

# An influential neighborhood

By BUCK DOPP

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**F**or Lyle Matzdorff, Lake Havasu City has been home for more than 53 years. In fact, he and his wife Stellene, and their 10-month-old son Lance came to the city on Dec. 18, 1963, before the first house was even built. The Matzdorffs shared the pioneering spirit of Robert P. McCulloch, Sr., the founder of Lake Havasu City, who in 1963 purchased a 26 square mile parcel of the desert with the idea of developing a city. At the time, it was the largest tract of land ever sold in Arizona. The cost per acre was less than \$75.

"McCulloch took a big financial risk," Lyle said. "Today, Havasu could never have happened. Think of it. No utilities, just desert. Lenders don't like lending money on desert land 60 miles away from utilities."

Lyle believed in McCulloch's vision for the city, buying five acres of land at Crystal Beach in 1963. He soon founded Continental Land and Investment Corporation, and in 1965 he built his real estate office on old London Bridge Road in the London Bridge Plaza. The building still stands and houses Sam's Café across from the Golden Corral.

According to Butch Wood, the first houses built in Havasu were the 10 models on Columbine Drive in the spring of 1964 — by contractor Alfred Anderson — followed by homes on Cliffrose, Sunflower, Saguaro and Smoketree. Wood should know. He worked for Anderson on his summer vacation from high school in Brea, California.

The Matzdorffs settled on Cliffrose Drive in 1964, which turned out to be an influential street. Fred Schumaker, the general manager for the McCulloch Properties, Inc., lived at the corner of Cliffrose and Smoketree. Robert P. McCulloch, Jr., son of the founder, lived on Cliffrose too, as well as business owners Edie and Jim McDougal, and Jim Dyerly, McCulloch's pilot.

McCulloch, Jr.'s chocolate brown bathroom contained a six-foot-tall king's throne with a wrought iron frame and a red velvet seat positioned over the toilet. Bob Childress, a local

sign painter, remembers building the chair out of 4 x 4's of sandblasted redwood. When McCulloch said he was going to "sit on the throne," he meant it.

Edie and Jim McDougal ran the first liquor store, doing business in Arnold Plaza on McCulloch Boulevard next to the Claypool Market—the first grocery store. Claypool's occupied the vacant building next to the Red Onion. Edie, a prominent business leader and community advocate, also sold insurance and real estate. Her standing hair appointment kept the upswept hairdo in place and the meticulous dresser had clothes delivered to her home because she didn't like trying them

on in a store.

Stellene called Edie "a great hostess whose parties brought people in the neighborhood together and made them feel at home." Edie loved the good life and would turn down the air conditioning so she could light the fireplace.

"I had three children and wanted to have an Easter egg hunt," Stellene said. "Site Six was chosen for the location because it was the only place with grass to hide eggs. It was a sod farm for the trees that would eventually be planted on McCulloch

Boulevard."

Stellene and nine of her Jaycee wives planned the Easter egg hunt, however, they discovered that Havasu didn't have enough fresh eggs to put it off. Schumaker asked the founder for help. McCulloch arranged for Dyerly to haul a load of eggs to Havasu on his twin-engine Beechcraft named, "Yellow Bird." Stellene and the other wives boiled and colored the eggs for the 300 children who enjoyed the fir



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**Stellene and Lyle Matzdorff, two of Lake Havasu City's original residents, pose for a photograph in their living room.**

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the eggs for the 300 children who enjoyed the first of many Lake Havasu Easter egg hunts.

"We made our own social life," Stellene said. "When we got cabin fever we would take a drive to Needles, California for a while. The restaurant there made really good pies."

Jim and Margy Sterling who lived on Saguaro Drive were also influential neighbors of the Matzdorffs. Jim, an electrician or McAfee-Guthrie, wired most of those early homes while living out of an 8-foot trailer. He took a long look, then leaped out of the trailer every morning to avoid the rattlesnakes. Jim also wired the London Bridge and pushed for the construction of the first traffic light on Mesquite and SR95 as a Mohave County Supervisor.

Jim, a good friend of C.V. Wood, the architect and designer of Disneyland and Lake Havasu, one day made a suggestion: "This place is going to get bigger, Woody. We need to get wider streets."

Wood replied, "But Jimmy, we need to sell a lot of land!"

Martha Gladwin believes she and her husband Roy met the Matzdorffs at a PTA meeting because "everyone went to the meetings and that's where you met people." Roy didn't like the cold weather of Connecticut, so when the Gladwins got a "blurb" in the mail in 1968 for a free Holly flight he was gung ho. Martha, not so much.

"I wasn't sold on Havasu. I had four kids and it was a big change. Roy heard there wasn't an office supply store, so he



Edie McDougal, left, ran the first liquor store with her husband, Jim, doing business in Arnold Plaza on McCulloch Blvd. next to the Claypool Market—the first grocery store.

wanted to open the first one. When we drove into town, I saw a sign for a stationery store and thought, 'Thank goodness. That takes care of that.'"

She poked her husband and said, "Look at that."

His face dropped and he sat there for a minute. Then he said, "I'm going to go in and talk to them." When he came

out to the car he announced to Martha he had bought it.

Roy moved to Havasu in May and the family followed in July. He kept telling them, "It's hot, it's hot, but you don't perspire." When Martha and the kids made the trip, their 10-year old daughter said, "Daddy said you don't perspire here. But something's running down my leg."

It all worked out. They ran that office supply for twenty years and put all four kids through college. Although Roy passed away in 1998, Martha continues to be active in the community and is a neighbor

of the Matzdorffs.

The Matzdorffs were also influential neighbors. In addition to founding Continental Land, they helped build and develop Mount Olive Lutheran Church—they have been members of the church longer than anyone. They launched the museum of history in 2000 and funded it out of their own pockets in the early years, even donating \$28,000 toward the solar panels in 2014. The Matzdorffs also sponsored one of the replica lighthouses.

"I loved what I was doing," Lyle said. "I'm extremely proud of Lake Havasu City and I kind of like sunsets."



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Courtesy photo

This photo from December 1964 shows a view of the first 10 McCulloch homes built by Alfred Anderson.