

{SHOW MUSIC STARTS}

Ron: [00:25:36] I always call it Beet Sugar. Factory and I'm always called on the carpet and holler at. No, no, no. It is the sugar beet factory, Ron. Come on. [00:25:54][17.3]

KAILA: That's Ron Short, the president of the Glendale Historical Society. He's talking about the five story abandoned building in Glendale. It is located near 52nd Avenue and Glendale Avenue.

KAILA: That building captured the interest of Valley 101 listener Garret Godfrey. He asked us about the history of the Beet Sugar Factory and about the future plans of the building.

KAILA: WELCOME TO VALLEY 101, A PODCAST FROM *THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC* AND *AZCENTRAL.COM* WHERE *WE ANSWER THE QUESTIONS YOU ASK ABOUT METRO PHOENIX*. I'm your host, Kaila White.

{PAUSE}

KAILA: Producer Maritza Dominguez is digging into how the factory's history correlates with the development of Glendale. Maritza, take it away!

{OUTCUE SHOW MUSIC}

MARITZA: William J. Murphy, owner of the Arizona Canal Company and the founder of Glendale, looked at the land west of Phoenix and saw potential. In the early 1900s, the Valley's soil was considered a prime area to farm. So Murphey, with the Arizona Canal Company, dug a 40 mile canal to bring water to the west Valley.

Ron: [00:03:59] But he saw some interesting federal reports saying that, hey, this area would be a great place for sugar beets, growing sugar beets. And so he got some other folks interested in and they bought a bunch of the land south of the Arizona canal.
[00:04:22][22.9]

MARITZA: Sugar beets are plants whose roots contain high concentrations of sucrose and are grown for the production of sugar. They're white with a long green stock at the top and require a lot of water to grow.

Ron: [00:04:33] once he had that worked out, then you need to have a factory to process your sugar beets. So he formed another company and they put together a consortium to build a beet sugar factory. And that took between nineteen or three to nineteen or six to do that.
[00:05:01][27.9]

MARITZA: The company ran into their first issue with the water. As they washed the sugar beets, they realized the water was too muddy. They had shut down the factory for a short period to [dig wells](#) and bring in ground water that was better purified. After that, they were back up and running.

Ron: [00:06:03] And they were able to develop maybe about a thousand tons per. Per day on the sugar beets, and they employed around three hundred people during harvest time, [00:06:23][19.7]

MARITZA: The Beet Sugar Factory and its farms had a hand in the growth of the town. By 1910, Glendale was incorporated, meaning it would have elected officials.

Ron: [00:06:40] And by 1912, boy, they were at their peak. They were doing really, really, really great. But then it started tailing off a little bit. The sugar beets, level of sugar was not very high. It was low. Then the bugs started getting after them. And then it had all sorts of other issues and problems. [00:07:06][25.9]

MARITZA: Ron said they had to start bringing in sugar beets from other places. This created a legal battle with other companies. So the factory stopped processing sugar beets and sent their supply to California. During World War I, the demand for sugar increased. That's when they decided to switch over to sugar cane.

Ron: [00:07:44] and sure enough, they got that. They brought in new machinery. They started growing sugar cane. But you know what? Sugar cane requires a lot of water and we didn't have a lot of water. [00:08:01][17.2]

MARITZA: By 1916, the production and processing of sugar beets and sugar cane stopped, and Murphy's vision of growing sugar in the desert met its end.

Ron: [00:08:18] it was great idea, but sugar beets are not a great place here. They were harvesting it in the summertime. The mules were dying in the fields. [00:08:32][14.3]

MARITZA: While it didn't work out, Ron called it a great experiment for Murphy. And although the Beet Sugar Factory stood empty over the next few years, it would find new purposes in the future.

Ron: [00:09:31] And it was a beer storage in nineteen thirty four for beer for a while and I believe there was a first place, a nation where they, they bottled soy sauce. On that, so it had those other distinctions, [00:09:49][17.9]

MARITZA: A man named Philip Ringer bought the building and the surrounding 10 acres in 1935. From 1938 to 1981, the Squirt Company used the building to make the squirt concentrate out of grapefruits for their soda.

(cue transitional music)

MARITZA: In 1978, the Beet Sugar Factory became the first building in Glendale to be on the National Register of Historic Places. To be considered for the listing a building has to be more than 50 years old and look the same as when it was first constructed.

MARITZA: There are some perks for a property owner to get a building designated as a historic building. The Arizona State Historic Preservation Act of 1982 allows non-commercial buildings a reduction in property tax. However, the designation doesn't prevent the owner from changing the building.

Ron: [00:18:33] But as a property owner of a building that's listed on the National Register, you can destroy it. It would be taken off the national register. You could change the exterior of it. It would be taken off the national register. You can do whatever you want on the inside and it would not be taken off the national register.
[00:18:58] [25.0]

MARITZA: It's more of an honor and distinction for a building to be classified as a historic place.

(out cue music)

MARITZA: While the building is over 100 years old now, Ron said the building has good bones. In fact according to Ron, the steel used to build the factory is the same type that was used for the Titanic.

Ron: [00:12:38] But the good news is that we don't have icebergs here, so we don't have to worry about icebergs hitting the steel and the beet sugar factory. [00:12:50] [11.3]

MARITZA: The Beet Sugar Factory is currently owned by Ray Klemp. He is also the owner of the AZ Wine Company. I was unable to get a hold of Ray but in 2011 in a video produced by the city of Glendale he outlined his goals for the building.

Ray Klemp: [00:03:35] This will be a plant where beverages are made. We will have a walled in room where the stills are located because we'll be making vodka and tequila and other things like that.
[00:03:48] [13.2]

MARITZA: To undertake a large project such as this, the building would need to be brought back up to code.

Ray Klemp: [00:04:09] We're not allowed to have more than nine people in here at a time. [00:04:12][2.6]

MARITZA: Ron said that the roof of the building is also in bad shape and would need to be re-done entirely. Ray also visualized using the upper floors as a tasting room.

Ray Klemp: [00:09:32] Then we would envision an elevator and perhaps on the fourth and fifth floors, this little display area, area where people might experiment, learning how to use the beverages and a bar or restaurant on top and then on the second floor railings and a walk through so that you could sit down and down and see things happening. [00:09:53][21.4]

MARITZA: In this 2011, Ray acknowledged that this project would take years. So far, he has been unable to open it as a functioning distillery. But the interest from people has continued.

MARITZA: It's status as an abandoned building has made people wonder why it still stands. In 2016, Arizona Republic readers name it one of the worst West Valley eyesores. The building is fenced off from the public with faded red brick and bordered windows. However for Ron, he sees it as more than just an abandoned building.

Ron: [00:22:49] So, no, it's it's very, very, very important to the city of Glendale. And the residents of Glendale doesn't do not view that as an eyesore. They view it as a very, very important historic building for the city and for the state [00:23:09][19.8]

{Show music cue}

Kaila: Hey listeners, it's me Kaila again. Who knew an abandoned building in Glendale would hold such historical significance to the development of the West Valley.

Kaila: As a courtesy note, audio in today's episode came from the City of Glendale.

Kaila: If you have more questions about metro Phoenix's history, submit them to us at valley101.azcentral.com. And if you're a regular listener of our show, please consider supporting it by subscribing to azcentral dot com.

Kaila: And as always, thank you for listening to Valley 101, a podcast from *The Arizona Republic* and azcentral.com. See you next week.