

{SHOW MUSIC STARTS}

John: [00:08:48] People would just would come there in the summertime just to cool off. [00:08:52][4.0]

Maritza: John Bueker remembers going to Christown Spectrum Mall in the late 60s and 70s. He'd run into neighbors and friends because that was the spot to be at during this era of Phoenix history.

John: [00:08:52] At that time, a lot of people didn't have air conditioning and we had water coolers. You know, that evaporation coolers that would cool off your house wasn't quite the same thing as having air conditioning. So, yeah, it was it was popular for that aspect alone, I suppose. [00:09:07][14.9]

(Music Break)

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 producer Maritza Dominguez and I'll be your host this week. Kaila is enjoying some time off. This week we're answering the question from David Thelen. He asked, what is the background and history of the man who served as the inspiration of the part of Phoenix named after him?

Today we're diving into Christown's name sake as well as the cultural impact the mall had on Phoenix after opening in 1961.

{Outcue show MUSIC}

I met with John at his home. He greeted me wearing a Christown shirt he made for the 50th anniversary of the mall. Long time fans of Valley 101 will remember him from our episode about Legend City.

John: [00:00:53] I am the creator and webmaster of the Christown website [00:00:59][6.3]

He's a local expert of Valley history. So I asked him...

Maritza: [00:01:19] who was Chistown named after? [00:01:21][1.8]

John: [00:01:23] OK, well, Chris Town was named after a man by the name of Chris Harri H-A- R -R- I, who was a Swiss born farmer. [00:01:34][10.5]

[12.3]

John: [00:00:32] And in 1887, his father brought the family to America when Chris was ten years old and the first settled in Kansas before coming out to Arizona [00:00:46][14.9]

According to the [Arizona Republic archives](#), his father bought the land in 1904 for 50 dollars an acre. They used the land to grow alfalfa and had a dairy farm. The land was passed to Harri after his father died.

John: [00:01:46] he leased the land to Del Webb for 99 years, 100 acres of land. And at this time Del Webb was very interested in building a major shopping center in this area, which at the time was very north Phoenix it was like near the city limits at that time. So out of gratitude to Chris for providing the land, Del Webb Corporation decided to name them all after Chris, so it became Chris-Town. [00:02:15][29.0]

Del Webb or Delbert Eugene Webb was a real estate developer and founder of Sun City. His research showed that north Phoenix would become a primary area for residential development. With that growth it would need a shopping center. At --- time the only other shopping center was Park Central which was an outdoor mall. Harri's land, which was located at 19th Avenue and Bethany Home Road, was the perfect spot.

John: [00:05:37] So he saw the future and he and he decided to put Christown in that area, which was a great choice because it became very popular and very successful [00:05:45][8.7]

So during all this what happened with Chris Harri?

John: [00:11:42] he stayed on the property that was adjacent to Chris Town, and Del Webb built him a home there. And but he he really didn't have an interest in money or in the in the house they built for him. He would camp out under the stars and he was just interested in farming. He had horses that he loved. And so children would come by to visit him and he would let them ride his horse and things like that [00:12:11][29.8]

Only an irrigation canal separated the \$15 million dollar shopping center from his farm. He was 81 years old when he leased the land to Del Web.

He stayed there till his death in 1971. He was 94 years old.

While Harri paid little to no attention to the shopping center, Phoenix residents were excited to have an indoor mall to cool off. Even the Republic wrote a plethora of articles on the opening and its new stores.

John: [00:06:50] And when they opened up on August 24th, 1961, I mean, I have pictures of it on my website, the parking lot is totally packed. I mean, it was just it was very successful from the get go. And it was just a beautifully designed mall. So, yeah, it was a hit from the beginning, [00:07:09][19.9]

Eugene Pulliam, the owner of the Republic at the time, [said this about Christown](#).

“In many ways, Christown symbolizes the manner in which Phoenix has won its battle against the desert.”

Christown gave home to many new stores and created excitement for its special attractions. The mall was designed around three courts.

John: [00:23:24] and the court of fountains had these beautiful fountains. There were three of them, one really large one and two others [00:23:30][6.0]

Another was the court of flowers on the east end of the mall. It was filled with flower decorations and a statue of Ferdinand the Bull. Then there was the last court that John said was the most popular among the three.

John: [00:23:50] the court of birds that had these beautiful pop art birdcages. There were ten cages that held about 64 birds total like birds. Yes, live birds. And, you know, so it was very popular, especially with kids. [00:24:06][15.7]

I saw pictures of the cages. They're hard to describe but they're long cylinder cages with upside down colorful pawn pieces.

There was a walk bridge that allowed people to get a closer look at the birds.

The three courts created a cohesiveness to the mall. Christown also hosted events that gained the attention of Phoenix residents

John: [00:10:39] And I think there was an antique car show every year that they held and they brought an antique cars into the mall for people to see. Just a wide variety. There was a national dairy week. They would bring cows into the mall and promoted all kinds of different things. So, yeah, there were many, many activities usually taking place there in the Court of fountains in the center, which was a very large space in the center of the mall. That's where most of these activities took place [00:11:06][27.3]

John's christown website has pictures of these events. You see the antique cars strolling down the mall with people dressed up in early 1900s clothing. There were rock concerts and Wallace and Ladmo shows as well.

And like any other mall, Christmas time was a big event for the kids. Christown ran commercials on channel 5 in the 80s to promote its events with Santa.

Commercial: [0:02] Come to Christown. It's fun to explore. The shopping tradition you'll come to discover more. [0:12]

(CUE MUSIC)

Christown is a beloved place for those who grew up in Phoenix. So much so there is a dedicated Facebook group where people share their memories and old pictures of the mall.

John has lots of memories of Christown. In fact one of his first memories after moving to Arizona is of Christown. His favorite is when he found a five dollar bill on the floor of the five and dime store Woolworths.

John: [00:25:23] And so I looked at my brother and I said, what about what do we do? So I said, well, we better tell the store, my brother, honest guy. So we went up to the cashier and said, hey, we found this five dollar bill. And she looked at us and said, well, I guess it's yours. I mean, so so what I did was I took my five dollar bill and we went from Woolworths, which was on the west end of the mall, and we walked all the way to the other end of the mall to Broadway. And I bought a little G.I. Joe toy that I wanted with my five dollars. So that's a nice memory of christown. [00:25:59][36.0]

Over the years, the shopping center has been in different management hands. At one point it even lost the Christown name.

John: [00:14:44] They change the name from Christown Mall to Phoenix Spectrum Mall. And that was in 2001. This turned out to be a highly unpopular decision, people did not want the name changed. Nobody really the the the name really didn't catch on. People still thought of as christown, people still called Christown. You know, we're going to go to Christown [00:15:10][26.4]

In 2006, new developers bought the mall. They recognized the importance of the Christown name and made a hybrid of the old name and the new name. It became Christown Spectrum ~~Mall~~, a name that still exists today.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of Christown Spectrum Mall. It may not be what it was in its heyday but it's a household name for native Phoenicians.

(CUE SHOW MUSIC)

Well, listeners, that's it for today's episode. As a courtesy note, audio in today's episode came from e-w-j-x-n on youtube.

If you've got more Phoenix history related questions make sure to submit them to our team at valley 101 dot azcentral dot com. And if you're a regular listener of our show, please consider supporting it by subscribing to azcentral dot com.

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See you next week.