

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES



Aerial view of construction of Sunrise Park with Pavilion Building in Palm Springs. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# Prop R provided ‘gobs of money’ to fund recreation opportunities

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As good manners and governance required, the Palm Springs City Council in 1972 “could not take a directly active part in trying to persuade local residents to troop to the polls and ‘X’ their approval of borrowing (through bonds) and pending that rather astronomical amount of money “just for fun.”

The proposal was instead advocated by a group of local citizens who worried that the city’s international reputation for fine recreation should also extend to services and facilities for its full-time residents. The result was Proposition R, named for Recreation, and The Desert Sun reported “when civic and local governmental leaders decided the city would need great gobs of money if it wanted to achieve an enviable reputation in the field of public playground.”

The initiative was put to the voters in November 1972 and \$5 million in general obligation bonds were approved. It was a daring proposal for a city whose population was only 20,000 people and was equal to about one half of the total yearly expenditures for all other services. Palm Springs would invest in becoming the “public playground capital, if not of the world, at least the leader of all communities in the Great American Desert.”

Proposition R built a “whole new recreational-educational complex on the site of the old Polo Grounds. This will include a new main library, a new Pavilion, a community center, leisure services offices – and the desert resort’s first public swimming pool.”

DeMuth Park was expanded to include 52 acres including four lighted Little League diamonds, two lighted softball diamonds, a large picnic area and a soccer field. The paper made sure to point out the park’s design would be programmed for “50 percent use by school-age young people, 30 percent by adults and 20 percent by senior citizens.”

Proposition R funded the “Desert Highland Park community building, for use by neighborhood children and families, a ‘drop in’ center providing many northside minority youths a place to play pool, ping pong, basketball or other games.” It started a system of bicycle trails the first of which was on Sunrise Way.

Upon approval by the voters, the city immediately advertised for bids. City National Bank offered the bonds with an interest rate of 6.00 percent. The bonds sold quickly and the city had the money to let contracts.

Working under established general design control guidelines, architect William Cody and a group of local architects began preparing construction documents. “Before actual construction be-



Aerial view of polo grounds, fire station, Pavilion, baseball field and Little League fields c. 1960 at the intersection of Sunrise Way and Ramon Road on the north and Baristo on the south in Palm Springs. COURTESY OF THE PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

gan on the many projects, inflated building costs started to plague the city. But adjustments were made in design to keep costs somewhere near the original target.”

The total final cost was \$6 million. The newspaper dutifully reported how the monies were spent.

Desert Highland Park was designed by architect Michael Black and landscape architect David Hamilton and built by landscape contractor Ray Barnett and building contractor Baldi Brothers at costs of \$189,865 for the park and \$91,888 for the building.

Richard Harrison designed the DeMuth Park restrooms and shelters which were built by Howard Pelham at a cost of \$36,200. Landscaping for the 52 acres was designed by Hamilton and built by Barnett at an eye-popping cost of \$453,451.

Frances Stevens School was converted into “a commodious center for older citizens” and was one of the first projects completed. Designed by Harrison it was built by Walter Colglazier at the

cost of \$104,600 and the surrounding desert was transformed into a park designed by Hamilton again and built by contractor Little Grass Shack at a cost of \$96,700.

A new main library, the largest expenditure of all the projects, was designed by William F. Cody & Associates and built by Peter Kiewit & Son at a cost of \$1,260,000.

Donald Wexler designed a sleek new Pavilion and Leisure Center which would become the center of city-offered recreational activities. Built by Donald, McKee & Hart at a cost of \$1,200,700. Hugh Kaptur and Howard Lapham designed the adjacent swim complex featuring a huge new pool built by Nadar, Inc at a cost of only \$185,000, with Dumphy & Dumphy building the bathhouse and related site work for \$204,900. The landscaping surrounding the Pavilion, Swim Center, Library and Leisure centers was designed by Michael Buccino and cost \$600,000 to plant.

The newspaper noted that, “these cost figures were supplied by city hall.

They were described as final costs, not including the fees of the architects and demolition charges for razing the old Pavilion building, Polo Ground stables and Girl Scout office.”

In 1975 the city created a five-year capital improvements plan as the Proposition R funds began to run out, in order to continue the progress made in just three years of construction following the approval of the bond issue.

For nearly 50 years since its passage the residents of Palm Springs have enjoyed the results of Proposition R. The bond measure had a profound effect on quality of life in Palm Springs.

In 2011, Palm Springs voters approved a 1% sales tax increase for 25 years for revitalizing the moribund downtown. Many millions of dollars have since been raised and spent.

The city council recently floated the idea of making the sales tax increase, dubbed Measure J, permanent. Slated to “sunset,” the “gobs of money” it provides the city will disappear by design in 2035.