that room, the meetings were held in the their cafeteria.

Various business people hosted monthly mixers at their offices where members could come and meet each other and network together.

Merabank in Youngtown, then known as First Federal Savings, offered the use of a small meeting room where board meetings were held and an office was established. The Chamber President, Claire Marie Sicher, was the manager of First Federal and was able to let us use the room in the mornings.

The Youngtown Boosters Club, a volunteer organization, staffed the Chamber office, keeping it open in the morning and answering phone calls and correspondence.

Bob Cooke, a local businessman, was President for 3 years and instrumental in forming a coop grocery store to serve the Youngtown area. The Chamber strongly supported this move. Bob was also active in many other Chamber programs.

An updated map of Youngtown showing all of the Chamber members and their business locations was printed and distributed during the year Ethel Behnle was President in 1981. That year we grew from a handful of loyal organizers to the unbelievable number of 100 members. Needless to say, it was getting too much for a President, Secretary and a few volunteer, non-members to handle.

Some of the other projects sponsored by the Chamber were: An annual award to the Youngtown Policeman of the Year (a plaque and small check were given to the recipient), a free Watermelon Bust was held each year in the Youngtown park for all residents. The Chamber provided entertainment and members sliced the watermelon. Each year a Christmas season Dinner Dance and Installation of Officers was held, as a special social event. The Chamber purchased and donated dummies for CPR training at Valley View Hospital, which was made available to all parties interested. Most members also took the course.

When the Northwest Development Group was formed, the Youngtown Chamber had as our representative, Francis McDade and we actively supported this group, which was responsible for so much of the progress in the five star communities.

When Bob Farrer became President in 1982, he asked the secretary if she would continue in a volunteer capacity. When she declined, the Board decided it was time to look for a staff person and hired Lorie Mielke, who served the Chamber very well for many years. The volunteer secretary also decided to stay.

The first real Chamber office was established in the Valley View Professional Plaza and remained there until 1991, when it was moved to The Courtyard at Sun Ridge on Bell Rd. The membership grew and we realized that we were attracting new members from the surrounding communities of: Sun City, Sun City West, Surprise and El Mirage. Because of these factors, we changed our

name to the Northwest Valley Chamber of Commerce April 5, 1984 and moved our meetings to the Suntowner and then on to the Lakes Club.

President, Keith Maves represented us in the Westside Coalition of Chambers, which worked very hard to bring the start of Loop 101 to the West side.

Each president has lead the Chamber to even greater achievements. New additions or programs for the Chamber at this time were: An annual Golf Tournament, educational seminars and we became the first Chamber in the US to joint venture business management classes with a recognized college system. Two prior member only networking shows grew to the beginning of the Better Living in 1987 and now has approximately 10,000 in attendance at the Sundome in October each year.

Mike Hughes became president in 1987 and supported a membership drive that brought in over 100 members in one week. In 1988 when Chuck Rogness became president, we started grand openings and ribbon cuttings. This is the same year we added Tom McCanna as Executive Director and an office staff of three. A Business Directory was also published for the first time.