

It Took A Few Great Men & Women And A.C.C.S. Was Born

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It was magic fifteen years ago. More than a decade and a half ago - before there was even a Sedona city government - there was a flurry of local editorials and Letters to the Editor from people who foresaw quite clearly the need for a senior citizen center in Sedona.

From the first editorial by Dick Riley in January 1984, to a Senior Citizen Tea in February sponsored by the Retired Teachers Association, to the first public meeting in March, the retirement community of Sedona stood up and demanded to be noticed. And in an unprecedented amount of time, Articles of Incorporation were submitted for the Adult Community Center of Sedona, to the state of Arizona, May 29, 1984.

Imagine . . . they dreamed big enough then to include "Center" in the name. Those that dedicated themselves to the difficult task of birthing an organization and signed the Articles were Helen F. Wilson, Beverly A. Stouper, Elizabeth G. Teders and Elmer Irwin. All four were extraordinarily visible within the community as they tried to obtain memberships and a first office space and funds for a building.

The list of people involved in the organizational development of ACCS reads like a Who's Who of Sedona. Bill Garland and Dave Blauret, representing Sedona Community Park, Douglas Gallez, from the Sedona Arts Center, Ann Satran, from the Coconino County Services, Si Birch, representing Sedona Tomorrow, and a dozen more, mostly from the Kachina Retired Teachers Association.

Also involved from the beginning was Ron Bricker, Director of the Verde Valley Guidance Center. After the first public meeting, there was remarkable energy to do something for the older adult.

"There were no coordinated services," remembers Bricker. "No meeting place, nothing socially organized."



Back In The Early Days - ACCS' first president and director of the Verde Valley Guidance Center, Ron Bricker.

Ron Bricker was asked to serve as the first ACCS President. Although he declined at first, eventually those that signed the Articles of Incorporation persevered, and Ron was handed the gavel.

"In the early days all people wanted were some senior citizen services. It was pretty naive and pretty pure," remembers Bricker. He and the newly formed ACCS Board went in search of their own building as a home for these eventual services. Originally, the committee dreamed of constructing a brand new building at the Sedona Community Park. And then the Pushmataha Building on Brewer Road was for sale and discussed. But ACCS had no funds of any kind yet to pull off either kind of extravagance.

Meanwhile, on the other side of town, Harmony Hills Homeowners Association had existed since 1962 and the members were coming to the conclusion that it was costing too much money to keep up their RV Lot, Recreation Center and Swimming Pool on the corner of Harmony and

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Melody. Led by then Homeowners Association President, Don Winslow, a heated debate ensued about donating the property to the fledgling ACCS organization.

Eventually, along with Association members Alice Winslow, Dorothy Tudor, Ruth and Leo Vrcek, Donna Krippner, Susan Myers, Florence Furse, Bob and Willie Alcorn, Olivia Benjamin, Emmett and Delene Foresman, Dick and Eva Heiliger, Ralph Johnson, and so many more, it was decided to donate the property to ACCS with only a few stipulations.

First, since ACCS was a membership organization, it was written that all Harmony Hills Homeowners had free membership for one decade. This included being able to use the pool, center and RV lot. Secondly, it was a priority to most of the homeowners, that ACCS use the center and pool for senior adult programming.

On May 13, 1986 the deed to the property at 2615 Melody Lane was signed over to the Adult Community Center of Sedona. Don Winslow and Ron Bricker formulated that original agreement.

"It became a real meeting place for the community," Bricker reminisced. "There were barbecues, mixers, card games and shared stories. Just a place for people to go."

In the beginning, the only program ACCS could tout was Meals on Wheels, founded by volunteer Margaret Flynn. She came to ACCS for a home for the project and an agreement was reached. To this day, Meals on Wheels is sponsored by ACCS. Throughout the last 15 years there have been three Executive Directors of ACCS, Lillian Lang, Ronald Roope and myself. Programs have expanded to include Respite Care, Senior Lunch, Transportation and Telecare. Fundraisers have grown from potlucks and barbecues to Fashion Shows, Holiday Letters, Loving Bowls and auctions.

Membership has reached over 600 people. And Meals on Wheels began with seven participants and 80 volunteers to deliver the meals in 1985. Today there are up to 40 participants and 170 volunteers at ACCS.

The original Harmony Hills building has doubled in size, due to two Community Development Block Grants issued ACCS. The co-sponsored programs, such as Red Rockin' Grannies, Food Service Institute of Sedona, Canyon Singers and Joey Bistro Day, brought much prestige to ACCS.

Don Winslow, President of the Association at time of transfer of deed exclaimed, "I am really surprised at the growth at ACCS. I am happy to see vehicles parked there every night and the building getting use from the community. I am 100 percent sure that we of Harmony Hills did the right thing in donating the building to ACCS."

As we begin 1999, there will be a year-long celebration of the 15th Anniversary of the Adult Community Center of Sedona - a realization of many people's dreams. Dreams made possible because, as Bricker recalled, "ACCS always had good leadership and good Boards of Directors."

Congratulations to all of the activists and visionaries who brought magic to Sedona 15 years ago!