

Green Valley and Its History

From www.discoversouthernaz.com and GVnews.com "Green Valley Through the Decades"

Green Valley is an unincorporated community located 2,980 feet above sea level in Arizona's Santa Cruz Valley in Pima County. The Santa Rita Mountains soar to the east; the Sierritas loom west. It's 20 miles south of Tucson and 43 miles north of Nogales, Arizona/Mexico. Green Valley, as it is today, was founded in 1964 and occupies part of the vast (46,697) acres of the San Ignacio de las Canoas Land Grant which was given to New Spain by the Spanish Crown in the 16th century. It is now a vibrant retirement community and gateway to historic southern Arizona located south of Tucson on Interstate 19.

Redefining How to Retire

Those who enjoy friendly neighbors and a small-town ambiance — combined with such amenities as shops, restaurants, hotels, and cultural and recreation activities — will feel right at home in Green Valley.

Add to all of that a scenic setting at the foot of the towering Santa Rita Mountains and it's no wonder residents and visitors are drawn to this nationally praised retirement community, 59 years young as of 2023. And if you prefer, bustling city life is only about 20 miles north in Tucson.

The Green Valley Sahuarita Chamber of Commerce has a membership roster of more than 400 businesses and is also an officially designated Tourism Information Center for the Arizona Office of Tourism. When you're in the area, stop by the chamber at 275 W. Continental Road, Suite 123. You'll find plenty of information about places to go and things to see and do in Green Valley, Sahuarita and the surrounding area.

Travelers will find excellent accommodations, with several hotels and inns within Green Valley and resorts, guest ranches, lodges and bed-and-breakfasts in the surrounding area.

Green Valley is home to plentiful retail options, including Green Valley Village and the Continental Shopping Plaza. Just up the road in Sahuarita is a mix of shopping centers, including Madera Marketplace, Sahuarita Plaza, Valley Verde Center, Rancho Sahuarita Marketplace, as well as The Crossing at Sahuarita on Abrego Drive and Nogales Highway and The Corner at Rancho Sahuarita.

Green Valley, at an elevation of 2,900 feet, is often described as a golfer's paradise. Both amateur and intermediate

golfers will find a great selection of courses in the area with opportunities to play year-round.

Many residents are members of Green Valley Recreation Inc., a non-profit services corporation that operates 14 recreation centers. Included are pickleball, tennis, swimming, bocce, racquetball and state-of-the-art fitness centers. It also offers a mix of various social clubs, leisure classes, concerts, movies and other entertainment, as well as facilities for lapidary, ceramics, pottery, woodworking, photography, billiards, computer instruction and more. Several times a year, the public is invited to craft shows at the West Center, and art exhibits can be viewed in the lobbies of several of the recreation centers. GVR, which has about 24,000 members, is frequently cited as the reason new retirees choose Green Valley.

Local attractions also include the beautiful, 4,800-acre Historic Canoa Ranch — formally Pima County's Raul M. Grijalva Canoa Ranch Conservation Park — with guided walking tours for the public that highlight the area's multicultural history, cattle ranching heydays, and the ranch homes, buildings and corral. Birders and picnickers flock to the popular Canoa Lake and nearby cienega and pollinator garden. Seasonal special events include an outdoor concert, Christmas lights, celestial viewing at A Night Under the Stars, plus Anza Day in the fall, celebrating Col. Juan Bautista de Anza and the Spanish colonial settlers who in 1775 visited Canoa Ranch on their 1,200-mile journey from Sonora, New Spain, to colonize the port of San Francisco. Visit: 5375 S. I-19 Frontage Road, south of the hospital.

At Green Valley's popular Community Performance & Art Center, a year-round variety of live concerts, art exhibits and theater productions entertain local residents and visitors



A Brief History of Green Valley and Its Beginning



In 1961 Chicago investors Don and Norman Maxon came to the area they later named Green Valley, looked around, and decided it was a good place for a retirement center. They studied the colonial architecture of Alamos, 250 miles south in Sonora, and purchased 2,900 acres of grazing land in the Canoa Land

Grant from Farmers Investment Company (FICO). They were lured by the promising elderly retirement and an amendment of the Fair Housing Act that allowed for government support of construction. The University of Arizona Foundation acted as a sponsor for the retirement community with a \$12.5 million federal loan.

Don Maxon described how Green Valley was named: “In July of 1961, one of our vice presidents, Charlie French and his wife Jeanette, together with my wife Mary, and myself were driving to Phoenix. On the way, we discussed the selection of a suitable name. Charlie described the beautiful site and in so doing mentioned that it was a beautiful green valley. On the way back to Tucson, Mary said, ‘Why not call it Tucson Green Valley?’ So, before we arrived back in Tucson, a new town, to become one of the most beautiful suburbs in America, had been named. Later the prefix ‘Tucson’ was dropped.”



The first concrete was poured in August 1963, and in the first year, about 1,150 apartments (now known as the East and West Villas) were constructed, along with a recreation center (today’s GVR East Center). The community officially unveiled in 1964, but the housing market slumped and development did not pan out as expected. Federal Housing

Authority took it over. At that point, the community amounted to 371-acres, which included a golf course, the beginnings of a shopping center and medical center. The remaining land was development into homes by the reorganized investors group, Green Valley Development. The population of Green Valley was 500 in 1964.

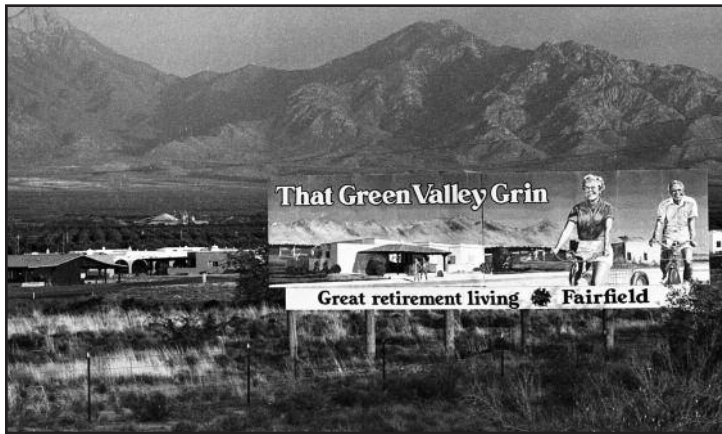


In 1972, Fairfield Green Valley Inc, a subsidiary of the developer of retirement communities in Arkansas, bought out Green Valley Development.

Today, Green Valley boasts a population of more than 23,000, a 70% growth since 2010, covering an area about 20 square miles. The median age is 72.5. With the sun shining over 300 days per year, Green Valley is part of the region dubbed the “Astronomy Capital of the World.” With its clear skies and minimal light pollution, Green Valley boasts star-studded skies most nights of the year. There is an average rainfall of 11 inches, mostly falling in the summer monsoon months. Up in the Santa Rita Mountains, snow lingers on the peaks for days at a time during winter. Summer temperatures average 101 degrees and dip below freezing before sunrise in winter.

The recorded early history of Green Valley, located in Arizona’s Santa Cruz Valley, began in 1 A.D. The Hohokam, Pima and Tohono O’odham Indian tribes were the first to call this area home. The flags of Mexico, Spain, the Confederacy, the State of Arizona & the United State of America have all flown here. Spanish warriors, ranchers, missionaries, desperados & prospectors also lived here in earlier times. After the first white settlers moved in, the Hohokam Indians vanished. Many years passed & a new kind of settler, a “snowbird” arrived. They may have come to visit a friend, a tourist attraction or a real estate office & were drawn to the area and often became a resident.

The more modern Green Valley history began in 1953 when a highway sign appeared in Interstate 19 that read “Live Now – Not Sometime – in an Established Community”. In 1964 a Chicago developer, Donald Maxon, and his brother/architect/construction manager, Norman, purchased 2,900 acres near Canoa Ranch for a residential development. Their vision soon became a reality and the Maxon brothers studied and photographed the late 18th century Spanish Colonial styles. They liked the arched colonnades, wrought iron screens and red roofs, features that are still found in many of the homes and buildings being constructed today. A “town that is too good to die...populated by people who have learned to live,” Green Valley has been a retirement community since its inception in the 1960s.



Green Valley's First Recreation Center

The sun rises in the East, so it is only fitting that the first ray of sunshine in Green Valley was the East Social Center! This gracious 50-year-old facility has served as a landmark for the Green Valley community, and as a focal point for numerous groups, organizations, clubs, classes and more who have called East Social Center their home!



The original developer, Maxon Construction Company, built the recreation center and swimming pool in 1964, but three years later, went bankrupt. The Federal Housing Authority (FHA), that had guaranteed the mortgage, took over the Maxon holdings including the East Center.

That very same year, 1967, the Community Recreation Association of Green Valley (CRAGV) was created to preserve the existing recreation facilities in Green Valley and to provide for additional facilities when needed.

In 1973, FHA sold several parcels in Green Valley to Haven Management Company, who became the new owners of the Haven Villas, the Haven Mall, the Haven Golf Course, and the East Social Center. At that time, CRAGV tried to either purchase or rent East Center from Haven, but the company turned it into a private club until 1975 when CRAGV was given a 20-year lease for East Center for \$1 per year from 1975 through 1995.

CRAGV (and its successor GVR) agreed to pay all expenses related to operating the facility, and also to pay real estate taxes on the center and its adjacent parking lot on the south end of the buildings. In January of 1997, the GVR Board approved the purchase of the East Center from Haven Equities Corporation for \$500 thousand dollars plus an additional amount for the parking lot. “It solidifies our service to every area of Green Valley for years and years into the future,” said David Sirota, at the time Board Director and chairman of the task force negotiating the purchase.

Sirota was right! Over the years, literally thousands of people have visited and enjoyed activities at the East Center! Some even have mistaken the East Social Center for a city government complex because of its distinguished architecture and central location.



Although it now is predominantly used by GVR groups, public use of East Center has been prevalent over the years. Friends in Deed (FID) erected and occupied a 1500 square foot space on the south end of the facility where they remained until they outgrew it in 1992. Shortly thereafter, Catholic Social Services utilized the FID facility for a senior lunch program (Meals on Wheels) that also was supported by the Pima Council on Aging (PCOA.). They called it the “Green Valley Senior Center” which was de-



signed to supply nutritious lunches, and to give seniors an opportunity to meet, converse, and enjoy bingo, arts and crafts and other activities. Hot lunches were prepared in Tucson and brought to Green Valley each day.

For a short period in the early 1980's, the Green Valley Fire District and Green Valley Assistance Services occupied office space at the East Center, and

numerous community services organizations have used East Center including the Kiwanis and the American Legion. The Lions Club has long hosted bingo games at the East Center, and the AARP tax program works out of there, too.

Many a prayer has been uttered at the East Center, as several local religious groups held their first services there. The Cornerstone Baptist Church and Sunday School, for example, and the Jewish Fellowship League were long standing tenants of the East Center. It also has been a favorite place for members to hold memorial services and "celebrations of life" for their loved ones.

One of the most obvious examples community spirit in Green Valley is the Rose Garden at East Center thanks to the devotion of the Green Valley Rose Society. In March of 1990, 124 rose bushes were planted in a garden covering approximately 7,000 square feet on either side of the main entrance. All of the roses, donated by Greenbelt Nursery, were planted and continue to this day to be maintained by the Rose Society.

East Center has many amenities that truly have enhanced the lives of GVR members. The swimming pool – home to the longest running GVR club, the "Aquabelles," also has been a meeting place for water aerobics for over thirty years! The water temperature at this pool is slightly higher than at other pools for those who prefer warmer water.



Not everyone realizes it, but the East Center fitness center has attendance among the highest at GVR, where members can exercise on their own, attend fitness center orientations for free, and work with certified personal trainers on a fee basis. There also was once a sauna at East Center!

Multi-purpose rooms including the auditorium, kitchen, game room, art room, sewing room, and lounge have been the meeting places for literally thousands of GVR members attending classes, clubs, and other activities, with set-ups accommodating bridge, bingo, chess, cribbage, canasta, Mah Jong, lectures, dinners, dances and many other activities! You name it, and it probably has been offered at the East Center some time in its history. Let us not forget computer club, camera club, billiards, lapidary, shuffleboard, basketball, tennis, and volleyball – all provided at the East Center during its 50 year run - and last but not least – pickleball. It seems fitting that the fastest growing sport in the world today made its GVR debut at the East Social Center. It continues to remain relevant as a leader, a landmark and a centerpiece for all of us who live and enjoy life in the community of Green Valley.



Before the Continental Shopping Plaza was built in 1979, and Safeway moved in, the local supermarket was Lucky's

