



Sun Tours

JULY 2007

Sunshine

SUN TOURS 30TH ANNIVERSARY

Can you believe it? **Sun Tours** has been taking New Mexicans on tours and cruises for 30 years. It has been a long and happy ride—and we have many miles to go.

I have so many happy memories of our clients. Because I led all the early tours, I got to know our early clients best. As I prepared this article, I read the passenger names on rooming lists from the early tours and could still picture the people, although most are long gone. There are too many memorable clients to name, but I appreciate all of you.

This is how it all began. I moved to New Mexico in 1972 and was immediately smitten by the beauty and the cultural variety of the “Land of Enchantment.” For a Midwesterner from Wisconsin, it was a new and liberating world. I drove around much of New Mexico, walking the trails, locating hot springs, searching for ghost towns, visiting the Pueblos, and meeting the people. I completely immersed myself in New Mexico including reading all of the books about New Mexico that I could find.

When my mother came to visit me in 1977, I took her on a one-week private tour of New Mexico. We had a great time together. Afterwards she told me that I should find a job as a tour guide. At the time I was finishing a year working as a beekeeper and was ready to try something new.

So I tried to offer private, customized tours of New Mexico like the trip with my mother. **Sun Tours** was born at the end of 1977. I advertised in national magazines that appealed to a cultured audience. My ads produced only one response—Marie Parrish from Florida. She had a memorable tour of northern New Mexico. She was an artist so we visited many art galleries and met some well-known artists.

Since my marketing efforts had resulted in only one client, I realized that I needed a better idea. Maybe senior citizen groups would be interested in bus tours of the Southwest. First I scouted the Southwest and developed a 14-day tour that included my favorite places. Then, I pitched the tour to every senior organization in Albuquerque. Finally, I chanced into the office of Margaret

Fell, Director of the Palo Duro Senior Center, the only senior center in Albuquerque at that time. Margaret was also in charge of the center’s travel program.

Margaret thought my tour idea was too long; however, she was interested in three shorter trips—fall foliage in Colorado, Sedona, and southern New Mexico. I assured Margaret that I could operate the tours for the center. Margaret trusted her instincts and gave me the commission to do those three tours. I first scouted each destination, designed the tours, then wrote up the tour description. This process has not changed in these 30 years.

In September 1978 **Sun Tours** operated its first Colorado Aspen Color tour. In October it was Sedona and northern Arizona. In November it was southern New Mexico. The tours all sold out. The travelers enjoyed their tours and spread the good word. These are all still popular destinations for **Sun Tours** clients today.

As a result of these successes, Margaret gave me commissions for new tours for 1979. The process repeated itself until 1981 when Palo Duro Senior Center stopped offering tours. **Sun Tours** then began selling directly to the public. The years of happy clients made the transition easy and 1982 was our most successful ever. That year **Sun Tours** opened its first office at 5201 Ponderosa NE, just across the arroyo from the Palo Duro Senior Center.

During these early years I also ran tours for Nora Franks, the travel organizer for the downtown YWCA. Like the Palo Duro clients, many YWCA travelers became lifelong **Sun Tours** clients.

In 1985 we moved into our present building which had just been built. Since then we have expanded our space three times. We have a staff and a group of tour directors of whom I am very proud. We all care enough to do our best for our clients.

Check your mailbox in mid September for your **Sun Tours** Family Picnic invitation.

Happy Trails,

Karl