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Paul C. Luken

*Arizona State University West*

Suzanne Vaughan

*Arizona State University West*

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# “Active Living”: Transforming the Organization of Retirement and Housing in the U.S.

PAUL C. LUKEN AND SUZANNE VAUGHAN

Arizona State University West  
Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences

*We examine the transformation of the social institutions of retirement and housing in the US in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Using institutional ethnography we explicate a woman's experience relocating to an age segregated community. Her relocation is predicated upon ideological practices that reconceptualize retirement as “active living” and the construction of a setting in which retirees engage in this new lifestyle. We demonstrate the textual mediation of this ideological and organizational reformation through an examination of an advertising campaign undertaken by the Del Webb Development Corporation in the marketing of Sun City, Arizona. The advertising texts provide an ideological code to manage and reorganize at multiple sites the social relations of one segment of the housing industry under late capitalism.*

In this paper we examine how texts enter into social processes to articulate and redefine the social organization of housing and retirement practices in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the US. We explicate one woman's experience of moving from Youngstown, Ohio, to Sun City, Arizona, in 1978, and in doing so, show how her activities are embedded in actual spheres of changing social relations which are textually mediated through advertising. The method we use is that of institutional ethnography. As institutional ethnographers we begin with an experience of a particular subject and the subject's experience becomes a point of departure. From there we seek to explicate that experience by discovering its social determinants. The subject's account of her experience leads us to a consideration of specific texts. (For a description of institutional ethnography see Campbell, 1998; Grahame, 1998; Smith, 1987. For works examining texts and social

processes in other institutional arrangements see de Montigny, 1995; Diamond, 1992; Griffith, 1992, 1995; Jackson, 1995; Kinsman, 1987; McCoy, 1995, 1998; Mueller, 1995; Mykhalovskiy, 1999; Ng, 1995; Reimer, 1995; Smith & Smith, 1990; Swift, 1995; Townsend, 1998; Turner, 1995; Walker, 1995.)

We interviewed Ursula Roberts on several occasions about her experiences in housing herself and family over her life.<sup>1</sup> We introduce her to you through a brief biography, and then we present her account of a specific period of her life when she moved to Arizona with her husband, Al, and took up residence in Sun City. The account is in the form of a reconstructed narrative that we compiled from her words. In the account she spoke of seeing advertisements about Sun City in the *Youngstown, Ohio*, newspaper. That led us to the Sun City Area Historical Society to recover some of the advertisements that she might have seen in the early 1970's. We also examined earlier ads and present some of them in this paper. We read these ads as textual practices in the exercise of power that reconceptualize housing and retirement under advanced capitalism (Walker, 1995). We begin with the biography.

Ursula Roberts was born in 1917, the oldest of two daughters, and reared in a small town in Pennsylvania. During her childhood her mother was a housewife and her father was a sales manager for an automobile dealership. After graduating from high school, she attended college briefly and then began working for J.C. Penney. In 1938 she married Al Roberts, who began working for Ursula's father. Ursula ended her employment when Al began working for J.C. Penney also, and within a few years they had two children.

During WWII Al worked in a defense-related industry, and after the war he sold groceries wholesale. In 1952 Al entered the insurance business as a general agent. He was quite successful and soon was running offices for a national company, Washington National Life Insurance. Since Al was frequently called upon to rectify troubled agencies, the family moved from city to city quite often. From 1952 until Al's retirement in 1977, many of Ursula's activities revolved around caring for her two children and her husband who had his first massive heart attack when he was 45. She was very active in country clubs wherever she lived, and

golfed whenever she could. She also maintained their households where they liked to have friends over for bridge, dancing, and dinners. Al had another heart attack in 1977 in Youngstown. We begin with Ursula's own narrative at this point.

And the company told him to walk out and close the door and never walk back in again. He said he couldn't afford to do it and they said, "Yes you can." So they made all the arrangements and that was it. So anyhow Washington was very, very good to us and got us all settled back so we could have a nice retirement, and that was it.

Well he was on disability for a while, but not for too long. He went on disability when he was 50 because he wasn't able to work and he couldn't collect social security. And he had disability insurance, so he got a good disability pension, money every month.

We lived there in Youngstown for five years, and then we came out here after he retired. He was probably retired for a year before we moved out here. I know he was. Before he became ill the last time, I wanted to come out to Sun City. They were advertising Sun City a lot then in the papers. I didn't want to live in Youngstown for the rest of my life 'cause I didn't like Youngstown, period.

Now Al's working just before his whole episode, before he had to retire, and we were going to go to New Orleans to a convention; and I said, "Well, why don't you take three weeks off, and we can drive out to Sun City," 'cause it was advertised in the paper, "and I would like to see it, and maybe it will give us an idea, as to maybe we would like to retire out there when you become 65." And he said, well, he said he couldn't take the time off. He just couldn't take three weeks and he said, "I don't think it's worth our time going out there unless we could take three weeks because, you know, it's a long trip out and then go down to New Orleans, be there a week or so." So he said no. So I said, "Well, okay." Well then in the meantime, he had his heart attack and gets sick. And once he got well he wasn't going back to work; and I said to him, "Well, why don't we take the time now and go out and take a look?" So he said, yes. So we drove out here; and we still went the convention in New Orleans. 'Cause this happened so fast that it was unbelievable, from the time he said no to, you know, he got sick so we still were able to go to that convention in New Orleans. So that's what we did. We drove out here then we went to New Orleans.

We came out here and saw a house and we talked about buying it and, you know, this was the same time as Youngstown Sheet and

Tubes was going down the drain. And that place closed up, you know. See Youngstown was a sheet, a steel town and they just closed up real fast. And we had a lot of friends that worked for Youngstown Sheet and Tube. You know, they were executives and they all lost their jobs just like that. But anyhow it went down the drain and we knew when we came out here so we were afraid to buy a house out here for fear we have to sit on that house for goodness knows how long. And we had made up our minds we were not going to move out until we'd sold our house. We put it on the market. And we sold our house in three weeks time.

So we got on a plane and then we flew out and the house we'd liked was sold. And so this street was brand new, wasn't even completely in yet. And, the man that had this house, he decided that he wanted to move to Florida. He didn't want this place. He was living here in Sun City and he went to Florida. So we came out here and bought the house from this man. We didn't finance this house. We paid cash for it, and so that was end of that.

This section up here, this area up here was just finished in 1978. When we moved into this house the streets weren't quite finished yet. So it was all brand new up here. The country club was brand new. They had just finished the clubhouse when we moved in. So everything was brand new when we moved here, you know. We had a nice life here. It was very enjoyable.

Ursula Roberts' narrative above tells us how she enters and connects with relations which are not the site of her everyday world, but which coordinate her activities and courses of action with regard to housing translocally. In other words, Ursula Roberts reads, talks about, and acts upon the printed advertisements about Sun City in her local Ohio newspaper.

The Del Webb Development Company (DEVCO), which began construction of Sun City as a suburban housing development in the desert outside of Phoenix, Arizona, in 1959, heavily marketed this project. The grand opening of Sun City occurred over the weekend of the 1960 New Year and an estimated 100,000 people attended the three-day event. Beginning in January DEVCO, in conjunction with a locally based advertising firm, Garland Agency, conducted an extensive advertising campaign by producing thematic layouts in local area newspapers and in other newspapers, newsletters, and national magazines. Some of the newspapers included *The New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*,

the *Los Angeles Times*, and such Ohio newspapers as the *Columbus Dispatch*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the *Akron Beacon Journal*, and the *Youngstown Vindicator*. National magazines included *National Review*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *McCalls*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Look*, *Life*, *Holiday*, *Sunset*, *Readers Digest*, and *Today's Health*; numerous sports and recreational periodicals such as *Golf Digest*, *Sporting News*, *Retirement Life*, *American Bowler*, and *Field and Stream*; and organizational magazines and newsletters like *Rotarian*, *Kiwanians*, *Lions*, *American Legion*, *Retired Officer*, *Army*, *Navy and Air Force Journal*, and *Sheet Workers Union* (Del Webb Corporation, 1959–80). Similar images were reproduced over and over again at different sites from 1959 through the 1980's.

The advertisements in Figures 1 and 2, or very similar ones, are samples of notices reproduced in 1975 which Ursula Roberts would have likely read in the Youngstown paper. DEVCO encourages readers to write for information about Sun City and plan for their retirement by sightseeing and vacationing in "the world's most famous resort-retirement community." The ads enter into the actualities of Ursula Roberts' life as textually mediated discourse and as a socially organized activity. The ad tells her who to contact, where to find housing, and how to begin retirement planning by vacationing with Del Webb. Further, these ads are not just an ensemble of meaning. Think about the activities Ursula mentions in the narrative. After reading the ad she initiates a discussion with Al about her desire to take a look at Sun City as a place to retire. After Al's heart attack, she reintroduces the topic with the idea of extending his convention trip to include a vacation in Arizona to visit Sun City. The Roberts visit Sun City, look at houses, and pick out one they like. They return to Ohio and put their house on the market, sell the house, fly to Sun City and buy a new house. These activities are done in conjunction with Al's employer helping to arrange for a financially secure retirement at age 60.

The advertisements are part of a course of action, a course which is organized by the text. They are designed to produce a visit to Sun City. They invite readers to come and look and make an association between visiting Sun City and deciding to stay and live there. The advertising texts do the work of getting prospective homeowners to visit Sun City, where the textual

(SPECIAL LIMITED OFFER — FOR THE "OVER 50" SET)

# Enjoy an Arizona Vacation in a Lovely Apartment at Beautiful...



## DEL WEBB'S Sun City

America's Most Famous Resort-Retirement Community  
**NOW \$99 For 2 People**  
**ONLY \$99 for One Week**  
Through May 31, 1975\*



Your own air-conditioned, furnished apartment.



Relax under Arizona's sunny skies.



Sun City is a golfer's paradise—nine courses



You're invited to enjoy Sun City's social life.

*Treat yourself to a fabulous week of fun and sample resort living at its finest!*

**Introductory Offer!** Enjoy a King's ransom in resort facilities. Meet the warm and friendly Sun Citizens—see their healthful, happy way of living. How: enjoy a wonderful vacation for two, in a lovely, furnished *air-conditioned* apartment—only \$99 for one week\* October 16 through May 31. One condition: you or your companion must be 50 or over.

**Free Guest Activities Card!** Your passport to pleasure—tennis, swimming, shuffleboard, lawn bowling, bridge, dancing, arts and craft centers—yours to enjoy *free!* Bask in the warm sun or just loaf. Be a Sun Citizen for a week. Discover what *they* enjoy every week for less than 10¢ a day per person.

**Play Two Golf Games free!** Sun Citizens enjoy golf year 'round on nine beautiful 18-hole courses. Two free games are included in your vacation week—one per person. Sun Citizens have the advantage, though—they enjoy remarkably low annual golf rates and they can own their golf carts, too!

**Discover Scenic Arizona!** Sun City is in the Valley of the Sun, 13 miles from Phoenix. And it's an easy drive to Grand Canyon, Mexico, Tombstone, Tucson and all of Arizona's fabulous tourist attractions.

**Act Now and Avoid Disappointment!** Reservations are filled on a "first come, first served" basis so send coupon today! Enclose deposit (\$99 for one week\*) or send for reservation application and full color brochure. Offer limited to availabilities. No reservations confirmed without deposit in full—prompt refund if no space.

**\*\$125 for 2 people for 2 weeks**  
**June 1, through October 15, 1975**



# FREE

informative brochure crammed with full color photos, facts about Sun City... the people, homes, climate... everything! Yours free with coupon. **Don't Delay—Send Coupon Today!**

Del Webb Development Co.  
A.S. 81-C 879-C  
**DEL WEBB CORPORATION**

**MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY!**

**DEL E. WEBB DEVELOPMENT CO., DEPT. KO-25**  
**P.O. Box 606, Sun City, Arizona 85351**

- Here's my check for \$99 (or for \$125). Reserve a vacation apt. for the week (or 2 weeks) starting \_\_\_\_\_ (any day of the week)
- Send complete information about Sun City

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_


DATE THIS COUPON IS VALID FOR USE: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 1  
Photograph of advertisement proof for magazine distribution, 1975, by DEVCO. Sun Cities Area Historical Society.

# arizona double feature


Tour Arizona and visit Sun City via two beautiful 16 mm movies. Available on loan

**FREE**



**THE STORY OF ARIZONA and SUN CITY**  
Narrated by Senator Barry Goldwater

Beautiful color cinematography captures the incredible diversity of the Grand Canyon State. The Senator traces the Arizona Story from the invasion of the Conquistadors to the rise of Sun City. (30 minutes).



**The Week Sun City**  
America's Most Famous Resort-Retirement Community

A profile of the community that changed the definition of retirement, and earned a place high on the list of attractions that draw visitors (and new residents) from all over the world to Arizona. See the homes, the churches, the recreational and commercial amenities, the medical facilities, and the scenic beauty that make Sun City the standard of the world in retirement living. (25 minutes).

The Arizona Double Feature is ideal for retirement planning programs, service clubs, church groups, etc. Your only cost would be the return postage (The Story of Arizona - CCo and Sun City - 59¢ in the U.S.). RESERVE 3 WEEKS AHEAD.

**MAIL THIS COUPON TO RESERVE FILMS**

Del E. Webb Dev. Co. Dept. NA-84M  
P. O. Box 866, Sun City, Ariz. 85351

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Occupation \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of showing \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
(Number of viewers) \_\_\_\_\_

\*Reservations subject to film availability

**DEL E. WEBB DEVELOPMENT COMPANY**

This advertisement does not constitute an offer to sell real estate in those states where such an offer is prohibited by law.

## JUST OFF THE PRESS!

You can learn more about the Great Abortion Debate from John T. Noonan's "How to argue about abortion" than from anything else you've ever read!

**H**ave you ever wanted to explain to someone just how *strongly* you feel that abortion-on-demand is both morally and legally wrong, but hesitated because you weren't quite sure how to word your deep concern? If you have, you're not alone. What most of us would consider plain common sense doesn't seem to be enough in an argument these days. And arguments over abortion grow more heated every day as a Constitutional debate over the proposed "Human Life" amendment continues to brew in Congress.



**How to argue about abortion**, just published, puts into words exactly what many people *feel* about the abortion issue. Written by a leading authority on the legal aspects of abortion, Professor John T. Noonan, Jr., this pamphlet presents powerful and persuasive logic that not only explains why abortion is wrong but also how support of abortion violates the humanistic principles that have made America's democratic institutions what they are. And this timely booklet helps clear up much of the confusion over the *real* issues at stake since the Supreme Court's muddled, pro-abortion decision in 1973.

**How to argue about abortion** is a short, concise handbook that you'll want to keep within easy reach. Order your copies today.

### About the Author

John T. Noonan, Jr., is Professor of Law at the University of California, Berkeley. Besides two books published by Harvard University Press, *Contraception* and *The Morality of Abortion*, he has written many articles on law, theology and philosophy. He is also a member of the Bar of Massachusetts and the Bar of the Supreme Court of the United States.

### To get your copies use this coupon today!

The Ad Hoc Committee in Defense of Life  
P.O. Box 574 • Murray Hill Station • New York, N.Y. 10016

Yes, I want to know more about the *real* issues involved in the Great Abortion Debate. Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ copies at \$1.00 each of *How to argue about abortion*. I enclose \$ \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ (Please Print)

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

(Bulk prices on request)

Figure 2 Photograph of advertisement, National Review, 1974, by DEVCO. Sun Cities Area Historical Society.



sequence continues in the form of sales pitches and brochures further describing the place.

The fixed physical property of texts gives them the appearance of having achieved stasis. When we look at the ads, we do not see the process by which they were created. We do not even know who wrote the words or took the pictures or how they came to appear in the newspapers or magazines. The ads appear to exist in what Dorothy Smith calls "textual time," i.e., they exist as if they are stable or fixed on the basis of their physicality. They can be picked up, put down, picked up again, and nothing has changed; however, that appearance is deceitful. When a text is taken up, a text-reader relation develops and the often-understood notion of reading as passivity can now be understood as activity. We see this as Ursula Roberts takes up the text and begins her work—her work of relocating—work which is regulated textually. While nothing changes in the text, as Smith says, "[E]ach iteration is the actual local practice of a particular individual, reading just where she is, for just the what-comes-next that her reading initiates" (Smith, 1999, p. 75).

However, the Roberts' relocation to an age segregated community is predicated upon significant changes in the institutions of retirement and housing that began around 1960 in the United States. In fact, DEVCO was instrumental in the construction of these new forms of housing and the articulation of a new definition of retirement. Through their advertising DEVCO reconceptualized notions of retirement at a time when more and more Americans were retiring and the traditional definition of retirement was largely negative.

Studies of later life that were undertaken before the 1960's revealed a great deal of dissatisfaction with mandatory retirement, along with difficulty with adjusting to retirement, especially for "the old, the poor, and those who like their work . . ." (Graebner, 1980, p. 220). Graebner noted that in 1956 Eleanor Roosevelt wrote that, instead of being forced to retire, she would "'rather die in the atomic war in a few seconds than live in a world that was constantly becoming more Communistic, than making me live in a narrower and narrower area.'" She added, "'Instead of letting them go quickly, you make them die more slowly'" (1980, p. 227). While disengagement theory, promoted in

the 1960's by sociologists and gerontologists, gave elderly people permission to withdraw from the workforce and the social roles associated with work, other social commentators struggled with the consequences of separating work from leisure. Businessman Henry B. Higgins suggested that since people would not know what to do with themselves in retirement, they would need to be educated about leisure. Lynn White Jr., president of Mills College, suggested that it would become necessary to "glamorize leisure as we have not." Sociologist David Riesman noted that retirement was an unattractive frontier: "frontier behavior is awkward; people have not yet learned to behave comfortably in the new surroundings. There is a formlessness which takes the shape of lawlessness on the frontier of production and of aimlessness on the frontier of consumption" (Graebner, 1980, p. 228). Graebner commented, "The problem of leisure, as Riesman defines it, lay not in leisure itself but in twentieth-century man's [sic] awkward responses to it" (p. 228–229). Finally, others worried that dissolving the rhythms of work and leisure would lead to devaluing work and relegating leisure as an unpleasant experience. Friedmann and Havighurst saw this dilemma as a temporary one, however. They argued that future generations of Americans, raised in an era of economic abundance, consumption, and leisure, would know how to play in old age (Graebner, 1980, p. 229–230).

In advertising a new definition of retirement, DEVCO referenced this discourse by teaching people how to play. Furthermore, it provided a much more radical solution to the problems of retirement than discussed by ordinary people, politicians, businessmen, bankers, college presidents, and social scientists. DEVCO not only created a textual form of a lifestyle that promoted a complete separation of work and leisure, but also recast leisure as purposeful recreational activity; and this was done in the process of building housing and community. Thus, in its organization the text broke the historical link between work and leisure and reorganized leisure in relation to housing. More importantly, however, DEVCO skillfully articulated this discourse to the commercial processes of home building and retirement living through both textual forms and by building the physical facilities—the organizational site for the distribution and consumption of leisure.

Despite the fact that DEVCO was selling housing, housing images made up a small part of the content of the advertisements. Remarkably, what they promoted instead was an alternative form of both retirement and community. The ads contained slogans about a new type of retirement and community; thematic images playing off the seasons of the year; various special activities sponsored by Del Webb (fashion, car, music, and art shows); photographs of the physical site under development, community buildings, and facilities; artistic renditions of senior citizens engaged in recreation and sports activities; and sketches of model homes.

One early ad (see Figure 3) from January 24, 1960, claims, "It's the town the whole nation's talking about where the definition of 'retirement' has been changed to mean ACTIVE LIVING for America's Senior Citizens who have been adopting its wonderful way-of-life in record numbers!" The ad also lists the "endless" recreational facilities: "Champion Golf Course, Olympic Size Swimming Pool, Completely Equipped Community Center Club House, Shuffleboard, Croquet, Horseshoes, Lawn Bowling, Archery, Creative Activity Center, Agricultural Project." DEVCO's encyclopedic inventory of facilities and activities to match retiree's desires was emphasized in the text: "Everything You Could Want is just a step from your door in Sun City . . . including the facilities for recreational and creative activities . . . AND a complete commercial center and the [advance] 'edition' of Del Webb's HiwayHouse Motor Hotel." A later ad (see Figure 4) invoked readers to "tell the folks back home" and pictured the community center, swimming pool, and creative activity workshop. "*Creative* ACTIVITY," an "Important Part of The New Way-of-Life" was illustrated by metal modeling, leather work, mosaics, wood turning, ceramics and potter's wheel, jewelry making, enameling, and lapidary work in the ad in Figure 5. A February 28, 1960, ad (see Figure 6) captured the popularity of this new phenomenon by declaring that it was "Arizona's Fastest Growing City" with a population of 1350 in less than two months. This ad drew our attention to both the theme of retirement as active living and the houses surrounded by golf fairways.



**population**

**... AT PRESS TIME**

**DEL WEBB'S**  
**Sun City**  
(ESTABLISHED JAN. 1, 1960)

**Arizona's Fastest Growing City . . . .**

**... AND THE NATION'S MOST COMPLETELY WONDERFUL NEW COMMUNITY!**

It's the topic the whole nation's talking about where the definition of "retirement" has been changed to mean **ACTIVE LIVING** for America's Senior Citizens who have been adopting its wonderful new way of life in record-breaking numbers!

**Sun City's Recreational Facilities Are Endless:**  
 Championship Golf Course • Olympic Size Swimming Pool  
 Completely Equipped Country Club Center • Club House  
 Shuffleboard • Croquet • Horseshoes • Lawn Bowling  
 Archery • Creative Artistry Center • Agricultural Project

Everything You Could Wish For is a step from your door in Sun City... including the facilities for recreational and creative activities... AND a complete recreational center and the newest addition of Del Webb's **Waystone Mobile Homes**.

The Finest Way to Live Around the Sunbelt Basin  
 Priced from just \$8,500 including all improvements

**5 Floor Plans 15 Plans**  
**OPEN 9 A.M. to 8 P.M.**

*Don't Wait Until Tomorrow*

**DEL. E. WEBB DEVELOPMENT CO.**

1212 12 MILE HIGHWAY  
 OF PHOENIX, ARIZONA  
 (Phone: 66-7600)



Figure 3  
Photograph of DEVCO advertisement tear sheet, January 24, 1960. Sun Cities Area Historical Society.

tell the  
folks  
back  
home...

about **DEL WEBB'S** Sun City.

THE TOWN THAT'S THE TALK OF THE TOWN WITH SENIOR CITIZENS WHO WANT  
**Active Retirement**

Drop into Our Sales Office at Sun City and Give Us the Names and Addresses of Ten Senior Citizen Friends and Relatives Back Home. Or you may send the names to our Development Offices. We'll mail each of them a free copy of our Big 20-Page Full-Color Brochure that tells the fascinating story of this remarkable new town.

**Drive Out Today**

**DEL. E. WEBB DEVELOPMENT CO.**

Figure 4  
Photograph of DEVCO advertisement tear sheet, February 7, 1960. Sun Cities Area Historical Society.

*Creative*  
**ACTIVITY**

Subject of  
Sun City's Dazzling  
**ARTS & CRAFTS SHOW**

Important Part of  
New Way-of-Life  
in this  
Remarkable Community  
for Active Retirement

|                  |                     |                      |                     |
|------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
|                  | <i>Wood Working</i> |                      | <i>Leather Work</i> |
| <i>Flowers</i>   |                     | <i>Wood Turning</i>  |                     |
|                  | <i>Ceramics</i>     |                      | <i>Knitting</i>     |
| <i>Enameling</i> |                     | <i>Lapidary Work</i> |                     |

This Wonderful Show Today in Sun City's Arts & Crafts Center

Champion Golf Club  
Olympic-size Swimming Pool Community Center  
Billiard/Pool Room, Croquet, Lawn Bowling, Archery  
Tennis and Crafts Center Agricultural Program  
Recreational Center Corporate Apartments  
Club House 1000+ Hours of Entertainment  
AND BEAUTIFUL HOMES priced from just \$1,299  
Residential Models Open 9 A.M. to 5 P.M.

**Sun City**  
Des. Woot's  
12 MILES N. W. OF PHOENIX  
ONE GRAND AVE. (HWY 66-10-00)

Des. E. Woot Development Co. PHOENIX, ARIZONA


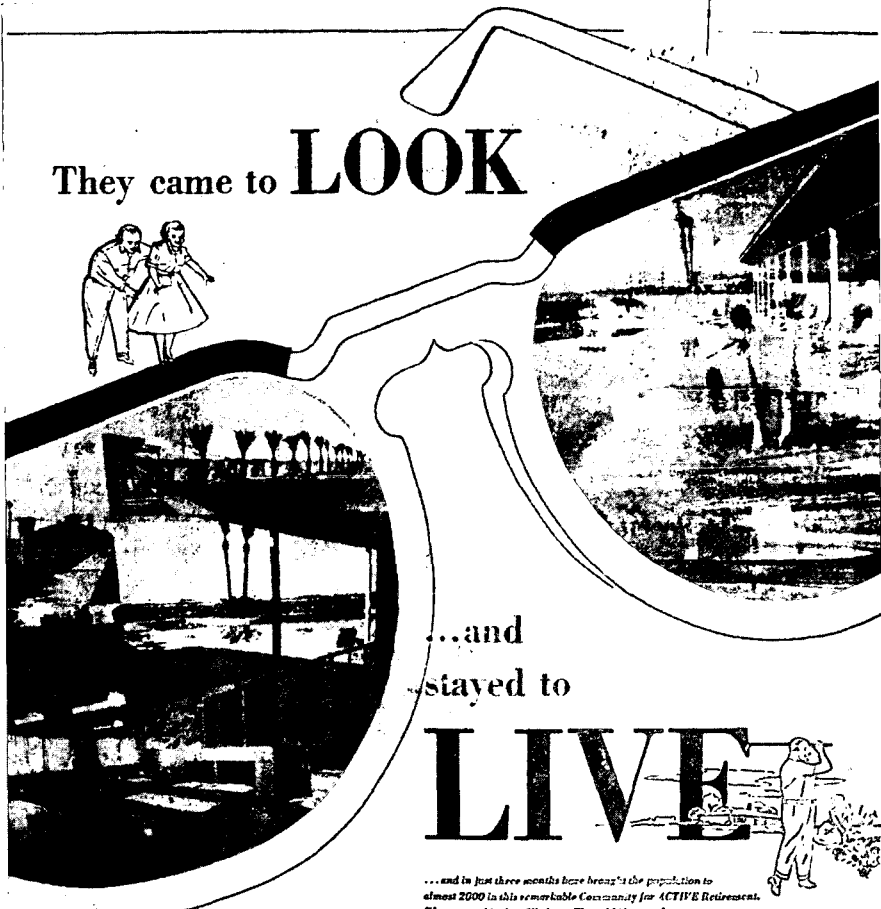
Figure 5  
Photograph of DEVCO advertisement tear sheet, February 21, 1960. Sun Cities Area Historical Society.

By April 3, 1960, DEVCO presented the alternative definition of retirement as an accomplished and growing practice (see Figure 7):


and in just three months they have brought the population to about 2000 in this remarkable Community for ACTIVE Retirement. They wanted its fun-filled new Way-of-Life to make the best years of their lives completely happy, filled with interesting, satisfying activity and the company of people who share their love of living. Come see what they saw . . . Come see where they'll be living and all the



They came to **LOOK**

...and stayed to **LIVE**



...and in just three months have brought the population to almost 2000 in this remarkable Community for ACTIVE Retirement. They wanted its fun-filled new Way-of-Life to make the best years of their lives completely happy, filled with interesting, satisfying activities and the enjoyment of people who share their love of living.

Come see what they see... Come see where they'll be living and all the wonderful things they'll be enjoying...

Come see the new Way-of-Life that's waiting for you, too.

For your recreation there is a championship golf course, an olympic-size swimming pool with sports swimming terrace, a completely furnished community center, shuffleboard, croquet, horseshoes, archery and lawn bowling. There is a completely equipped Arts & Crafts Center... and an Agricultural Center.

For your convenience there is the completely furnished Center and Del Webb's Honeymoon Motor Hotel with Coffee Shop and Restaurant.

For your living there are beautiful, top quality homes with a choice of 3 floor plans and 12 elevations... priced from just \$28,750.

**Sun City**

JUST 12 MILES NW of PHOENIX on GRAND AVE.  
 DEL. E. WEBB DEVELOPMENT CO.

APRIL 3 and 10, 1960.

Figure 7  
Photograph of DEVCO advertisement tear sheet, April 3, 1960. Sun Cities Area Historical Society.



wonderful things they'll be enjoying . . . Come see the new Way-of-Living that's waiting for you too.

On April 17, 1960, Del Webb's Sun City declared "A JOYOUS EASTER" without mentioning that there are homes for sale (see Figure 8).

A meaningful retirement was again elaborated on May 8, 1960, by DEVCO declaring that "SCIENCE adds years to LIFE . . . Del Webb's Sun City ADDS LIFE TO YEARS" (see Figure 9). As in other tear sheets, this ad illustrated the same activities of a meaningful life for retirees. Artists' renditions of "BEAUTIFUL HOMES" were secondary to the pictures of the activities.

This remarkable community has completely changed the meaning of Retirement . . . to ACTIVE LIVING. Sun City has been designed and equipped to give you the most out of every treasured minute of those golden years of freedom. There is something doing . . . and something to do at all hours of the day plus the company of those who share your interest and your love of an active life. What's your favorite sport, your favorite creative outlet, your favorite social activity? It's waiting for you in Sun City.

DEVCO directly addressed the new definition of retirement on May 22, 1960, in Figure 10: "active RETIREMENT" may be a paradox according to Webster . . . but not to Webb! It's an interesting, satisfying, Fun-filled, Way-of-Life, created by Del E. Webb for America's Senior Citizens who want every day of their golden years of freedom to be spent in purposeful activity . . . it's SUN CITY!" The purposeful activities that were illustrated are croquet, ceramics, golf, gardening and swimming. The image (see Figure 11) from August 14, 1960, further articulates the distinction between the old retirement ("Withdrawn, Secluded, and Inactive") and the new retirement ("Active, Creative, and Interesting") by placing the meaning of retirement on trial. Exhibits A through F refute Webster's standard and authoritative definition and present DEVCO's definition as an accomplished act. In doing so, the concerns of Friedmann, Havighurst, Riessman and others are put to rest.

Through their extensive, nationwide advertising campaign, Webb and his associates were engaged in constructing more than housing. A key feature of these texts is the evolving and explicit

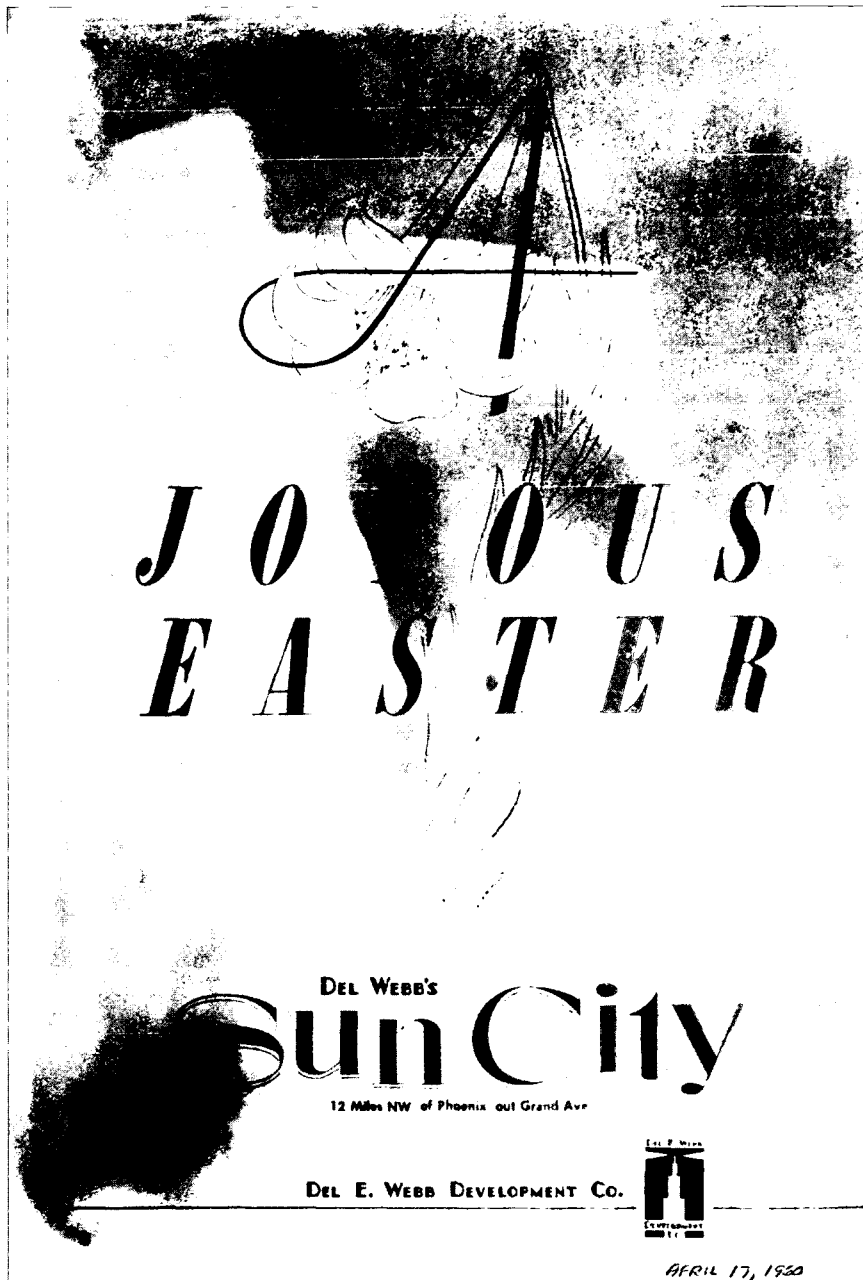


Figure 8  
Photograph of DEVCO advertisement tear sheet, April 17, 1960. Sun Cities  
Area Historical Society.



construction of a new definition of retirement called "active living." What is active living? It is obvious from these ads that it is a time of life which is valuable, i.e., "golden," "treasured," for people to enjoy "freedom" from paid employment and for those who are willing and able to commit themselves to a life filled with low impact sports, artistic and other leisure activities. In addition, active living is defined in relationship to the facilities constructed by the Del Webb Corporation and is made available to those who actually buy a house in the community. In other words, although housing is coincidental in the advertising, in order to partake in this new "Way-of-Life," one must purchase a house in Sun City. Quite evident in the images of the tear sheets, but also evident in the placement of these advertisements in certain periodicals, Webb was constructing a certain category of "America's Senior Citizen"—they were able-bodied, heterosexual, white, middle income, Christian couples unencumbered by children. Indeed, DEVCO's own marketing department specifically examined US Census data and consulted other social science experts on aging identifying the social background characteristics of those 55 and over as the first generation of retirees having disposable income in the form of Social Security and private pension funds. Additionally new retirees had assets derived from homeownership. DEVCO appropriated the characteristics of this age cohort and targeted this population in their advertising campaign during the 1960's (Sturgeon, 1992).

Furthermore, in constructing the text mediated discourse of "active retirement as a way-of-life" through the language of typification (you, they, American, senior citizen) and the atemporal present, DEVCO deployed what Smith (1999) calls "ideological codes." This discourse, ordered by idealizations about active living in retirement as purposeful activity, provides a schema which allows its organization in text and concerting discourse to be replicated in multiple sites regardless of historicity across divergent sites and audiences, and links " . . . the active and creative subject with the market and the productive organization of capital. This discourse locates the social relations of a 'symbolic' terrain and material practices which bring it into being and sustain it" (Smith, 1993, p. 161–163).

**R E T I R E M E N T**

May 22, 1960

It's a Remarkable New Community... and It's All Waiting for You!

**Del Webb's Sun City**

DEL. E. WEBB DEVELOPMENT CO.

Figure 10

*Photograph of DEVCO advertisement tear sheet, May 22, 1960. Sun Cities Area Historical Society.*

Textual forms (photographic, written, etc.) enter into social processes as people take them up at their sites of action. Smith says that some texts are important because they, "... as the normative structure of the everyday" (1993, p. 202), are standardized, and they organize local social relations. What our investigation led

THE **Evidence**

that won a **New Way-of-Life** for America's **Senior Citizens** in the case of **Webb vs Webster** on the subject of **RETIRED LIVING**

...“Active, Creative, Interesting,” said Webb

...“Withdrawn, Secluded, Inactive,” said Webster

SINCE JANUARY 1, 1960, THE CITY OF SUN CITY HAS BEEN...  
**DEL WEBB'S**  
**Sun City**

Arizona's Fastest Growing City and the Chosen Home of More than 3000 Citizens from All Over the Nation. Come See the Evidence. Come See the City that Changed the Meaning of Retirement to Active, Interesting, Full-Time Living.

12 MILES NW OF PHOENIX, OUT GRAND AVENUE

**DEL E. WEBB DEVELOPMENT CO.**

Figure 11  
*Photograph of DEVCO advertisement tear sheet, August 14, 1960. Sun Cities Area Historical Society.*

us to, however, is something a bit different. We found discursive practices dedicated to the reformulation of the institutional spheres of housing and retirement. We take the ads to be a web of texts redefining retirement. They string together and coordinate the multiple local and particular sites of people with market processes within the housing industry.

Active retirement also involves the work Ursula Roberts does of producing herself to realize the textual image of “active living.” The discourse creates the motivational structures which return purchasers again and again—buying leisure in the form of housing, greens fees, community assessments, vacation packages, maintenance fees, etc. The Roberts both enter practices ordered by the text and are active participants in its relations. Ursula says:

We didn’t know a soul in Arizona. I can’t honestly and truthfully say that Al ever liked it here. He was used to working with younger people. And it didn’t bother me; course I will have to admit that when we joined the country club we were the kids, you know, in the country club.

I never had any problems making friends anywhere. And I think too because I play bridge and I play golf, it was easy for me too. And fortunately we had enough money to join a country club everywhere we went. So it’s easy if you can join a country club and if you’re a good golfer to go in. I’ve been chairman of the golf association, every golf association I ever belong to, you know. And I was the second chairman up here at the country club. And I have always been very active in everything I get into, you know.

I had a terrible time right when Al passed away. The biggest adjustment I’ve had to make is socially by myself. I don’t like going places by myself, socially. Where there’s other husbands and wives. Now I don’t mind going, if another man will go and he can be with me, that’s fine. But I don’t like to go by myself. And I’ve been very fortunate and usually have someone to go with.

I had a knee replacement two years ago. No problem at all. I used the walker for one day, after I got home. Oh you can’t play golf for about—I had it done the last day of May and I was out playing golf in the middle of August—so that wasn’t too bad, you know.

Ursula and Al, as Sun City residents, practice active living separated from “work roles” as an able-bodied, white, middle-income couple. They work actively to retire by taking up golf, bridge, and vacationing. They coordinate their activities with others and experience features of that organizational form which present problems or contradictions in their everyday world, such as Al’s dissatisfaction with interacting solely with older people and Ursula’s challenge of living as a widow in a coupled community.

We have demonstrated how texts enter into social processes to reorganize social relations and transform the institution of housing during the latter part of 20<sup>th</sup> century capitalism. Our method takes up retirement and housing from within, exploring social relations organizing the particular local historical sites of people's experience as multiple and sometimes contradictory relations. The subject's, Ursula's, account of her experience led us to a consideration of specific texts. The conceptual dimensions of active retirement elaborated by DEVCO are " 'organizers' packaged in texts that transmit 'organization' invented in one site of ruling to multiple sites regulating the local activities of particular people" (Smith, 1999, p. 93). DEVCO'S Sun City, particularly its formality, its designed and organized character, depends heavily on textual practices. These texts, unfamiliar in the retirement and housing discourse in the early part of 20<sup>th</sup> century, are fundamental to understanding how housing and retirement are practiced by ordinary people, such as the Roberts, in the latter part of the century.

### Note

1. This paper is part of a larger research project on the changes in the social institution of housing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the U.S. Beginning from the standpoint of women we worked together with five women to generate oral housing histories. We contacted the women, who lived in the Phoenix metropolitan area at the time of the interviews, through acquaintances and former students. All of the women were at least 60 years of age and had "lived alone" for at least six months. After an initial contact we interviewed the women in their homes on at least four occasions for approximately two hours in 1992-93. We tape recorded and transcribed approximately 10 to 12 hours of conversation with each woman. We rewrote the transcripts as first person narratives. We changed some information and provided pseudonyms to assure anonymity.

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Authors' names are listed in alphabetical order. The contents of this article represent a cooperative effort.

