

Lake Havasu High School saw busy start, even amid construction

By **BRANDON MESSICK**
TODAY'S NEWS-HERALD

Fifty years ago, Lake Havasu City was barely a speck against Arizona's desert landscape, bordered by jagged red cliffs and miles of sandy beaches.

But throughout the country, the town was gaining attention.

With the recent addition of the world-famous London Bridge, and a growing reputation as a resort community, flights were arriving in Havasu each week, ferrying prospective homebuyers throughout the country to see what the city had to offer.

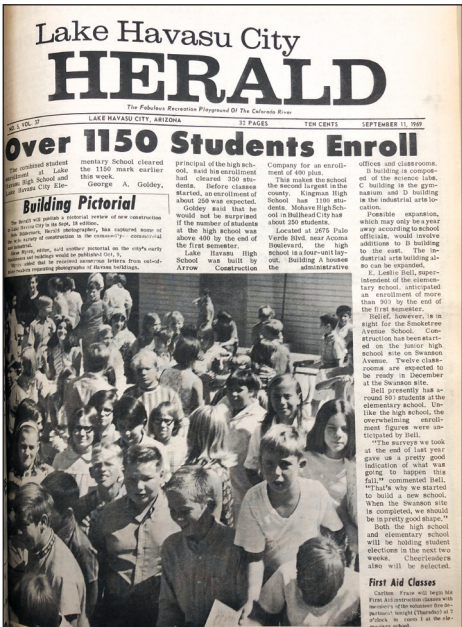
And although the city was host to only a few winding streets and a handful of businesses, more people were choosing Havasu as a place to live, play and work. And they were bringing their children with them.

Lake Havasu High School began construction in 1968, and was scheduled to open in September 1969. With only four buildings, the campus was built to accommodate about 400 students.

With 15 teachers on staff, administrators expected an initial class of about 250 — but they underestimated Havasu's growing popularity. By the time Lake Havasu High School opened, 340 students were registered.

"We knew this was a booming community," said George A. Goldey, Lake Havasu High School's first principal, in a 1969 interview. "We just didn't think it would be moving this fast, not even in our wildest expectations."

Before the high school's construction,



The front page of the Lake Havasu City Herald on Sept. 11, 1969, said there were 350 students at the high school when it opened, and enrollment was growing so quickly that the principal at the time said he wouldn't be surprised to have more than 400 students by the end of the first semester.

the only option for Havasu's high school students was to travel by bus to attend classes in Kingman, at what was then Mohave County Union High School.

According to statements from students to the Lake Havasu City Herald in 1969, a

number of parents and their families chose to move to Havasu that year specifically because the high school had been completed.

The campus was at the time home to nine classrooms, three business education rooms, a home-making lab, one chemistry and physics lab, a general science lab, a music room, gymnasium and a preparation room for the school's teachers.

At the time, tennis courts and a track field were still under construction, and high school football players practiced at a nearby sod farm for lack of a stadium.

Even as construction continued, however, Goldey expected only further growth for the school.

"The Havasu area has a tendency to explode population-wise, and it is extremely difficult to estimate the rate of growth," Goldey told Lake Havasu City Herald reporters in 1969. "I don't think it's unreasonable to expect Lake Havasu High School to be the biggest school in Mohave County by 1972, or maybe even 1971."

Since then, Lake Havasu High School has expanded to accommodate thousands of students and dozens of classrooms, with its own bookstore, career and technical education facilities, a full cafeteria and the school's new stadium, named for the Lake Havasu Knights' first football coach, Lee Barnes.

The school provides education for more students than any other municipality in Mohave County, with about 1,721 students enrolled as of this March.

Havasu's first coach

By **BUCK DOPP**
SPECIAL TO
TODAY'S NEWS-HERALD

Lee Barnes coached Lake Havasu High School's first varsity football team to a 7-0 record. This is remarkable considering that only one player, Greg Gibbs, had ever played high school football before, and the team played home games on a sod farm.

Coach Barnes instituted the Wing-T offense, which featured two running-backs with the quarterback in the backfield and a wing-back next to the tight end. "The simpler you make the offense, the more successful you will be. We ran straight at you. Our fullback, Greg Gibbs was our horse. I would say we gave him the ball on 60 percent of the plays."

"We had one play — give the ball to Gibbs," one player quipped. "Then clear the way, or he'll run over you."

"We made it happen," Gibbs said. "I did my part, and they did their part." He remembers a practice when the offense was playing against the defense, and he was carrying the ball, play after play. "All of a sudden, there were like 11 extra guys on the defense. I said, 'Coach, what are you trying to do to me?' He said, 'Make you a better runner.'"

Gibbs played for Kingman his sophomore and junior years since Havasu didn't have a high school before the 1969-1970 school year. The team's only senior lived with a family in Kingman during the week so he could go to football practice. Gibbs went on to play for Western Arizona College where he blocked for future NFL great Chuck Muncie.

The quarterback was Steve Kingsbury who Coach Barnes said had the playbook memorized the second day. Dean Nielsen was the first assistant coach, and Dave Bracamonte was the scout who was so good, the team was prepared ahead of time for every play that opponents would use against them.

The school didn't have a football field, so games were played on a sod farm in an area now referred to as Grand Island. Originally called Pittsburg Point, Site Six is located at the end of the island. Havasu Founder, Robert P. McCulloch tested his motors there. Later, he built the sod farm to grow grass, which could then be transplanted to lots in the neighborhoods to make them look more attractive to buyers.

According to Barnes, one side of the field was more sandy than solid, which slowed runners down. Knowing that, he called all running plays to the fast side. When asked if he notified visiting coaches he joked, "No. I didn't tell them which side would slow them down. Maybe that's why we went 7-0."

According to Barnes, McCulloch arranged for Frank Kush, the head coach at Arizona State University, to speak to the football players. McCulloch even



Buck Dopp/Special to Today's News-Herald
Millie and Lee Barnes are pictured in their home.



Left, Greg Gibbs shows Lee Barnes what opposing blockers could expect from him during a 1969 practice. Gibbs was the only varsity player with any football experience during the school's inaugural year.

In another coincidence, both graduated from Western New Mexico University, five years apart, and both were inducted into that school's athletic hall of fame — Lee for football and Millie for softball, volleyball and tennis.

Millie and her daughters Darla and Deanna, moved into a Highlands trailer park.

"The day we arrived in Havasu it was 128 degrees in the shade," she said. "And there was no shade! It was on a Friday, and we had no electricity until Monday."

Lee only earned \$300 a year to coach football, so he supplemented his coaching and teaching salaries by running a janitorial service. "I had all the McCulloch houses tied up," he said. Millie and her daughters worked for his company.

In May 1971, Lee and Millie got married. "He was paying me anyway, so he probably figured he might as well have me cook for him, too," she wisecracked.



Lake Havasu High school football players prepare for their opening game against Parker in this photo from the Sept. 4, 1969, edition of the Lake Havasu City Herald.

PIONEER PROFILES

By **SARAH DIXON**
SPECIAL TO TODAY'S NEWS-HERALD

Phyllis Wagner

Phyllis Wagner, her husband, and their three boys moved to Lake Havasu in April 1972. Although they arrived nearly a decade after Havasu was founded, the population was still much smaller than it is today. In fact, the amount of people living here has grown over seven times since Wagner's arrival. She doesn't mind Havasu's growth, mostly because the shopping has gotten better, but what she can live without is how crowded the beaches and lake get during peak season. She says, "When we first moved here, we had a cove on the lake that we liked to go to but now it's always busy."

One of Wagner's favorite things about moving from Iowa to Havasu is the weather. "I'm here all year round and love the sun every day!" When she isn't enjoying the sunshine outdoors, Wagner sews, knits, reads books, and volunteers at the Lake Havasu Museum of History. "If you like to volunteer for things, Havasu has so many organizations for that," Wagner says. "There are so many other things to do around here and it's easy to get to places with not much traffic."



Courtesy
The Kingsbury family

Rick Kingsbury

When Rick Kingsbury moved to Lake Havasu with his parents in 1965, there were 20 houses and around 600 people in the area. Kingsbury, author of *Living' At the End of Old 95*, came just one year after Havasu was founded and still in its developmental stages. "It was three months before we got running water. I think five months until we got electricity. And a year when we finally got a phone," he shares during an interview with C-Span.

There weren't any businesses in Havasu at that time, not even a grocery store. They had to travel 40 miles just to buy food and additional supplies. Kingsbury says, "It was very isolated. It was just the end of the road, literally a dead end. I thought it was kind of funny to decide to build a city at the end of a dead-end road so I thought I'll write a book about Havasu and call it 'Living' at the End..."

If anyone were to write a book about the early days of Havasu, it had to be Kingsbury. He saw the London Bridge get delivered piece by piece and even remembers its particular smell. He was also there on the opening day when Robert McCulloch and C.V. Wood planned an extravagant bird release to commemorate the day; however, it was too hot and several of them perished before their debut.

Kingsbury watched as housing developments quadrupled and Havasu changed from a wonderful small world into a big party town. "I think this is a great place to live. I know that it's different from when we were kids, but I couldn't have grown up in a better place."



KINGSBURY