

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

Harry Chaddick left rich development legacy

Tracy Conrad

Special to Palm Springs Desert Sun
USA TODAY NETWORK

In 1970, \$200 million was an astronomical amount of money. It was therefore utterly astounding that Harry Chaddick decided to invest on that scale to create Andreas Hills to the south of Palm Springs. Once the undiscovered domain of the Agua Caliente Indians, the idyllic spot prefaced the oasis of palm-filled canyons that stretched into the crevice between the great desert mountains.

Chaddick's investment would produce a 700-acre community that was advertised as "only five minutes from downtown Palm Springs ... nestled in the western slope of Palm Canyon ... Andreas Hills features cluster condominiums in one and two stories, as well as two-story townhouses with three bedrooms on the lower slopes of the hills."

Higher up, Chaddick planned half-acre estates offering panoramic views of the flat desert below. "Roads are being developed now to give access to some 400 home sites. Residents of the 300 condominium and custom homes will have access to all the recreational facilities of the development, including swimming pools, hot pools, tennis courts, shuffleboard, stables, riding rings and equestrian trails. California-Mediterranean architecture, with iron grill work, archways, tile roofs, masonry walls and floor-to-ceiling windows has been designed by architect Edward Walker to accent garden-oriented living."

Andreas Hills, dubbed "the Bel Air" of Palm Springs, was Chaddick's third major project in the desert, making him the biggest land developer in town. Purchase of a lot in Andreas Hills came with membership to the Tennis Club or the Whitewater Country Club, which was also owned by Chaddick.

His expansion and improvements plans at the Tennis Club, which he purchased in 1961, and Whitewater Country Club, previously called San Jacinto and purchased in 1969, were ambitious — perhaps even grandiose.

At the Tennis Club he planned to add a 150-room hotel and a preposterous lighted waterfall dropping 250 feet down the mountainside off Baristo Road that would end in a reflection pool "which



The tennis courts at Chaddick's Whitewater Country Club have since fallen into disrepair. NICKCARVERPHOTO.COM/SPECIAL TO THE DESERT SUN

will be bridged to a hotel mall." The expansion was designed by William Cody after an epic struggle with the city regarding its height. The resulting more modest two-story building sprawled north from the original club and was intended to blend into the mountainside skinned in a special sand-colored cement found in Nebraska.

The opening of the new addition in 1973 was attended by Robert Wagner and Natalie Wood, Candice Bergen, Ginger Rogers, Dinah Shore, Susan St. James, Suzanne Pleschette, Barbara Mark, Kirk and Anne Douglas and Steve McQueen and Ali Mc Graw. The newspaper reported that among the "notable bachelors" in attendance were Burt Reynolds, Rock Hudson, Ross Hunter, Peter Lawford, Frank Sinatra and Bill Holden.

At Whitewater Country Club, Chaddick spent \$100,000 in 1970 alone to rebuild the clubhouse in "Moorish style" and add 5,000 trees. He had plans for more than 200 condominiums around the championship course also designed by Cody. It comprised 175 acres described as a "self-contained recreational area with its own golf-tennis facilities, swimming pool, ping-pong tables, therapeutic pool and village lodge containing a cocktail lounge and dining room. It is located near a large riding stable and is only five minutes from the airport."

Chaddick touted the Whitewater Country Club as one of the few courses with year-round golf and greens maintenance, sporting four lakes, a putting green and driving range. (Without the

largess of a devoted owner, the club and course have since fallen into disrepair.)

Chaddick also purchased 500 acres 4,000 feet up the Santa Rosa mountains with the intent to develop lots after the completion of Dunn Road, which, if finished, would have given access to the imagined lots. (Dunn road was never completed, leading locals to call it "undunn road.")

The newspaper noted: "Although Chaddick admits he has yet to make a 10-cent profit on any of his Palm Springs enterprises, changes are that the picture is going to change, in light of his current plans."

It was more that in light of his Horatio Alger life story, it was reasonable to bet on his success. Chaddick was born into a family of nine children in Chicago's rough west side. He dropped out of school at 14 years old to work as a drug store errand boy to help feed his impoverished family. Later he operated two newsstands and studied business at night. In his 20s he bought a used truck and went into the motor freight business, eventually building one of the largest concerns in the country. Then he turned his attention to real estate. He became expert in zoning and planning. Among many projects, he re-developed a car factory into Ford City, the largest shopping center in the United States at the time, covering more than 640 acres of commercial and residential development. His many accomplishments included directing transportation in North Africa during World War II, which

brought him more accolades.

That fame also brought him some strange attention. In May 1979, Chaddick's 65-year-old wife, Elaine, was kidnapped at gunpoint from her Palm Springs house by a married couple. The kidnapers held her in a mine shaft near Twentynine Palms. The kidnapers demanded \$1 million ransom, which seemed a pittance in comparison to Chaddick's prodigious wealth. But in his unflinching businessman fashion, Chaddick negotiated them down to \$198,000 during his wife's three-day ordeal.

The money was dropped in a place marked with an X in the sand near where Mrs. Chaddick was being held captive. The male kidnapper, riding a motorcycle, tried to retrieve the ransom when an FBI airplane spotted him, alerting sheriff's helicopters, which gave airborne chase across the desert.

The kidnapper fell off his motorcycle and opened fire on the agents, who shot him. The female kidnapper fled in a camper truck which she later abandoned after a gunfight with pursuers. She was found and arrested by a team of Palm Springs police who tracked her 20 miles across the desert to a metal shack at a salt quarry. She was subsequently prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

The travail doubtless scared the Chaddicks and perhaps gave them pause. By 1981 after a lifetime of work, Chaddick sold the Tennis Club. At a party there, Rabbi Joe Hurwitz teased that Chaddick had "unloaded this white elephant" and teased that he'd heard the new owners "just sold off all the tennis courts." Chaddick was quick with a retort in good fun, "Some people asked me why did I sell them out, how could I do this to them? And these are the very people who complained about my rotten place, my lousy food, my awful service."

Throughout the 1980s he concentrated on giving away his money rather than making more. The traumatic events of the kidnapping were made into the book "Night of the Full Moon" by Herb Clough, the FBI agent who'd overseen the case. The feature film "Do It or Die" inspired by that book premiered at the Palm Springs International Film Festival in 2017.

Tracy Conrad is president of the Palm Springs Historical Society. The Thanks for the Memories column appears Sundays in *The Desert Sun*.