

RECOM

Retired Employees City of Mesa

Volume 4 Issue 5
May, 2010

RECOMAZ.org

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RECOM Executive Board

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

A "DRIVING" OBSESSION (By John S. Gendron)

To paraphrase Vince Lombardi, "Driving isn't everything, it's the only thing". My obsession with the concept of driving a motor vehicle and the more specific goal of obtaining a driver's license began around the time I picked up a ragged copy of *Motor Trend Magazine*.

It was like yesterday. I was sitting in Ted's Barbershop waiting my turn to have my "flat top" renewed. The headline on the cover read, "Hold On To Your Hats --- We Test The All New '57's!

As I perused the shiny new models, I eventually worked my way to the tri-page foldout where I caught my first glimpse of the most beautiful thing I had ever cast my eyes upon. I turned the magazine ninety degrees and pulled the pages taught to totally reveal the voluptuous lines of the brand new Chrysler Saratoga. "Oh my god," I exclaimed silently to myself. What would I need to do to own such a magnificent automobile?

Suddenly, my Catholic upbringing kicked in and my mind quickly reviewed just how many and what kinds of sins I must surely be committing.

My nine year old logic then told me that any potential sins could be confessed to Father Belanger later that day, but for now my full attention could be focused on that be-finned beauty.

It was the summer of 1963 and life was good. My freshman year was going well, I had my first "date" with Janie Jasminsky, and finally, my very own subscription to *Motor Trend*. Until now, my automotive experiences were confined to the vicarious thrills from reading the magazine road tests, and the intricacies of assembling scale models. The latter activity was surely enhanced by the inhalation of fumes from plastic glue, a hallucinatory substance not yet banned for sale to minors.

My very best car memories of that time, however, came from the annual fall pilgrimage to the new car unveiling. My dad and I would hop in our old '52 Chrysler Newport, two door hardtop and head to the big city of Marinette (pop. 12,000) to visit the local Ford, Chevy, and Dodge dealers.

I was in automotive nirvana. Balloons and streamers festooned the showrooms. I gorged myself on free doughnuts and Nehi Orange soda. But the best part was getting to sit in the drivers seats of the finest automobiles that Detroit could produce!

My dad would talk with the salesman, pretending to be on the verge of buying. But even at the tender age of thirteen, I was vaguely aware of our family's financial situation, so I knew we'd be driving home in the rusty old Chrysler.

One evening after leaving the last dealership, the final jelly doughnut devoured, my dad and I were approaching our car. Instead of heading for the driver's side, he mysteriously went over to the passenger side, turned to me and said, "Wanna drive home"? Totally caught off guard by this serendipitous inquiry, I yammered out a feeble "Yeah, okay, swell", as he tossed over the keys.

My fumbling fingers finally found the door key and I gently glided into the driver's seat. The huge pearl steering wheel loomed before me as I stared directly into the gold Chrysler emblem in the center of the wheel. My dad, sensing me challenged vertically, discretely slipped me a pillow from the back seat.

A depression of the clutch, followed by a twist of the key and the "Spitfire" straight six settled into a mellow idle. Even on this cool October evening, sweat poured from my brow as I purposely slid the "Fluid Drive" selector lever into "Dr", and gradually released the "safety clutch". No power steering meant a heavy tug on the wheel as I gingerly crept out of the parking lot into the traffic lane.



(Author's note): At this point in the story it would be tempting to invoke "artistic license" and embellish a bit about my driving prowess on the way home, or prevaricate about some manufactured happenstance. But alas, the ride home was truly uneventful.

Uneventful, perhaps, only in the sense that no accidents occurred, no traffic tickets were issued, and my dad didn't sprain his ankle while stomping on the imaginary passenger brake

pedal. What was monumentally "eventful" to me, however, was my first experience at piloting an automobile, and those appurtenant feelings of accomplishment, immense joy, and personal freedom that came with it.

The experience created an addiction for me that could only be satiated by the act of driving. I've been doing that now for almost fifty years, and I have owned several cars, driven numerous roads, and had many remarkable driving experiences. While my cars have changed, my life has changed, and I have changed, I'll never forget the feelings and emotions I had on that seminal moment in the fall of 1963.

Speaker

Janie Parks and two other Desert Botanical Gardens volunteers (Peggy and Diane) talked to a full house of RECOM members about the Gardens.



Together the three of them have over 23 years of volunteer service there. Their enthusiasm about Desert Botanical Gardens was contagious and the information they provided was interesting, educational, and filled with fun stories.

Here's a little test to see what you know about deserts:

1. Do you know what a desert is?
2. Which of the four major deserts of North America is in Arizona?
3. What is the signature plant of the Sonoran Desert?
4. What is a characteristic of the Sonoran Desert?

Answers:

1. A desert has three parts: less than 10" annual rainfall, extreme temperature changes, and a high rate of evaporation.
2. The Sonoran Desert – in Arizona, California and northwest Mexico.
3. Saguaro Cactus
4. A high diversity in plants and animals because we have two rainy seasons (*gentle winter rains , and the summer torrential monsoons*) and a varied topography (*mountains, basins, washes, and buttes*).

Well, how'd you do? Did you get them all right?

Well, enough about deserts, now onto the Desert Botanical Gardens which was opened in Papago Park in 1939 as a result of efforts by Gertrude Webster and Swedish botanist Gustaf Starck.

Remember Mission Statements? Well, the Gardens has one too. *To advance excellence in education, research, exhibition, and conservation of desert plants of the world with emphasis on the Southwestern United States.*

Education: Janie talked about many of the learning opportunities provided by the Gardens for children and adults which sound really fun.



Each of the trails in the Gardens - **Desert Discovery Trail, Plants & People of the Sonoran Desert Trail, Harriet K. Maxwell Desert Wildflower Trail, and Sonoran Desert Nature Trail** - provide information on desert plants.

There are self-guided audio tours of the Gardens or docent led tours if you prefer.

In the summer you can take an evening flashlight tour on Thursdays and Saturdays to avoid the daytime heat.

The workshops on photography, tai chi, cooking, gardening, composting, landscape design, geology, and wildflowers to name a few, really piqued this writer's curiosity.

Research: The collections are documented and cataloged and the Gardens share this information to researchers from all over the world. In addition to a botanical garden it's also classified as a museum.

Exhibition: There are the Cactus & Succulent Galleries, the Herb Garden, and the butterfly pavilion (the monarchs arrive in November).

Through May 30th, there is an exhibition of renowned Native American artist Allan Houser's sculptures in bronze.



Last year you may have heard the Gardens held an exhibition of Chihuly glass.



You can still see some pieces on display which the Gardens are trying to purchase.

Or you can go to the Gardens just to see 'Patches', a tortoise named for the life-saving repairs done to his shell. There's something for everyone.

There are way too many areas of interest to mention here however the Desert Botanical Gardens website (www.dbg.org) covers it all. In their Digital Resource Area, you can view/print their trail guides, calendar of events, jazz music schedule, wildflower guide and others.

There are sections on the 20+ volunteer programs they offer, the gardening help they provide (yes they answer your questions), and facilities available for rent in the Gardens.



The volunteers brought some great handouts for attendees. RECOM provided door prizes themed to the topic of the presentation. As numbers were drawn, seven winners claimed their cactus and one received discount tickets to the Gardens, and thanks to Lin Adams, another won tickets to a performance of Shakespeare at the Mesa Arts Center.



The display set up by the volunteers contained photos and other items of interest from the Gardens.

Election of Board Members:

Peggy Haney, chair of the Nominations Committee, conducted the election of the 2010-11 Board. Their terms begin July 1, 2010. The results of the election are:

President – Kathy Barrett
Vice President – John Gendron
Secretary – Lin Adams
Treasurer – Don Miller
Director (2-year term) – Jo Ferguson
Director (1 year term) – Jane Albin

Reports

Membership:

Lin announced the Annual Membership Drive will begin in late May. Dues are due July 1. Members are encouraged to renew on-line. Members with e-mail addresses will receive their reminder notices by e-mail to keep mailing costs down.

Deferred Compensation:

The next Deferred Comp meeting is scheduled for May 10th, so there will be more news later.

Benefits Task Force:

Well, as you may have already heard the news is not good. There has been a decision made to increase premiums and most likely make other changes to the plan.

The goal is to get approval of the new premium structure approved by no later than mid September.

There is more money going out to pay the claims than there is money coming in and if changes are not made soon, it is estimated the Benefit Trust Fund would be in the red by 2012. Something needs to be done to reduce the gap between the income and the expenditures.

The City Council is planning to increase its contribution by \$4,000,000, but this doesn't include the additional money needed to balance the Trust Fund.

The Trust Fund takes a much harder financial hit when out of network providers are used, so it would be best to use an in network provider when possible.

Insofar as the new Healthcare bill is concerned, there are many questions and no answers yet. The city has hired a consultant to review the law.

The next Employee Benefit Task Force meeting is scheduled for May 19th. We'll keep you informed as we hear anything more.

Issues:

No impact on retirees. However for individuals whose membership with ASRS starts July 1, 2011 or later: 85 points will be required for full retirement eligibility and the retirement benefit calculation changes to the average of the highest 60 months in the last 120 months.

Meetings

May 19 – Speaker: Rosie and Romey from Rosie on the House Radio and TV Shows.

SPECIAL TIME - 4:00 – 6:00 PM

**AND LOCATION – 200 S. Center Street
Building #3**

Refreshments will be provided along with door prizes consistent with the theme of the presentation.

Meetings, except for the May 19th meeting, are held on the third Wednesday of the month at 9:00AM in the community room of the fire station at Mesa Dr. and 1st Street.

June 16 – Speaker to be announced.

July 21 – Speaker to be announced.

August 18 - Speaker to be announced.

January, 2011 – University of Utah Summer Citizens Program – More on this later