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 Jr., Bishop Henry Hearn, Daria
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 Geraldine Robinson, and Saren Scott
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Left to Right:

The Sun Village Women's Club at
 the Jackie Robinson County Park
 Groundbreaking November 29, 1965.
 Courtesy the Jackie Robinson Park
 Archives.

Sun Village Cub Scouts Den #2 Early
 1970s. Courtesy the Jackie Robinson
 Park Archives.

Jalisa Burton, Alexis Brooks, and
 Saren Scott on Juneteenth 2022.
 Photo by Stella Kalinina.

First Missionary Baptist Church
 (named Living Stone Cathedral of
 Worship as of 1985) 1951. Courtesy
 the Living Stone Cathedral of
 Worship Archives.

Aerial view of Jackie Robinson park,
 present day.

An Oasis in the Desert: Stories of the First Jackie Robinson Park in America Sun Village, CA



The story of Sun Village, California is one of incredible self-determination, and Jackie Robinson Park is at the center of this community's civic life. A green oasis forged in the midst of the Antelope Valley desert by mostly African American women, the park became one of the key places where village elders built a tight-knit, loving, inclusive community, and raised generations of diverse young leaders. In honor of this inspiring history, the County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) has partnered with arts organization Clockshop, Kounkey Design Initiative, and artist April Banks to design and develop an interpretive exhibition on site at the park. As part of the community engagement and design process leading up to the installation of this work, Clockshop commissioned photographer Stella Kalinina to interview generations of villagers and take their portraits at the 2022 Juneteenth Festival in Jackie Robinson Park. These stories are presented here on the occasion of the 2023 Juneteenth Festival, accompanied by an introduction to Sun Village history by local historian Daria Collier Jiles, and a newly commissioned artwork from James Brooks, Jr., that is interwoven with quotes from initial research collected by Lynell George.

The History of Sun Village by Daria Collier Jiles

The history of Sun Village should be documented and always remembered because of the residents' contributions. One of the things I've come to appreciate is being part of this community. I feel compelled to share with you the heroic efforts of some of Sun Village's founders and how this unique oasis in the desert came to be.

Sun Village is a self-built African American community in the Antelope Valley of California, which is part of Los Angeles County. Many intrepid leaders used their skills and resources to start this unincorporated African American community in 1940, such as Melvin Ray Grubbs, an African American attorney and real estate agent from Chicago. He partnered with the Marble family, who owned Sun Village Land Corporation, which held one thousand acres of desert land mainly containing Joshua trees, to turn this land into a thriving village built on self-determination.

"Property for Sale in Sun Village!" The broadcast on Hunter Hancock's popular rhythm and blues radio show in Los Angeles advertised unconditional places for African Americans to live. They still found many challenges in purchasing homes.

Some of those barriers included realtors who redlined people of color to Sun Village only, as African Americans were often directed unknowingly away from buying homes in the larger nearby desert cities of Palmdale and Lancaster. These new homebuyers soon learned that there was very little infrastructure in Sun Village. However, Sun Village supplied fresh water.

Mr. Grubbs served as chairman of the Sun Village Water Company along with board member Robert Joseph, and the water company building is still evident today.

Even so, building a new home was next to impossible. Early settlers brought in used lumber, purchased unfinished houses, and completed them by hand. Residents drove over unpaved, muddy, bumpy roads to jobs in Palmdale, Lancaster, and Edwards Air Force Base or created their employment raising livestock, farming, gas stations, care homes, or automotive repair. Everyone knew one another and helped each other survive in a difficult place. With the strength of the people, they built the infrastructure. They brought in gas lines, lights, and sewers.

Much of the community coalesced around the 73-year-old Living Stone Cathedral of Worship (LSCW). LSCW, formally known as First Missionary Baptist Church, was established by Pastor R.E. Edward in 1949. The church has fed our souls and served as a haven to all who came to the "Little Pink Church." Bishop Henry Hearn's later led LSCW; he supplied water from a well on church property that also served the community. As part of his community leadership,

he also negotiated the paving of roads for the community. The church continues to be a crucial gathering place and support for the people of Sun Village.

The Sun Village Women's Club has also been an important civic and social force in the growing community. The Women's Club played an active role in promoting education and acts of philanthropic activities among its members to develop an interest in the civic, social, and economic conditions in Sun Village. From 1956 to 1963, the Women's Club of Sun Village organized bake sales, tacos, chili, and fish dinners, along with personal donations to purchase a ten-acre parcel of land. The Women's Club then negotiated with Los Angeles County supervisor Warren Dorn to have a park, something they saw as a necessary development for the community.

Because of the adoration and notoriety of Jackie Robinson, the Women's Club networked through Dr. William Shaw, another leader in the development of Sun Village, to ask about using Mr. Robinson's name and presence. Dr. Shaw and Jackie Robinson were friends and both from Pasadena, California.

On opening day, June 16, 1965, Jackie Robinson, the famed Dodger baseball player, was here in Sun Village to dedicate the first park named in his honor in the United States. Jackie Robinson Park, a verdant public space nestled in the heart of the desert, was finally declared a Historic Landmark on June 18, 2022, because of its deep importance to the community of Sun Village and the County as a whole.

On September 20, 1963, the California Rumford Fair Housing Act (AF1240) passed in the State Legislature. Designed to protect minorities, the disabled, and others from unfair housing practices, AF1240 was named after William Byron Rumford, an African American California Assemblyman elected to the California State Assembly in 1948.

The result of The Fair Housing Act and similar laws that would follow prompted the residents of Sun Village to move out to areas in Palmdale and Lancaster for better housing and employment. Today Sun Village has a more significant percentage of Mexican-American, Central-American, and White residents, with African Americans being the smallest percentage of the population. Change is imminent for any community, but as for Sun Village, we want to remember and retain our rich history. Our African American pioneers led the way, and invested sweat equity in dwelling in this harsh land they made their own. There are currently important sites identified in Sun Village that should become historic landmarks. There are pioneers to thank among the living and those who are no longer with us who helped to make Sun Village a decent place to live then and now, including Melvin Ray Grubbs, Dr. William Shaw, Jessie Carroll, Ruth E. Joseph, Robert Joseph, Daisy Lee Mothershed Gibson, Nelloice Gatson, Roy Goodie, James T. Lott, Levi and Olean Kindred, Semper Fidelis Scholarship Club, Sun Village Chamber of Commerce, Sun Village Women's Club, The Friends of Jackie Robinson Park, Sun Village Town Council, and II Sun Village Teen Post Ruth Ellen Lewis, plus many more.



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2. The Reverential Renegade Peg Lee

Successful stewardship is as much a balancing act as it is a fine art, and few know this as intuitively as Peg Lee. During her tenure as Recreation Services Supervisor at Jackie Robinson Park from 1984 to 2015, Lee worked tirelessly to fortify the park's programs through a responsive approach rooted in the evolving needs of her community. She began boxing and drill teams, bolstered Juneteenth and Cinco de Mayo celebrations, broke ground on a new gymnasium complex, and even built the park's first after-school program. As you'll read in the stories ahead, her work continues to be cherished by former and current residents alike.

"When I got to Jackie Robinson Park, I said to myself, 'I'm going to run this park as if this is my school. I'm going to be the principal, the superintendent...everything.'" But with Reaganomics in full swing and municipal budgets in Los Angeles county shriveled by the recent passage of Proposition 13, Lee knew it'd take more than keen administration to ensure the park remained a vital gathering space. In addition to raising money effectively and imaginatively, she strove to deepen Sun Village's collective investment in the park. "I was very successful with the park because I had the community behind me. I learned how to grow with the community...I let people create what they wanted, and I respected it."

Lee attributes this approach in part to park elders who mentored her at the beginning of her time there. "I remember, the first time I got to the park, there was a lady named Mrs. Daisy Gibson, who used to be in the movies. She came to the park to check me out, to see who I was. And that was kind of intimidating, but it turned out to be pretty good." These "OGs," as she affectionately refers to them, included Gibson, Bernice Sims, Jessie Carroll, and members of the Sun Village Women's Club. "They told me, 'Don't give away that park.' And I knew what they were talking about. They had to work too hard—having bake sales, forming organizations, getting volunteers to help solicit the county for that park. So they charged me with that...to carry on [their] morals and standards by being a good steward."

Empowered by this mandate, Lee would go on to boldly expand the contours of civic life in Sun Village for the next 34 years. And thanks to the deep trust she engendered through her work, the community in turn entrusted her with its story. The atrium in the park's Carroll Building is now adorned with pictures and ephemera that detail the origins and ongoing legacy of Jackie Robinson Park, including the shovel used at the 1965 groundbreaking. Many of these items were recovered by Lee over the course of her career.

"As a county employee, [I] had the freedom to do what was needed to keep that park running...[and] being an educator all my life, I knew how important it was to preserve history," she recounts. It's not surprising that Lee's mindful yet "out-of-the-box" approach garnered her a reputation as something of a renegade in the Antelope Valley. "I never thought of myself as being [one]...but sometimes renegades do what they have to do to get things done."



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3. Love Beyond Hate Bishop Henry Hearn's

Born in 1933 and raised on a farmer's plantation in Byhalia, Mississippi, Bishop Henry Hearn's has been a fixture in and around Sun Village since moving there with his family in 1965. Growing up, Hearn's navigated years of educational disenfranchisement and military conscription to graduate with two engineering degrees from Nashville's Tennessee State University. But when he entered a segregated job market, his prospects at home didn't quite match his qualifications.

"When I got out of school in 1959, I could not find a job as a Black engineer. Nowhere in Mississippi, and in Tennessee, I see a big sign up. It says, 'Civil Engineers: Wanted,' and I go up to look for the job. They said, 'It's just been filled.' So, [I] wait a week, two weeks, come back, that same sign is there. I knew at that [time] that I wasn't going to get a job. I ended up getting with a friend of mine, and we drove to California to look for jobs. I ended up finding a job in San Fernando, California...I took the test, got the job."

Once west, he'd go on to build a pathbreaking, decades-long career as an engineer, pastor, and community leader. Hearn's many accolades include serving as the first Black engineer to work for the Department of Agriculture's soil conservation service, the first Black City Councilman and then Mayor of Lancaster, CA, and a driving force behind the robust and much beloved civic life at Jackie Robinson Park.

"When I became the pastor [at First Missionary Baptist Church, now Living Stone Cathedral of Worship], I was able to help put together the programs...I have fond memories of helping to develop the park and bring kids out here. In fact, once or twice a year, I would bring my church out here and have church in the park. People were spread out everywhere. My daughter was a part of that, so we brought out ushers, our choirs, musical instruments, and everything else. So, that was a very special time in my life, and I was also able to help them put together the Black Chamber [of Commerce] that they have up here, and also the Black Town Council, and the place just grew from there. They help them put on Juneteenth days; they help them put on Black History days right here in the park."

For Hearn's, Jackie Robinson Park heralds back to a time when "people cared about their community" and "houses... really represented home." "My kids grew up around here," he recounts. "One of the things that I remember that was very precious to me—my kids could come here to the park, and everybody was their parent. So, talking about taking a village to raise a kid, well, everybody here helped to raise my children."

The lifelong community advocate remains mindful of Sun Village's origin story, too. "We are the town where the people are here because we were not welcome in Lancaster or Palmdale. There's that prejudice issue, so I would like it to be known...that is: we are the city who lived through it by love, and we love beyond hate...This is the place where people live through prejudice, and still love."

1. Celebrating the Park's 25th Anniversary. The first Sun Village parade, waiting for participants to enter the arches (with Park Supervisor Peg Lee) 1990. Courtesy the Jackie Robinson Park Archives.



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4. Little Desert Sanctuary Naima Moore

A 38-year resident of the Antelope Valley, Naima Moore first found herself at Jackie Robinson Park in the '80s after being invited by the park's former recreation services supervisor, Peg Lee. "She used to call me out...to judge the competitions with the kids, whether it be drill team, art," Moore remembers. "One year, I brought African artifacts, and we filled up the gym, which was very instrumental for the kids to be able to see authentic artwork from Africa because the community was primarily Black."

That first invitation blossomed into a nearly 25-year career shepherding art and activities at the park. Her favorite memory of time spent there? Witnessing the community's enthusiastic response to its milestone event: the annual Juneteenth celebration. "My aspiration is to see it come back in terms of the liveliness of it, with the excitement."

For Moore, strong civic engagement is key to activating optimism in any community. And she believes deeply that this engagement must be a collective effort that includes residents of all ages—especially children—working alongside developers, local businesses, and other community-based organizations. "Community-involved activists should always try to encourage things in the community, especially for the kids," she notes, citing opportunities for community engagement and mentorship as some of the "most hopeful things" local leaders can facilitate.

It's no surprise that she considers herself "pretty radical in terms of development," encouraging everyone who interfaces with her community to "leave a little monument or something to say. You know, I contributed to the Antelope Valley. ... We have a thing going on right now where a Home Depot is supporting a healing garden next to our church. Bishop [Hearns] worked alongside Pastor Rivers to approve it," she shares, acknowledging the ongoing contributions of a friend and collaborator she's known for years. Together with Rhonda Moss, Moore and Hearns organized an annual "Justice Sunday" gathering that celebrates the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. What started in 2008 as a project within Living Stone Cathedral's Call to Action Ministry is now a major civic event for the city of Lancaster.

"Not only is he a Minister, Bishop, but he's also a community advocate, and even at 89 years old, he continues to be involved." Moore admires Hearns deeply, and hopes other residents of Sun Village—new and old—will be inspired by his ongoing efforts to help the community keep the faith. "Age is a number. You might not be able to do all the things you normally do, but you can do something, even if it's just a word of wisdom, plant a seed." And Moore asks that former residents of Sun Village who now live elsewhere not hesitate to return to their roots. "Don't be afraid to share yourselves...Just because you moved away doesn't mean you can't pay it forward, or pay it back."

5. A Grand Place to Live Lila Beldo

When Lila Beldo's mother, Josephine Bullard, relocated their family to the desert in the 1950s, Beldo and her brother, Milton, feared the worst. "We thought she had lost her mind," Beldo quips. Still, it didn't take long for the duo to acclimate to their new, more arid

home. "When we started school, the kids were so friendly, and they wrapped their arms around us. We only had one high school, Antelope Valley High School in Lancaster. Back then children were bussed from several locations: Littlerock, Wilsona, and Sun Village. I said, 'Okay, Mom. You don't have to take us back to LA every week so we can see our other friends,' because we had made friends up here."

For Beldo, life in Sun Village is warm and loving in a way that sets it apart from anywhere else she's been. "I've had the privilege of traveling a little bit, you know, in different countries, but I always want to come back here...it's a grand land, a grand place to live, especially to bring up your children." Part of this feeling stems from a deep sense of care that spans generations. Growing up, "the older people [at church]...just kind of took us under their wing," she recalls. "Back then, you would listen to what people say because you know that they weren't gonna harm you. Whatever they said was [in] your best interest because if you didn't tell your mother or you were doing something wrong, well, they would tell them and you might get a spanking."

"When I was raising mine, people look after your children if you aren't around, or if you turn your back or whatever, there was always somebody that was going to look after your children to keep them out of harm's way." These days, she's proud to continue this tradition as a community elder. "I like for older people to be doing that, and now I'm doing that for other children." She's also one of Sun Village's biggest cheerleaders. "I don't think people would have any regret of moving up here, you know, away from the hustle and bustle, because I think the big cities have gotten so large to where that warmth and closeness is not there. But I find that it's still here in the Valley."

Her favorite memories of Jackie Robinson Park involve time spent with the First Baptist Missionary Church (now the Living Stone Cathedral of Worship). "Our church...used to have our picnic out here. I think my fondest memory was getting into that kitchen there. And me, I don't cook, so I was just talking, you know, making everybody laugh and stuff like that, but it was such a warm place to be. That's one of my greatest...memories, having a picnic up here and mingling with all the members, not only members of our church, but the community because they knew if First Baptist was out here in the park, they could always get something to eat."

Like many of her neighbors, Beldo hopes to one day witness the unveiling of a monument honoring the park's namesake. "A statue of Jackie Robinson—I would like for it to be at the entrance of the building," she shares. "[Him coming here] was great for us, a real good thing for us, you know. And when I say us, I mean the Black community."

6. Miss Sun Village Daria Collier Jiles

"When this park was dedicated, I was looking down on Jackie Robinson himself," reminisces longtime Sun Village resident Daria Jiles (née Collier). "They were doing the groundbreaking. I didn't quite know exactly who he was at the time because I was so young. There was a rocket here that was part of the playground equipment, it was me and Joanne Jenkins who were in the rocket. We were looking down and we were wondering, 'What's all the fuss about?'"

Although nonplussed by this arguably cosmic encounter in 1965, Jiles's youth is full of cherished memories from the hometown she affectionately calls "The Village." "We had the Teen Post, a state program run by Mr. and Mrs. Levi and Clean Kindred. It was located just adjacent to the park on 90th Street, and it was phenomenal for us because they would take us on trips. We would visit other parks, meet other teens, we'd have dances, go swimming, roller skating, [and] participate in other fun activities. The Kindreds kept us busy. In fact, they had this woman—she reminded me of Debbie Allen, the famous dancer—who came out here, and in the summer she taught twenty of us an African troupe dance. We competed in a major talent show at Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. We placed in the event and were awarded with trophies. Eyewitness News filmed it, we got accolades from the newspapers. It was really a good time for us."

And the laurels didn't stop there. Jiles was crowned "Miss Sun Village" in 1971, advancing to the Miss Antelope Valley pageant where she competed alongside beauty queens from neighboring Palmdale, Lancaster, Antelope Acres, and Lake Hughes. "I really didn't have a town that I [could] tout about and say...we have this here, and that there, and you want to come and visit because we're famous for this. We weren't famous for anything. For my platform, I went on the strength of the people, and the love and the respect that we had for one another and the community."

After graduating from Antelope Valley College, a yearning for greener pastures led Jiles to Hawaii and then around the world. But it wasn't long before she found her way back to Sun Village with her husband in tow. "I've been to seven countries, various places, but this place has always been a home for me." And it's clear that feeling runs in the family. "You know, older people, they grow gracefully out here...My mom lived here up until four years ago when she passed away. She was 102, and she just lived over on Avenue R-8, and she loved it here. You couldn't get her to move anywhere else or be anywhere else."

When asked what kind of public art she'd like to see installed in the park, Jiles's response evokes the magnificence of the desert she adores. "I've thought about that and because of our breezes and beautiful clear blue sky and sunsets, I would like to see something standing erect." Indeed, the Antelope Valley's strong winds are so central to life there that even the desert trees grow at an angle out of the ground. "It might be several—maybe eight—bars or something, but I'd like to see those bars blowing in the wind and making a chiming noise, perhaps a song, if you will, in honor of our pioneers who worked hard for this self-built community. I think that would be beautiful."

7. A Family Affair Geraldine Robinson

"Everyone was considered family; whether by blood or by love. We had to show respect to everyone. It didn't matter if they were related or not. We had to respect everyone in our community; they supported and cared for us. It was a family here, so you felt secure and safe. We didn't have any real problems out here during that time."

Geraldine Robinson first came to Sun Village as a child with her parents, George and Inez Thomas. "We came to

visit family, and my father fell in love with the desert and the mountains. So in 1955, we relocated to Sun Village. We lived in a little house. A year later, my parents assisted my grandparents, Abraham and Flora Culver, with relocating from Mississippi to Sun Village. In '57, my grandfather went back to Mississippi to assist his brother and sister-in-law, Marcus and Jesse Bell Culver, with moving to Sun Village as well. We were the largest family out here during that time."

And central to this coming-of-age was a newly-christened desert oasis called Jackie Robinson Park. "We came every Saturday and Sunday...before the buildings were built," Robinson shares, scanning the grounds she knows and loves so well. "We'd have a whole gang of...kids because we couldn't go to the park in Palmdale, so once we got our own park, that became our hangout spot. There were a lot of kids that lived out here, so we would meet up at the park after school on Fridays. There was us (the Culvers), the Franklins, the Hendersons, the Reids, the Colliers, and the Talleys. There were a lot of us."

Like many of her neighbors, Robinson holds a deep reverence for local leaders who were instrumental in building the park and maintaining its vitality over the years—leaders like Jessie Carroll, Daisy Gibson, and Robert Joseph. It's no surprise, then, that she'd welcome a sculptural tribute in the park honoring their contributions and sharing their story with future generations.

Today, Robinson is happily nested back in Sun Village amongst its schools, its churches, its local businesses, and, most importantly, its people. "I love living out here. I moved back 25 years ago...I purchased my house from my parents...I'm still in the same house I grew up in."

8. Sounds Like Home James Brooks, Jr.

"I used to live down over here on R4, and every morning, you [could] hear the high schoolers playing, practicing [for] marching band in zero period," remarks James Brooks, who spent part of his youth in a home down the street from Jackie Robinson Park. "There's this flat desert land and you can just hear that sound going all over the place in the morning."

As a kid in the 90s, the park offered Brooks and his friends abundant space to imagine, explore, and reflect. "Over here, next to where we're standing right now, there's a wash. When it would rain in the winter, or when the snow melted from the mountains, it would fill up with water...We'd play in it and we'd be hanging around, like a temporary river." His passion for music grew during his time spent there, too—thanks in part to the community-minded Sheriff's deputy stationed at the park. "[Deputy Johnnie Oates] would have us listen to classical music in the Carroll building. A couple times, he turned down the lights and had us all just sitting and just focusing on listening to music. For me, that was a really cool experience because that got me more into music." Brooks would go on to play in marching and jazz bands at Little Rock High School and beyond.

"It was a good childhood. I spent a lot of time actually going to the park's after-school program, especially in elementary school. That was a lot of fun. They helped with our homework; there was time to hang out with friends." Brooks and his sister even had the opportunity to study aeronautics. Although peer relationships later took priority, intergenerational connections

provided a sturdy anchor as he came of age. "There was definitely a presence of elders in the community there. There [were] a few...that would be around at the park to keep everybody straight." Among these elders, he cites Deputy Johnnie Oates, former park recreation services supervisor Peg Lee, and Caroline Hicks, who helped keep him and his friends nourished and active." She was responsible for...corralling us all to get together. There was a free snack program that was part of the after-school program, so [she made] sure that we were all fed and all good. She's definitely one of the important people."

In terms of imagining a new piece of public art in the park, Brooks is open to many possibilities. What he is certain of, however, is that the piece must connect to the park's origins. "[This] place is a literal desert that was so under-resourced at the time. Remembering [the work of the Sun Village Women's Club that helped make this park a reality], I think, [is] important for everybody who lives here. It's an inspiring history. I think no matter who you are, if you're here and you're connected to that...you're in that history, you're in that fabric, so you can do it, too."

9. Raised and Rooted Janice Banks

Jackie Robinson Park has been an important place for Janice Banks's family for generations. "I can remember from probably five, six years old we used to come here to this park...Where the gym is now, there used to be a big swing set. My mom, Geraldine Robinson, used to bring us here to play on that swing set."

Set within a community that can feel isolated from the hustle and bustle of greater Los Angeles county, the park helps local residents connect, play, and thrive under the desert sun. Growing up, "there wasn't a whole lot out here," Banks notes. "I just remember that anytime they had any functions here at the park, there were always large gatherings of people from the community that came here to the park. We would socialize. I just remember activities for us as children, you know, going to the Little Rock Dam, coming to the park to ride our bikes. We lived about a mile from here. All of us kids, we would always ride our bikes and just come play around at the park."

The park, too, provides services, opportunities, and even employment for local residents. "I remember way back when they used to provide lunches for all the kids in the community. They used to take trips. I remember we met here, and they would take us on trips to Venice beach, to the Los Angeles County Zoo. There's just so many memories from this park, even as an adult," Banks recounts, pointing out significant locations around the park as she narrates. "I worked here as the Youth Activities League Deputy for the park, and, with that program, I would take kids out, and we would go on camping trips...a lot of different activities."

When asked which community members have a special place in her heart, Banks immediately names former colleague Peg Lee, the park's retired recreation services supervisor. "Peg Lee is important because I worked side-by-side with her for a lot of different activities for the kids here during the time that I was a deputy here." Next, she acknowledges the contributions of Mother Jessie Carroll—a community pillar and President of the Sun Village Women's

Club that helped raise funds to create the park. Carroll and her husband also donated property to the county so that Jackie Robinson Park could come into existence.

Although she was born two years after Jackie Robinson came to Sun Village, Banks feels that the park deserves a statue honoring its namesake.

"I know nowadays a lot of the kids are just stuck inside on video games and watching TV," she laments. "That just wasn't us. Back then, it was always this park."

10. Friends for Life Alexis Brooks and Saren Scott

For lifelong friends Alexis Brooks and Saren Scott, Jackie Robinson Park feels like home. The duo met playing tee-ball together at the park back in elementary school, and share warm memories of time spent in the after-school program with Deputy Johnnie Oates, on basketball courts through the summertime Sheriff's League, and at countless barbecue cookouts with friends, family, and loved ones. "There's a saying that it takes a village to raise a child and my parents always tell me that's true," reflects Brooks. "It took Sun Village to raise [me]...Really, the community comes together to take care of each child." And Scott agrees. "We [are] able to really love one another the way that family does. You might not get along all the time...but we'll never turn our backs on you."

Like many of their neighbors, Brooks and Scott attribute one community leader's contributions to the park's enduring impact. "When you think of Jackie Robinson Park, you think of Miss [Peg] Lee," exclaims Scott. "She definitely made sure that we had what we needed." Although her demeanor could be stern, Lee's jovial humor kept everyone smiling even when there was work to be done. "She's a staple in the community," Brooks concurs. "Growing up, it felt like she lived here because she was here so much...She was so invested—and still is so invested—in the community that she made a point to be here all the time and to pour into kids. I was one of the kids that was able to benefit from that."

Brooks expands on this definition of community to include not only those in Sun Village now, but also those who came before. "The Black community really built Sun Village, and it's changed over the years, but...it still has that presence and that spirit. I would want [the art] to definitely reflect the people who live here and the people who have built it up. I would like to see a mural somewhere in the park...[something that communicates] the whole experience of what Sun Village" is, complete with imagery depicting historical figures, music, sports, local agriculture, and food.

"I didn't realize the beauty of Sun Village until I left, really," Brooks continues. "How precious it is to grow up with someone, and be with them, friends to them 20 to 30 years later. We will be," she notes, gesturing towards Scott. "I think that's something that's really unique to being from here, that you get these lasting relationships, and it really feels like family." Scott replies. "The people that established Sun Village, the reason why we were able to purchase land here, honestly, is because there was nothing here. There was nothing that was established, and this was somewhere that no one wanted to be, but our ancestors were able to come here and to build here. When they built what was here, they built community."

Jackie Robinson Park is the oasis of the desert because it's where people came to take that fresh drink of life.
- Peg Lee

These are the same people that built the roads, brought in the lights, and brought in the park. But they were everyday people. Very smart people.
- James Brooks

Through overwhelming odds, through racial discrimination, though African-Americans were forced to be here, they were able to adapt, overcome, persevere, and make a community that everyone enjoyed.
- Fred Thompson

Open space and the mountain views. The stars at night were amazing.
- Ana Quiles

I thought the stars did not exist anymore until I came out here.
- James Brooks

The park became a kind of oasis, because people started coming out to Sun Village to the park. They had picnics, they had baseball games. They'd stay in the park real late. Everybody could come to see each other and meet each other under wonderful conditions. Because there was nothing else.
- Fred Thompson

All the little kids came up to Jackie Robinson, got his autograph. And quite a few of them took pictures with him.
- Fred Thompson

I was there, when he put the shovel in the ground.
- Fred Thompson

There are people here that made everything. I mean, even their own soap-everything."
- Gail Brooks

It was a lot of hard work for the local community to get a park that provided so much safe space. Since most lots are pretty big, it's not about just the space, but the activities that can take place in the park. Safe space is a huge thing.
- Ana Quiles

