



# Articles dated 2000-current



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## Retiree home needs plumbing fix But state budget woes hurt funding chances

By Alisa Blackwood  
Associated Press

Like most historic buildings, the Arizona Pioneers' Home exudes charm. The three-story, brick structure with a view of downtown Prescott holds more colorful stories within its walls about the state's first settlers than there are people left to tell them.

But also within the building's historic walls is a not-so-charming set of 50- and 90-year old pipes that are clogged, decaying and in need of replacement.

Sometimes residents of the retirement home withstand icy showers before the water erratically turns hot. The toilets have to be flushed three times.

The state-supported home is one of many state entities affected by cutbacks in funding to help erase a state budget shortfall this fiscal year.

An estimated \$1.2 million is needed to fix the home's plumbing, but it's unclear how or when it will get the money, said Jeanine Dike, the home's superintendent.

The home opened in 1911 to serve as the last residence for Arizona cowboys, miners and other trail-blazers who settled in the nation's 48<sup>th</sup> state. Now the home accepts people 65 and older who have lived in Arizona for at least 30 years.

The home's \$5 million annual operating budget was funded until last year from the state's general fund. But last fall, the state directed the home to begin taking money from the Miner's Hospital Endowment Fund, from which Dike had planned to take money to fix the plumbing. Now, she said, there

won't be enough left over for the plumbing.

Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Ruth Solomon, D-Tucson, is pushing lawmakers to include money for the repairs in the 2003 budget.

"What I saw was just disgusting," Solomon said. "If the washing machines are going then the drains in the showers back up. These wonderful, older Arizonans are taking showers in somebody's washing when these bubbles come up. It creates a very serious health hazard."



Thursday, November 25, 2004, Desert Morning News

## Pioneers' Home rejuvenated

*Arizona facility serves only longtime state residents and miners*

By Arthur H. Rotstein  
Associated Press

TUCSON, Ariz. --- The 93-year-old Arizona Pioneers' Home in Prescott fittingly didn't get just a facelift. It's had an arterial transplant. Literally, new plumbing from the ground up.

The 150-bed home, predating Arizona's 1912 statehood, remains a retirement residence only for faithful, longtime and pioneer Arizonans.

Arizona and Alaska are the only two states to operate such facilities.

Arizona's is restricted to people who have lived in the state for at least 30 years or who have worked in mining --- an original lifeblood industry of the state.

"It's been a joy; I've enjoyed every day," said Burnadean Chesley, who turned 87 on Tuesday and has lived in the Pioneers' Home for seven years. "It's just like living at home,

except you don't have to clean up after yourself. You can't beat it."

"Everybody does seem to be doing their best to keep us happy," said Del Chesley, 85, who spent 15 years mining copper underground and has lived for six years in the home.

The Chesleys met and married at the home.

The Arizona Territorial Legislature created the Pioneers' Home in 1909, and the original red brick, three-story building with porticos was built for \$25,000. It opened two years later.

It has been added to four times, and improvements since 1996 including upgraded fire suppression and a new fire alarm system, new kitchen and a stair tower refuge for potential evacuation, have cost about \$5 million, said superintendent Jeanine Dike.

The home, with a clear view of the historic Prescott Courthouse Square, was built with the idea of repaying faithful and longtime Arizona residents who helped pioneer and build the state.

The state appropriates more than \$5 million annually for the home from its general fund, a miners' hospital fund paid for from state trust land a state charitable fund. Meanwhile, revenue generated by residents of about \$1 million is returned to the state.

Until 1916, the home was a men-only affair. But among its early women's residents was "Big Nose Kate" Elder, one-time companion of John Henry "Doc" Holliday.

Another was Sharlot Hall, who converted the original log cabin territorial governor's mansion in Prescott into what is now the Prescott Historical Society's Sharlot Hall Museum.

In its formative statehood years early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mining was a gigantic industry seen as playing a key role in building the state. But it came with a high rate of illness and injury, leaving a lot of its workers destitute, Dike said.

“So it (the home) was to try to provide a safe place for them to be cared for and to age,” Dike said. “And they looked at it as if anybody who had helped in developing the state and had invested that energy deserved the respect and the care that we could provide.”

It has served 2,989 residents over the years, with two standards for admission:

- Miners can enter at any age and in any state of disability.
- Anyone else must have lived in Arizona at least 30 years, must be at least 65, ambulatory and independent.

Disabled miners do not pay anything, while other residents pay on a sliding scale based on financial need and ability to pay, Dike said.

The actual cost per resident is more than \$3,000 a month, but each resident's Social Security check goes back to the state, less an allowance for medical insurance and \$175 for personal needs, said deputy superintendent Carl Johnson.

“They're not getting a free ride, and they are paying nearly everything they have to stay here,” he said.

The home, which has 34 private rooms, has a skilled-care area for residents whose conditions have changed to require more assistance.

The average stay is about four to five years, Dike said.

“Because people come here by choice when they're healthy, and then age in place, it has created a completely different dynamic than other long-term facilities,” she said. “It's like taking care of your grandma and grandpa.”

In most long-term care facilities, the typical admission comes from a hospital, and residents might not know each other.

“But because we know who they are, what they enjoy, what they stand for, we see a lot of interaction. And those who are healthy look out for the others,” Dike said.

New admissions were temporarily halted in 2002, several months

before plumbing renovations began, so there would be room to move people temporarily as work shifted through the home.

Some of the drainage pipes replaced were clay, preceding even galvanized metal. “They were old,” she said.

Admissions are being restarted now.

Burnadean Chesley, who turned 87 on Tuesday, is a second-generation dweller in the home. Her mother, Nettie Meredith, another centenarian, lived there from 1997 to 2001, dying at age 102.

And there are two 100-year old men in the home now, including Roy Fisk, who celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on Sunday by dancing with his wife, Dorothy --- a youngster of about 84, Dike said.



*August 18, 2005*  
*The Arizona Republic*

## **REFUGE AT TRAIL'S END ARIZONA REPAYS DEBT TO ITS EARLY SETTLERS AT PIONEERS' HOME**

*By: Angela Cara Pancrazio*

Curtis Ritter tried his darndest not to become a rancher: He joined the Army, blasted ore out of Arizona copper mines and even tried fishing in Alaska.

But he never could seem to leave the family's Arizona ranch, the one he grew up on, the same ranch his father lived on his entire life, the ranch his grandfather homesteaded in the late 1800s.

Last December, 88-year-old Curtis and his wife, Nora, decided they could no longer keep up with the work and sold most of the more than 6,000-acre ranch.

Both native Arizonans, the Ritters chose to move into the Arizona Pioneers' Home to live among about 135 of the state's longtime residents inside a three-story red-brick building on a hill overlooking Prescott.

Where, said Nora, 86, "we're treated like king and queen."

That's exactly what state leaders intended back in 1911 when the Pioneers' Home opened to serve people to whom they felt they owed a debt: the cowboys, miners and other trailblazers who helped shape the state.

The Pioneers' Home is one of only two such state-sponsored homes in the country. The other is in Alaska which has a system of six Pioneers' Homes.

But over the years, the cost of running the long-term care home has been an issue for lawmakers. The average monthly cost per resident is roughly \$3,600. Residents pay a portion of that depending on their income from Social Security and pension checks. But the average resident's share is about \$600 a month, said state Rep. Laura Knaperek, R-Tempe.

To help curb costs, Knaperek wrote a bill that tightened requirements for getting in. The law went into effect last week.

To qualify for admission, an Arizona resident must now be at least 70 years of age instead of 65 and have lived in Arizona for at least 50 years instead of 30. Disabled miners have always been the exception. They can enter at any age and live for free. But now, as required by another new law, only those who physically participated in mining, not office workers, can be admitted as disabled miners.

Lawmakers hope the changes will help get a handle on the costs so that the Pioneers' Home can continue with its mission of taking care of residents who helped build the state, Knaperek said.

The Pioneers' Home has sweeping views of Granite Dells, the Bradshaw Mountains and the San Francisco Peaks. Inside the building, freshly waxed floors reflect the shine of the polished-wood hand railings along the walls, and notices for weekly trips to Wal-Mart and the time of the next nickel bingo game are posted on bulletin boards scattered throughout the home.

There are the ranchers like Curtis Ritter whose grandparents journeyed from the Texas Panhandle in a covered wagon, who landed in California but turned around and drove their cattle

back through the desert to a verdant place they had passed in Arizona.

Now, the Ritters remember life on their Kirkland ranch and the many hard times.

"You're always on your knees praying that it would rain, that the grass would grow, so you'd have hay for the horses, feed for the cattle," Nora said.

Still, it broke their hearts to leave their land. It helped that not long after moving into the third floor of the Pioneers' Home they gained celebrity by being asked to be honorary grand marshals for the Prescott Frontier Days Parade on the Fourth of July.

Down on the second floor, Esther Lee Cherry Henderson, born in Camp Verde 95 years ago, stays in the infirmary.

She can't see anymore, just like she can't ride those bucking horses her husband used to rent out to rodeos around the state.

Instead, she is rocking in her chair now, listening to Western novels on tape by Louis L'Amour and reliving her past.

Her eyes shine bright, even brighter when she remembers how she and her husband drove their buckin' horses to rodeos around the state. Drove, not as in a car or trailer, but on horseback.

"We drove them down the highway, up the hills, down the hills, around the turns, all dirt, to Payson, Snowflake, Flagstaff, Ashfork, Seligman and Wickenburg," she said.

Even now, with her shock of white hair, colorful blouse and beads, it's easy to picture her atop one such horse named Cannonball. Her husband, Perry, persuaded Henderson to ride Cannonball in the Frontier Days Parade years ago.

Henderson worked as a bookkeeper at the Dewey mine. When her eyesight began failing a year ago, she came into the home as a disabled miner. Today, she wouldn't qualify.

Another rule for entry is that all those other than disabled miners must be able to care for themselves when first coming to the home.

Once there, a continuum of care follows, from independent living to assisted living, intermediate care and skilled nursing care.

Because the majority of the residents require less care, said Gary Olson, superintendent of the facility, there is more interaction that brings about a family atmosphere.

"Whatever losses incurred individually are eased by the camaraderie," Olson said. "It's kind of a big family, a very big house, a very big family."

Not all who call this place home are rooted to the state like the Ritters and Henderson.

Like the tens of thousands who flooded into Arizona during the postwar era, the climate lured Mario Vinci's family to the state in 1950. His mother had arthritis. So Vinci followed his parents. He traded in his top hat, overcoat and Chicago streets for the copper mine tunnels of Bagdad, Superior and Miami.

Vinci, now 91, didn't see the state from atop a horse like Ritter or Henderson. He preferred the view from behind the wheel of his 1970s Cadillac.

He keeps a snapshot of himself on the door to his room, the one he shares with his wife, Virla. In the photo, a much younger Vinci poses in his cutoff blue jeans and cowboy boots, grinning from beneath his cowboy hat in front of his Cadillac.

And Vinci is still driving.

"He just got his driver's license, no restrictions, without eyeglasses," said Virla, 78. "The ornery pup."

The Vincis come and go as they please. They're getting ready to take a road trip to Washington. But Virla said, "This is our house."

Editor's Note: This story caught reporter Angela Cara Pancrazio's eye when her mother, Anita Pancrazio, moved into the Pioneers' Home last week. Her mother is 76 and moved to Arizona from Chicago in 1971.

