

The background is a detailed, sepia-toned illustration. At the top, the words 'CATALINA FOOTHILLS' are written in a large, ornate, cursive font, with 'ESTATES' in a smaller, simpler font below them. Below the text, there is a landscape scene featuring a large, multi-story building with a prominent tower and a cross on its roof, surrounded by trees and a cactus. In the foreground, there is a large, stylized face with a crown and a mustache, and a large, stylized cactus. The bottom of the illustration shows a landscape with mountains and a body of water.

CFE7 50th Anniversary Celebration

Saturday, March 25, 2017

Special thanks to:

- Carol and John Bowers for hosting the event**
- Linda Grossman for catering the event**
- The 50th Anniversary Celebration Committee
(Carol Bowers, Linda Grossman, Jean Harber, Karen
Lansdale and Megan Wood)**
- The CFE7 Association for its support**

Catalina Foothills Estates (CFE7) – Then and Now by Jean Harber



I had the privilege of visiting with many of the original owners of CFE7 properties who still live in their homes. My goal was to find out what CFE7 was like when their homes were built and they first moved in, the ways CFE7 has remained the same and the ways CFE7 has changed.

Being a resident of CFE7 for just over 6 years, I had a LOT to learn. The homeowners I visited graciously welcomed me into their homes and gladly described their memories and impressions of CFE7 and the areas that surround CFE7. I learned a great deal and am very appreciative of all of them.

The homeowners I interviewed moved into their brand new homes between 1968 and 1982. Some lived elsewhere in Tucson before moving to CFE7, some for a short time and some starting sometime during their childhood. Several homeowners I interviewed served on the CFE7 Board of Directors. Early on, the board meetings were held in board members' homes. The records were stored in the sales office, which was located at the Northeast corner of River Road and Via Entrada. One homeowner I interviewed was instrumental in bringing in the first paid part-time secretary.

The neighborhood hasn't changed very much but the area around CFE7 changed a great deal.

Overall, native vegetation remains the same, thanks to the covenants. The density of the native vegetation (and some non-native vegetation like *Rhus Lancia*) has increased. The increase is due in part to the fact that cattle no longer graze in CFE7 and also because the runoff from roofs and paved areas has concentrated runoff from rainfall and promoted infiltration and increased soil moisture. Before, when the rainfall was distributed and not concentrated, more of it evaporated and was not available for the plants to capture.

The neighborhood still has the solitude it had early on. The neighborhood was and is a unique place to come home to – quiet and peaceful. People did and still do take good care of the exterior of their homes. There never were a lot of children in the area, but now there are even fewer. There were no boulders at the washes initially. In 1968 there were no leash laws in Pima County. Dogs roamed free. There were fewer javelina and bobcats early on but there were more roadrunners.

Initially the roads within CFE7 were loose gravel. The roads were owned and maintained by the Association. Later the roads were chip sealed. In late 1978 or early 1979 Murphey Estates turned over the management of CFE7 to the Homeowners Association and almost immediately the roads were turned over to the county.

There were no stop signs and no speed limit signs within CFE7 initially. Water was initially supplied by a private company, the Murphey Water Company, but was later supplied by the City of Tucson.

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Catalina Foothills Estates (CFE7) – Then and Now (continued)

Murphey worked with a land planner (Tom Via) and laid out the lots in a very logical manner. The well thought-out protective covenants kept homes low and set back so they were not seen from far away. Lots were laid out in a very professional way to maximize the number of commercial acre lots with buildable home sites. That is why the north-south part of Via Entrada lies in the bottom of a wash.

Houses built later on were designed to blend in with the earlier-built houses. The most important function of the Architectural Review Committee, now the Project Review Committee, is to ensure that new construction or modifications of an existing structure blends in with the existing buildings in the subdivision.

Water flowed over the tower (fountain) at River Road and Via Entrada until the early 1970s. Initially "For Sale" signs were not allowed. There were very few rentals. People did not park vehicles on their driveways. More people attended the annual homeowner meetings.

There was no traffic light at River Road and Via Entrada in 1982. River Road was a two-lane winding road. River Road connected to Campbell Avenue and then did a dog-leg to the other side of Campbell Avenue. Racetrack Wash did not go under River Road as it does now and River Road flooded when there was heavy rain. First Avenue was one lane in each direction.

The Rillito Park Race Track, one of oldest quarter horse race tracks in the U.S., opened in 1943 and still exists today. The Desert Foothills Post Office opened in August 1991. In the early 1970s, the closest supermarkets were a Lucky supermarket on Campbell Avenue near Glenn Street and a Lucky supermarket at Oracle Road and Orange Grove Road. By the late 1970s, more supermarkets opened. There was a Smiths on Wetmore (which did not last long) and a Smiths on First Avenue, where Fry's is now. There was an Alpha Beta supermarket where Bed Bath & Beyond is now (Southeast corner of Oracle Road and Orange Grove Road); in the early 1980s it was replaced by an IGA that only lasted a couple of years.

Initially there were few restaurants nearby. There was a Denny's at Oracle Road and River Road and a Coco's on Campbell Avenue just north of where Chicago Pizza is now. El Corral on River Road was an upscale restaurant. Casa Molina and Chuy's restaurants were on Campbell Avenue where Trader Joe's is today. As the population increased, more restaurants opened. The Golden Dragon Chinese restaurant has been in the same location on the Northwest corner of Oracle Road and Orange Grove Road since at least the early 1980s. Las Margaritas Mexican restaurant on Oracle Road at Rudasill Road has been there since the 1980s, and there was an upscale Italian restaurant on the west side of Oracle Road about halfway between Rudasill Road and Roller Coaster Road in the late 1980s and into the 1990s. The Tack Room and the Arizona Inn required coat and tie.

Now there is more noise, more stores and traffic moves faster.

In the early 1980s the first high density housing was announced just north of CFE7. As a concession to the complaints received from CFE7 homeowners, the developer agreed to keep the lots along the north boundary of CFE7 at one acre, but north of that, the density is higher. There were also complaints about the development at the Southwest corner of CFE7, but those complaints fell on deaf ears.

A Brief History of the Catalina Foothills

Suburban development of the Catalina Foothills began decades before the development of Catalina Foothills Estates 7 (CFE7) started. History attributes the development of the Foothills largely to the Murpheys. John W. Murphey, a native of Tucson, graduated from the University of Arizona in 1920 and married Helen Geyser, a native of Natick, Massachusetts, that year. The Murpheys spent much of their first three years of marriage living in a tent near River Road and Campbell Avenue to maintain their claim as a homestead which would later become a part of their most ambitious real estate development – the Catalina Foothills.

By 1927, their company, the Murphey Building Company, was credited with the construction of more than 200 houses in Tucson. In 1928 the Murpheys successfully bid for approximately 7,000 acres of undeveloped public land which was being sold at auction. Thus began one of the earliest master-planned communities in southern Arizona. The Murpheys located a young Swiss immigrant architect, Josias Joesler, and convinced him to come to Tucson.

Between 1928 and the mid-1930s Joesler and the Murpheys collaborated on a variety of projects including the Old World Addition (near the University of Arizona, which was later torn down to build the Medical Center), commercial buildings, University of Arizona fraternities and sororities and churches. The Depression caused their success to come to a halt; in 1932 they did not develop one house and Joesler searched for other commissions. By the mid-1930s, the growing national economic prosperity rejuvenated their partnership and in the years between 1936 and 1941 they gained national publicity and an “up-scale” clientele.

The Catalina Foothills became their “flagship” collaboration and provided much of Joesler’s business until World War II. World War II slowed new construction. The development of a remote residential community challenged the Murpheys to create and promote a uniquely different development than those which had defined Tucson’s neighborhoods previously. Much of the success for the Catalina Foothills Estates must be credited to the Murpheys’ clear vision for a project to develop an affluent “Mexican style” community with all the amenities and services required to attract prominent buyers. This vision, combined with Joesler’s architectural expertise, proved to be the project’s enduring legacy. While the Catalina Foothills became one of Tucson’s premier real estate developments, at the time it was a very risky venture.

Joesler died in 1956, prior to any CFE7 homes being built; Juan Worner Baz took over as the architect and worked with the Murpheys. Baz designed St. Philip’s Plaza, the fountain at the entrance to CFE7, the Murphey home as well as many other buildings and homes in Tucson.

The Murpheys promoted the Catalina Foothills as providing a complete lifestyle for Tucson residents and winter visitors. Brochures touted the benefits of living in this suburban community which included large “estate” lots, low tax rates (since there were no city taxes) and the ability of residents to eat at the local tea room rather than preparing their own meals. The security of the investment was assured by the area’s popularity as reflected in higher resale values and the exclusion of undesirable commercial enterprises. St. Philip’s Plaza located at River Road and Campbell Avenue served as a community center.

The Murpheys exercised strict control over how the community was to be developed. Lots were sold with comprehensive deed restrictions which kept all decisions regarding real estate design and construction within the control of the Murpheys’ company. Thus the stunning foothills topography, views and natural vegetation were preserved. Restrictions prevented the scraping of the entire lot and the cutting of natural vegetation to within five feet of the building perimeter.

Together, John Murphey, Helen Murphey and Josias Joesler developed a significant architectural legacy for Tucson. The Murpheys created the vision, which Joesler interpreted with his unique architectural skills. Their work successfully promoted Tucson as a resort destination and, subsequently, fostered America’s romance with the Southwest. John Murphey, Helen Murphey and Josias Joesler collaborated for over three decades. Although many of their buildings no longer exist or are irreparably altered, over 200 remain, together with their drawings and job records. These buildings contribute to Tucson’s architectural heritage and to its cultural and geographic identity.

Sources:

Joesler & Murphey – An Architectural Legacy for Tucson, City of Tucson Planning Department
A Guide to Tucson Architecture, Anne M. Nequette and R. Brooks Jeffery