

PIONEER PROFILES

# Havasu’s first residents recall living the good life in another era

By SARAH DIXON  
SPECIAL TO TODAY'S NEWS HERALD

## Phillip Gerlach

In 1971 when Phillip Gerlach was just 15 years old, he moved to Lake Havasu City. Before there were stop lights and nearly half the streets were left unpaved, Gerlach ripped around the desert on motorcycles and in trucks. He recalls, “When I first moved here, there were no police after 10 p.m. We used to joke that they rolled up the streets at night. If anything happened, we’d have to call the sheriff in Kingman.”

No one would worry that there was no sheriff on duty because it was such a safe town back then. Gerlach remembers when everyone would leave their doors unlocked at night. “It’s not like the city is full of crime now but it was just different back then. It had a much smaller small-town feeling and everyone knew each other.”

Gerlach was part of the first group of hiking enthusiasts, the Leaping Lizard Tribe, to light Cupcake Mountain with flares and also helped establish trails at SARA Park. He is an avid outdoorsman and adrenaline junkie. When he’s not hiking, he’s riding his motorcycle; in fact, he’s part of the River Riders Motorcycle Club and participates in bike nights and other charitable events the club puts on. Gerlach’s advice to anyone looking to retire in Havasu is to relax and enjoy the quiet city. “I’ve lived in a couple different places but Havasu is the best. This is where I call home. I grew up here and I plan on dying here.”

## Dody Lee-Hietpas

Taking advantage of one of McCulloch’s free flights, Dody Lee-Hietpas came to Havasu in September 1972. She recalls, “When the plane hit the tarmac of the old airport, we could see the steam coming up off the ground. It was 110 degrees! We went to the Havasu Hotel which is now the police station and fell in love with the place because of the weather and the water.”

At the time, there were about 6,000 people — which Lee-Hietpas says sounds like a lot but even with that many people there were still only running mom and pop shops that didn’t carry a lot of items. Residents had to travel to Las Vegas or Kingman to find various things. “It was hard to find a job because it was hard enough for those mom and pop shops to pay their own bills, with nobody to pay for their products. There’s no way they could pay for employees. My husband was a milkman on the East Coast. When we came here, he went to Claypools to find a job, and they said that what he sold in a month, they might sell in a year.”

Lee-Hietpas took whatever jobs she could find, which covered multiple industries including manufacturing at the McCulloch factory, night manager at Burger King, and an educational assistant for special education. In addition to taking whatever job available, Lee-Hietpas and her husband took whatever living situation they could find. All of the hotels were booked with visitors on the McCulloch flights and the workers building the city, but luckily for the couple, they ran into someone they knew from their hometown who opened their home to them.

The friendly nature of Havasu’s early days as a small-town still resonates today. “Everyone here is super friendly. We all say hi to each other. Havasu is the best place! No matter where we travel, we always say, ‘this place is great but it’s not like home.’ I love Havasu. I am so glad we moved here and there’s nowhere else I’d rather be.”



Courtesy  
**The Lee girls ride on the merry-go-round during a 1973 carnival on McCulloch Boulevard, where Wells Fargo Bank is now located.**

## Toni Ade

As President of the Havasu Pioneers, Toni Ade was happy to share her recollection of Havasu in its early days. At the young age of 13, Ade, her parents, and six of her eleven siblings packed up and moved to the wonderful “small” world of Lake Havasu City. Ade recalls, “The population was so small and there were barely any stores. If you needed something the stores didn’t offer, you had to trek to Vegas. I actually bought my prom dress and wedding dress in Vegas.”

As the years went on and Havasu’s development progressed, Ade says, “It still has the small-town atmosphere. The people are extremely friendly and everyone says hello even if they don’t know you.”

One of the biggest changes Ade has seen in the city is how great of a job Parks and Recreation have done in beautifying the city. With all of the parks and nature walks, “They’ve created so many things for the children to do and a lot of beautiful areas to see.” With her love of Havasu’s outdoor beauty, it’s no surprise Ade’s favorite place to be is Rotary Park and underneath the bridge.

Although she doesn’t have one favorite place to eat, she does recommend Ed’s Deli, as do the other pioneers, because of its deep roots in Havasu’s history as the first sandwich shop in the city. As an entrepreneur herself, Ade is all about supporting small, local businesses, especially when they remind her of her childhood.

For people looking to retire in Havasu, Ade says, “Go to the lake and enjoy the scenery. Relax and have fun; you earned it!”



Courtesy  
**Toni Ade with her parents and siblings in 1972.**



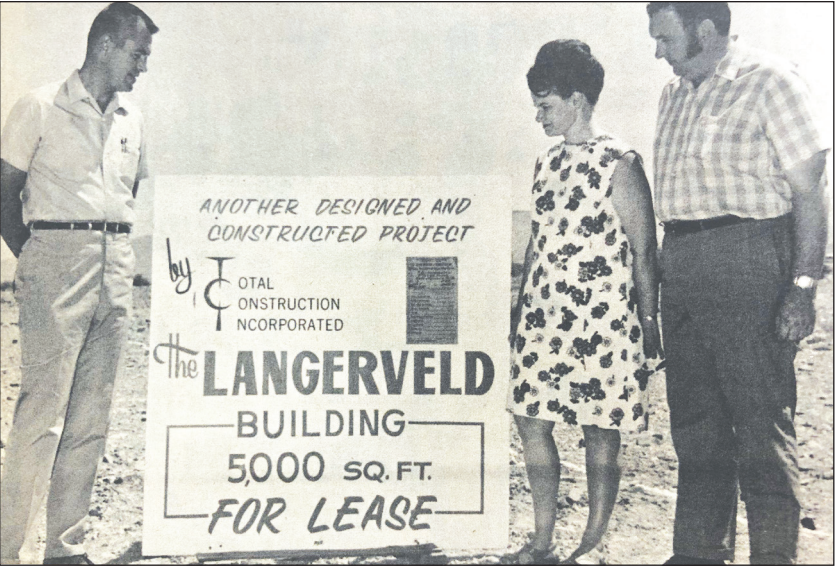
Buck Dopp/Special to Today's News-Herald  
**Janet and Chuck Langerveld at their home.**

# Langerveld: Business owner, builder, baseball team owner, Havasu mayor

By BUCK DOPP  
SPECIAL TO TODAY'S NEWS-HERALD

A conversation with former Mayor Chuck Langerveld is as energetic and varied as his resume. At the mention of any topic related to Lake Havasu City, he launches into a story until he gets to a person’s name — which he spells out — then keeps right on going.

Langerveld’s resume includes titles such as insurance agent, realtor, builder, businessman, baseball team owner, councilman and Havasu mayor.



Today's News-Herald archives  
**In this photo from a 1969 edition of the Lake Havaus City Herald, Russ Foster of Total Construction, Inc., visits the construction site of the Langerveld Building with Chuck and Janet Langerveld of Kalamazoo, Michigan. The 5,000-square-foot building, located next to Havasu Hardware on McCulloch Boulevard, is now called the Hodel Building.**

**“We wouldn’t have the parks and recreational facilities like we do now if it wasn’t for Chuck. He doesn’t get a lot of credit for that.”**  
HARVEY JACKSON  
Former Lake Havasu City mayor

Havasu.”

He bought a residential lot in 1968 and then a commercial property, eventually building what is now called the Hodel Building at 2079 McCulloch Blvd. Next, he created the first structure in the city with an elevator, the Gateway Building, which is at the corner of McCulloch and Smoketree.

He was there when the London Bridge was dedicated and saw something he’ll never forget. “The grass from the sod farm was brought in around the English Village to improve its appearance. The grass turned brown, so Charlie Burchett painted it green. McCulloch always wore either white bucks or saddle shoes. “That day he wore the white bucks, and they turned a glowing green.”

Chuck has a long history of engaging in community events and giving back to his country. Dressing up like a monk, Chuck won the costume contest at the first two London Bridge Days in 1972 and 1973. He is a member of the Lake Havasu City Rotary Club and was the first non-charter member of the London Bridge Rotary. He is an Army veteran who served in Korea.

Chuck and Janet ran Havasu Home Health Care from 1992-1996 and had 59 employees when he retired, although their favorite business was owning the Helena Gold Sox, a minor league baseball team. His accountant, Frank Masden, talked him into it, saying the other owners were “running out” of money.

“It was a terrible investment,” Chuck said. “But the best fun I ever had in my life. It wasn’t so bad spending four summers in Helena, Montana either.” He owned the team from 1984-1988 and said he could give away the tickets. “You make your money on the advertising and concessions. We sold a lot of beer!”

Dr. Don Nelson and his family moved to the city in 1970, about the same time that Chuck and Janet came with sons Craig and Chris. The two families became close and spent a lot of time traveling

together.

“Chuck is an extremely colorful guy and very outspoken,” Nelson said. “He speaks his mind, even if it’s to his own detriment as it often is. He’s a good Christian, and I always call upon him when a prayer is needed at a gathering.”

Nelson said when his friend was the mayor, Chuck got the idea to promote Havasu as a vacation destination by having a picture taken of him in a bathing suit sitting in the water at the Nautical Inn beach with several young ladies. The image of the old man sitting in water with scantily clad pretty girls ignited a firestorm. The picture landed on the front page of the LA Times and gave the impression that Havasu was a party place where anything goes.

“Man, did he take a lot of heat for that,” Nelson said with a laugh. “He took the posture, ‘I’m going to promote the city!’”

Janet said her husband has always been a good family man. “One day I was yelling at Chuck for something, and our five-year old said, ‘Leave him alone. He’s a good dad!’” She added that he is an entrepreneur and very intelligent. “If you are going to play Trivial Pursuit, make sure you’re on Chuck’s side.”

While he understands the reasons for the “Main Street” signs on McCulloch, Chuck hopes the street will keep its original name. “McCulloch could have put his name on many things in the city, yet he only named the boulevard after himself.”

He said the founder was shy, quiet and unassuming. “He was a genius. The man was good to us. If we needed land for a park or a road-way, he would give it to us. He was very generous.”

The 83-year old former mayor thinks Cal Sheehy is a great guy. “I hope he does well. When it comes to financial management, Mark Nexen was the best mayor we ever had.”

Chuck and another former mayor Harvey Jackson have had coffee together at local restaurants every morning since 1976. “We’re both political junkies,” Langerveld explained.

“We wouldn’t have the parks and recreational facilities like we do now if it wasn’t for Chuck,” Jackson said. “He doesn’t get a lot of credit for that.”

Chuck doesn’t sound like a man looking for any credit. Summarizing his feelings for the city, he said even if he went broke and had to borrow money to leave, “I will consider it a privilege to have lived here.”