

Good-bye Beeline Drag Strip

Are there any gear-heads in our readership? If you ever were a fan of drag racing in the valley back in the day, perhaps you remember Beeline Drag Strip. Sure it was hot in the summer; sure the noise probably has contributed to our hearing loss. Wasn't it fun? We loved the roar of the engines, funny cars doing wheelies and the crowd cheering for their favorite drivers.



Any of you who drive out of the valley to the cooler climes of the Rim Country may have noticed the absence of the remnant of the tower of the Beeline Drag Strip. I am not sure when it was demolished, but it was there last summer and is gone this summer.



Beeline Drag Strip was built in 1963, by local entrepreneur Jim Rogers on land leased from the Salt River Pima Indians. Located one mile north of Mesa on the south side of State Highway 87, it was a favorite activity of car/speed enthusiasts. During the heat of the summer, racing was on Saturday nights. In the

cooler months races were held on Sundays. In the '50s and '60s, it was the premier racing destination in the Valley. Highlight of the year was the American Hot Rod Association's Winternationals. Popular drag racers such as Don "Big Daddy" Gartlits, "Dandy" Dick Landy, Don "The Snake" Prudhomme and Shirley "Cha Cha" Muldowney have all made history racing at Beeline.

Newer venues like Firebird Raceway and Phoenix International Raceway came along and Beeline lost its luster. It closed in 1973. At some point in its history, Motorola used the Concrete and steel timing tower for radio testing.

With the demolition of the timing tower we are left with only memories of the sights and sounds. Maybe you can also remember the "feel" of the vibration in your body as a high powered engine roared by.

Silvestre S. Herrera – War Hero

Always a Gentleman, Always Humble

Growing up in the 1950's, there were not many kids throughout our country that didn't know or hadn't heard of Alvin York, Audie Murphy, and Ira Hayes. In Arizona, there were a few who hadn't heard of Silvestre Herrera, but in Tolleson we all knew who he was. Silvestre was the only Congressional Medal of Honor recipient during World War II from Arizona.

Silvestre, the youngest child, was born to the Almanza family on December 31, 1916, in Camargo, Chihuahua, Mexico. His parents died during an influenza epidemic when he was only 18 months old. The man he had always thought was his father was really his uncle who brought him to the United States via El Paso, Texas. He lived there until the age of ten. He then moved to Arizona; that's where his connection to the West Valley and Tolleson began.

He grew up in a farming community in the area between Camelback and Indian School Roads near 107th Avenue. At that time Indian School Road was known as Avenue J, 107th Avenue was called Lateral 24, and Camelback Road did not yet exist. Silvestre attended and graduated from Pendergast Elementary School. Both his residence and his school received rural delivery from Tolleson Post Office. Here, as a young man, he adopted his mother's maiden name, "Herrera" and spent his youth in the care of his maternal aunt until his marriage.

Silvestre was 27 years old, married to Ramona Hidalgo and the father of three young children with a fourth on the way when he received his draft notice. Legally, Silvestre was a Mexican National and didn't owe service to the United States, but he felt he had an obligation to his adopted country. He entered the Army on January 13, 1944. After basic training, he was assigned to the men of the Texas National Guard's 36th Infantry Division to train for combat in Europe. While fighting for survival in France, Private First Class Herrera was also studying to become a U.S. citizen.

Herrera's unit was operating in the vicinity of Mertzwiller, France, when on March 15, 1945, events occurred that changed Silvestre's life forever. His Medal of Honor Citation reads as follows:

“He advanced with a platoon along a wooded road until stopped by heavy enemy machine gunfire. As the rest of the unit took cover he made a one-man frontal assault on a strong point and captured eight enemy soldiers. When the platoon resumed its advance it was subject to fire from a second emplacement beyond an extensive minefield, Pvt. Herrera again moved forward, disregarding the danger of exploding mines, to attack the position. He stepped on a mine and had both feet severed, but despite intense pain and unchecked loss of blood, he pinned down the enemy with accurate rifle fire while a friendly squad captured the enemy by skirting the minefield and rushing in from the flank. The magnificent courage, extraordinary heroism, and willing self-sacrifice displayed by Private Herrera resulted in the capture of two enemy strongpoints and the taking of eight prisoners.”

While recovering from wounds at an Army hospital, Silvestre called home to let his family know he had survived and would be coming home. On August 23, 1945, with his family present, Silvestre wheeled his wheelchair across the White House lawn so President Truman could present him with the Congressional Medal of Honor. During the ceremony on the White House lawn, the President told Silvestre that “He would rather be awarded the Medal of Honor than be President of the United States.” Silvestre has said that made him more proud.

Herrera was not only the first soldier, but the only soldier from Arizona to receive the Medal of Honor during World War II. A year later, the country of his birth took the unprecedented step awarding him its highest award for valor, the “Premier Merito Militar.” He was the only person in the world authorized to wear the Medal of Honor and Mexico's equivalent. Silvestre was proud of his Mexican birth



and heritage and equally proud to be a citizen of the U.S.

Throughout his life he received many awards and honors, including a school named after him, Silvestre S. Herrera School, and the Army dedicated the Silvestre S. Herrera Training Center in Mesa. He retired as a leather worker and silversmith. On Monday, November 26, 2007, Silvestre died at the age of 91 at his home in Glendale. He was survived by five of his seven children, eleven grandchildren, and seventeen great-grandchildren. His wife, Ramona, died in 1991. Silvestre rarely spoke of his hardships but had a cheerful and happy life, always a gentleman and always humble.

By Jim Ruiz

The Volunteer Fire Department

I grew up in Goodyear, arriving before the town incorporated. The volunteer fire department was a part of my formative years. The Goodyear Fire Department was established in September, 1948. The department consisted of chief, George Powney and twelve volunteers. The fire station was attached to Town Hall and was located just north of Western Avenue on Litchfield Road. Atop a tower on the fire station was a loud siren that alerted the volunteers and the residents that there was a fire. Remember, at that time Goodyear only covered about a square mile so the siren was quite effective.

The volunteers were all men from the community. In those early years, one of the volunteers, John Padilla, was the butcher at Abraham's Market. The market backed up to the fire station so John was usually the first to arrive. The first to arrive wrote the location of the fire on a chalk board inside the station, put on his fire gear and drove the truck to the fire.

Volunteers came to the station to pick up their gear, note the fire's location and drive there to help out.

Over the years many of our neighbors served on the fire department. During the day they might be bankers, business owners, workers at Goodyear Aircraft or Litchfield Naval Air Facility, but all generously gave of their time to protect their community.

One of the highlights in our family was the day my mother was a hero. Mother had a private kindergarten in the Scout Lodge in a time before kindergarten was in the public schools. There were two gas heaters in the Scout Lodge for heat in the winter. On cold days, she drove to the kindergarten to light the heaters at six in the morning to get it toasty for the children. On this particular morning, she arrived at the kindergarten and saw flames leaping out of the back of Jim King's Variety Store. She placed the call to the fire department and the volunteers arrived and were able to limit the damage to just the rear of the store.

Another memory of the fire department was that the siren was tested each Saturday at noon. Jean Bailey, town clerk for many years, remembered that her final duty on Saturday mornings was to set off the siren. For our younger readers who have never known a world without cell phones, computers, etc., using a siren to notify people of a fire and writing the location on a chalk board may seem like a strange mode of communication, but it worked!

Avondale had a volunteer fire department very similar to Goodyear's. For many years one of the volunteers was Willard Tolman, also the band teacher at Avondale School. Do you suppose that all those young musicians knew their teacher was also a fireman?



By Sally Kiko

Avondale Elementary School – A School for Pioneers

Did you know that Avondale Elementary School existed before Arizona was even a state? Avondale School, originally Coldwater School, was founded in 1894. At that time William Van Horn served as the Clerk of the School Board. Not the first public school in the Arizona Territory, Avondale trailed the Catholic School in Tucson founded in 1866. A school at the Mission San Xavier de Bac predates the Tucson School; both of these early schools were Church sponsored. Locally, Liberty Elementary district was founded in 1887, Buckeye in 1889, Littleton in 1912, Litchfield in 1915, and Tolleson in 1923. Avondale School was inactive from 1901 until it reopened in 1907.



The Basic Act of 1871, Arizona Territory, provided for a general tax for the support of schools and created a Territorial Board of Education. The tax rate was ten cents per \$100 property valuation. In addition, the County Board of Supervisors could levy a tax not to exceed fifty cents per \$100 of property valuation. In 1874, Maricopa County received \$108.38 for the education of its 94 children. Phoenix opened its first school in 1879, located on First Avenue south of Washington Street.

Avondale's first school was an adobe building on Western Avenue east of Central Avenue. Early School Board Members included Joseph Hill, 1911-1926, and John Portman, 1912-1916. Avondale passed its first school bond in 1924 for \$20,000 and built a building west of Central Avenue on Western Avenue consisting of three classrooms and an auditorium. At that time School Board Members included E.S. Bettler and Eugene C. Skelley. J.D. Cameron was the school principal. The teachers were Edith Hammond Skelley, a homesteader, and Pearl Reynolds. That early building currently houses the Board of Education.

By 1935, with a population of 100 and a school population increasing because the surrounding area was being included in the school district, more classrooms were needed for the growing population. Another bond was issued for \$20,000 to build four more classrooms. In 1936, Lattie F. Coor was hired as teacher and principal. The 1930's and 1940's were years of growth and challenges in public schools. Economic woes, the Dust Bowl, the Great Depression and then WWII contributed to change. Those fleeing the Dust Bowl and on their way to California often ran out of money or had car trouble and ended up camping along road ways and attending whatever school they were near. They often came to school with few clothes and no food. Lattie Coor and teacher Elma Ludlow worked tirelessly helping these students and their families.

From 1930 to 1946, the school enrollment tripled from 336 students to 1,386. In 1937, with a school bond issue of \$12,500 and \$77,315 in W.P.A. labor, Avondale School added more classrooms. In 1945, Avondale received \$49,000 in Federal Aid money and received \$42,000 in surplus buildings at 5% of their value to again increase school capacity. Avondale graduates will remember the many barracks style buildings that were converted to classrooms and used for many years. The estimated population of the school district in 1946 was 4,260 and included children from the communities of Avondale, Goodyear, and the surrounding area.

In 1957, a school bond issue of \$378,000 and an award of P.L. 815 Federal funds were used to construct Avondale Junior High School on North Central Avenue. The school was renamed Lattie Coor School in 2005. In 1958 Avondale Elementary School #2 opened. It was later known as Pioneer Elementary and then Eliseo C. Felix School. As the district has grown, changes have occurred to better serve the students. Additions were built as needed. In 2013, Lattie Coor became a K-4 school; grades 5-8 became Avondale Middle School

As the cities of Avondale and Goodyear continued to grow, more schools were required; Wildflower opened in 2000, Desert Star in 2002, Desert Thunder in 2004, Centerra Mirage in 2005, and Copper Trails in 2008.

Lattie F. Coor remained principal until 1955 when he was named the Superintendent of the school district. He continued to lead the school district until his retirement in 1972. When he started work at Avondale School in 1936, there were six teachers and about 200 students. When he retired in 1972 there were about 2200 students in the district. It was his firm belief that a good education was the key to a bright future. He passed that belief on to the children of our community.

I extend my thanks to Judy Jameson, Avondale Elementary School District, for providing historical information for this article.

Lady Banksia of Tombstone

There is a beautiful, elderly lady in Tombstone, Arizona. In the town considered “Too Tough to Die,” lives a lovely Scottish lass who came to Tombstone in 1885. In 1885, Mary Gee came from her home in Scotland to be with her American husband, a miner in Tombstone. She was quite homesick when she first arrived and asked her family to send her a few of her favorite things from Scotland. One of those items was a rooted shoot of a rosebush. Her landlady at the Cochise House allowed Mary to plant the shoot in the backyard of the boarding house. The rose she planted, much to everyone’s amazement, has lived 130 years.

The Lady Banks rose is named for British botanist, Sir Joseph Banks. It is believed that the species originated in China; specimens of the rose were brought to England in 1807. The shoot that Mary Gee planted has spread to cover 8,700 square feet and has a trunk that is twelve feet around. Like many of us that have aged, this huge rose requires support. A metal pipe trellis holds her up and provides dappled shade for the patio. Each April, it bursts into bloom as hundreds of thousands of small, white, fragrant blooms cover the bush. It is almost always in bloom for Easter.



The Cochise House, now the Rose Tree Museum, was the first adobe building in Tombstone. It has been owned and maintained by the Macia-Devere family for six generations. Burt and Dorothy Devere took it over in 1990. They have built a platform with steps to allow visitors to see the blanket of blooms from above. Beside the amazing rose, visitors will find displays that tell the history of Tombstone. If you visit Tombstone, in addition to the haunted Bird Cage Theater, Boot Hill, and the Gunfight reenactment, consider a visit to the World’s largest rose tree as confirmed by The Guinness Book of World Records each year.

Marty

Editor's note: Jonathon Abel provides a more personal glimpse into the early life of Marty Robbins.

"Now that's that nice young man that lives down on the corner of the place..." said my aging Grandma Moore as she smiled and nodded over at my Uncle Bill. He just gave me a wink and I realized Grandma thought I was young Marty Robbins.

Grandma and I had just completed a discussion of the immensity of what she had witnessed in her lifetime. She had come to Arizona at 16 with her new husband, a Texas cowboy, in a covered wagon...and together, we had just watched the news feed of a man driving a car on the moon!

And then, I realized I've been mistaken for Marty.

The Robinson's, you have heard, were dirt poor. Nope. Marty's dad worked for Mom's dad. Mom's dad was dirt poor! My father said that farmers during the Depression never actually saw a dollar bill.

My mom is Enid Abel, who married Karl Abel, her childhood friend from Glendale. She was the Moore daughter who befriended Marty. She was three years older, but they became fast friends when Mom defended Marty against bullies who made fun of him because he didn't have shoes. The kids on the surrounding farms would walk into Peoria with their roller skates, tighten them down to their shoes with a skate key, and tear up and down the only sidewalk for miles around. It ran east and west parallel the storefronts and west of the tracks at Grand Avenue. One of my family treasures is Mom's skate key.

Now, I believe Marty's environment played a big part in his writing his hit songs years later. When I was a kid, I would stay over at my grandparents' farm once in a while in the old, back bedroom, with the windows open to the orchard. I would listen to how incredibly quiet the cotton fields became after dark. A few times a night, a lonely train would rumble through Peoria. Oh, those mournful whistles on the country air...the stuff of which songs are made, eh?

Sometimes I would hear the Mexican Mariachis serenading lovers on that sidewalk in town. It was a long time, firm tradition among the Hispanic families to allow only a traditional, Mexican courtship. With Mama and a few Aunties walking along behind with a keen eye on the youngsters, who were not even allowed to hold hands. This also meant the fellow doing the courting needed to hire musicians or sing and play himself.

Marty heard that music all his young life and incorporated the chord progressions and strolling style into many of his best songs. Mom remembers seeing Marty on Saturday afternoons with his guitar slung over his back, barefoot, walking south on the

dirt farm-road into town. He was soon hired to stroll and play for the young Mexican lovers on their promenades. He then became a regular contributor at the square dances in Peoria. Marty was on his way...

Mom is 93 now, and remembers Marty Robbins for the hard-working, polite kid who was always animated and enthusiastic when getting to come along on something with her and the other kids. I think he decided during that time that he was going to change things in his life. Marty's first big hit was "The Ballad of Billy the Kid" and I believe I know what inspired his song-story I, also, had heard from my grandparents as a kid. I'm sure Marty heard it, too.

My grandparents came to Phoenix from a Texas cattle ranch across country and camped every night along the trail. One evening rather late, a rider hailed their camp and asked if he could come in to water his horse. Granddad Roland was a deadly shot with his big, Colt 45 drawn quick from the hip. Roland picked up an axe and kept it in his hand for the entire visit from a "talkative, well-dressed young fella in a stylish sombrero." They fed him, watered his overworked, lathered horse, and then he was off into the Lincoln County, New Mexico, night.

A few hours later, they got another shout from the desert night, and allowed another rider to come into camp for water; a lawman named Pat Garrett in pursuit of Billy. They had helped Billy the Kid make good his escape. But then, they had helped the lawman, too. In Marty's song, Billy had killed twenty-one men. It is more widely accepted that he had killed eight, his first was at age 17. Roland kept his 45 hanging handy on his sleeping porch coatrack. It was impressive to me as a kid, especially when he would bring it out and shoot holes in thrown silver dollars. You had to bring the dollar, but he'd pitch it in the air out in the front yard and draw from the hip. He never missed, but then it was hard to find those dollars with the hole in them! I have one. I think Granddad and that big, old pistol were the ingredients for Marty's song, "Big Iron".

In closing, I want to say that Marty never lost his humility. Mom and I were walking into Basha's in Glendale, when we heard some guy running towards us on the sidewalk shouting, "Enid, Enid...do you remember me?" Mom said, "Marty...of course I remember you! You are famous! I'm surprised you remember me!"

Yes, Marty was still a home-town farm boy, happy to see his childhood buddy. But by that time, he had topped the country western charts for forty years, with several hits crossing over into popular music. He had starred in TV shows and westerns, even becoming a top NASCAR driver!

Yes, Marty, we remember you...

THE FINAL INSPECTION

The Soldier stood and faced God,
Which must always come to pass.
He hoped his shoes were shining,
Just as brightly as his brass.

'Step forward now, Soldier,
How shall I deal with you?
Have you always turned the other cheek?
To My Church have you been true?'

The soldier squared his shoulders and said,
'no, Lord, I guess I ain't.
Because those of us who carry guns,
Can't always be a saint.

I've had to work most Sundays,
And at times my talk was tough.
And sometimes I've been violent,
Because the world is awfully rough.

But, I never took a penny,
That wasn't mine to keep.
Though I worked a lot of overtime,
When the bills just got too steep.

And I never passed a cry for help,
Though at times I shook with fear.
And sometimes, God, forgive me,
I've wept unmanly tears.

I know I don't deserve a place,
Among the people here.
They never wanted me around,
Except to calm their fears.

If you've a place for me here, Lord,
It needn't be so grand.
I never expected or had too much,
But if you don't, I'll understand.

There was a silence all around the throne,
Where the saints had often trod.
As the Soldier waited quietly,
For the judgment of his God.

'Step forward now, you Soldier,
You've borne your burdens well.
Walk peacefully on Heaven's streets,
You've done your time in Hell.'

~Author Unknown~

Annual Membership Reminder

Membership fees for 2015 are due. If you have not yet paid, please mail payment to P O Box 7251, Goodyear, AZ, 85338.

If you haven't officially joined, we would love to have you as members. Membership information is on the back page of this newsletter. Your memberships fees help pay the expenses of publishing this newsletter and other expenses of the organization. Thank you.

Letters to the Editor

We received some nice notes from our readers. Thank you!

I was so happy to have read about my "Nino" Arturo Martinez. He and Jenny, my "Nina", were my best man and matron of honor at my wedding. Prior to that, I also baby sat their 4 children.

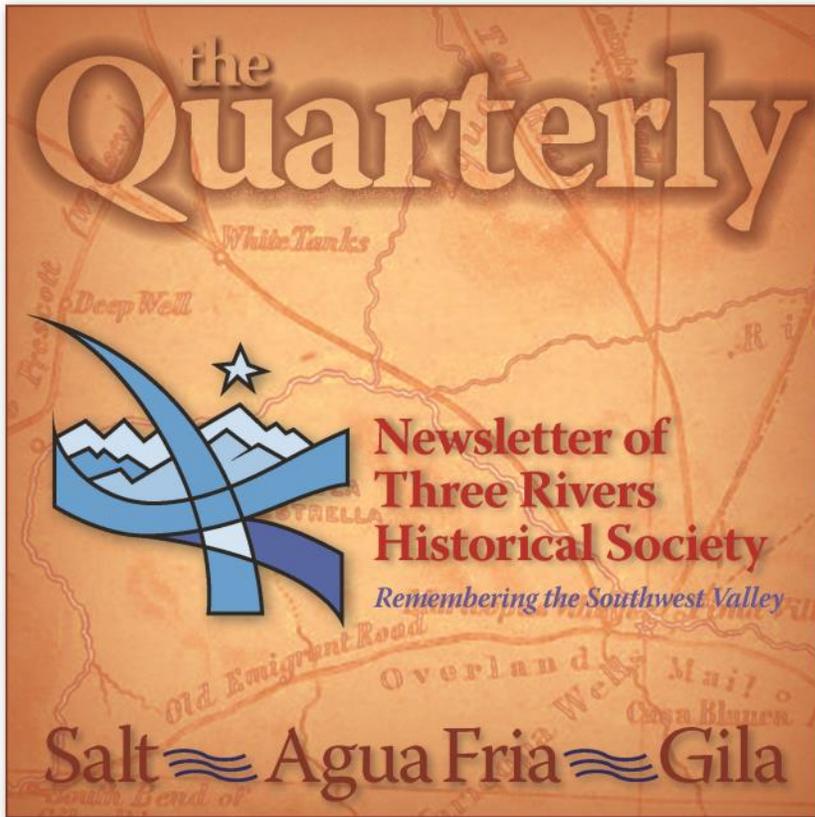
Another little piece of history, my maternal grandmother Chonita Sagasta, taught Catechism to Arturo and his 2 brothers, Manuel and (? forgot his name). They all lived in Camp #52.
Teresa A. Garcia

Great job. It demonstrates your dedication to our history. Thank you.
Sharolyn

Always good articles in your newsletters. Thanks for sending them to me. I wish my Mom were still alive to read them....
Sue D.

.....this is a very informative and interesting issue. I recognized many names. So glad to be a member of Three Rivers. I hope I am a current member. Always in Buckeye, Verlyne Meck





Yes, I want to join Three Rivers Historical Society!

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student \$5* | <input type="checkbox"/> Single \$15* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family \$25* | <input type="checkbox"/> Business/Professional \$45* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contributor \$100* | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor \$250* |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime \$500 | * <i>Yearly Fee</i> |

Join _____ Renew _____ Call me to volunteer _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ (Evening) _____

Cell _____ e-mail _____

Check enclosed in the amount of \$ _____
A receipt will be issued to you.

Make out your check and mail to:

Three Rivers Historical Society,
P.O. Box 7251, Goodyear, AZ 85338

Three Rivers Historical Society is a 501 (c) 3
non-profit organization



Three Rivers Historical Society

Remembering the Southwest Valley

P.O. Box 7251, Goodyear, AZ 85338

Mark Pelletier, President

Betty Lynch, 1st V.P.

Laura Kaino, 2nd V.P.

Sally Kiko, Secretary

David Meese, Treasurer

Bill Arnold, Past President

Joann Gongaware,

Diane Fekete, Wendy Neely,

Al Field

Board Members

The Quarterly

Editor:

Sally Kiko & Diane Fekete

3RHS Meetings

We meet on the third Tuesday of each month at 3pm, at Goodyear Library, 14455 W. Van Buren, Goodyear, Arizona. Notices of date, location and guest speaker are e-mailed. Be sure we have your correct address. E-mail Sally at kskiko@cox.net