

Historic Significance and Integrity Assessment Report for Listing Sugar Bowl on the Scottsdale Historic Register

Sugar Bowl

3935 and 4005 North Scottsdale Road, Scottsdale, Arizona

Scottsdale Historic Register No. SHR –04-15

Zoning Case No. 20-ZN-2003

Background

The City Historic Preservation Office staff conducted an intensive survey of downtown Scottsdale with assistance from Arizona State University interns, local historians and architects during the period 2000-2001. The goal of the survey was to identify those properties that might be eligible for listing on the Scottsdale Historic Register. Approximately 750 properties, built for commercial use, were studied with particular emphasis on those properties that related to Scottsdale's historic development as an "Arts Colony and Tourist Destination." The Scottsdale Historic Preservation Commission and the members of the Commission's Historic Register Committee periodically reviewed the research collected and conducted field studies of the survey properties. Their relative significance and integrity were analyzed and compared. As a result of this effort, approximately two dozen properties were identified that merited further consideration for designation to the Scottsdale Historic Register for their association with important historic events and representation of the architectural influences that shaped Scottsdale development during the post World War II era. The Sugar Bowl building was among those properties that were identified as having historic significance and a high degree of integrity of location, design, materials, setting and workmanship.

Description

The Sugar Bowl building is located on a .13-acre parcel at the southeast corner of Scottsdale Road and First Avenue in Scottsdale, Arizona and is identified under Maricopa County Assessor PIN #130-23-101. It is located in the heart of Old Town Scottsdale in a busy area of retail shops, restaurants and offices. Originally constructed in 1950 for Western Motor Service, the building was adapted for reuse in 1958 by the Sugar Bowl Ice Cream Parlor and The Cancellation Shoe Center. The Sugar Bowl has continuously operated from this location for more than 45 years. AZ-Accents gift shop currently does business from the other retail space in the building.

The rectilinear building is oriented broadside to Scottsdale Road, the main north-south street in the downtown area of the City. The footprint of the 5,000 square foot building occupies the entire parcel, with the north and west facades constructed to the sidewalk. An alley separates it from another building to the south and an asphalt parking lot is located to the east off of First Avenue. The Sugar Bowl building is constructed in the themed "Old West" Architectural Style.

The building is a single story, simple form with a flat roof obscured by a parapet with wood molding on the north and west facades that give the appearance of extra volume. The rectilinear plan cuts in at the northeast corner to provide a service entrance and outside storage area for the Sugar Bowl Ice Cream Parlor. On the northwest, the building edges wrap around at a 45-degree

angle, creating a street corner façade. Exterior walls are constructed of concrete block and nine simple block buttresses adorn the east façade.

The building's Western Style is characterized by a conscious use of specific materials and features. The parapet walls are clad with wood flush-board applied vertically with a simple wood band cornice. An identical band of molding adorns these facades directly above the porch canopy. Vertical wood cladding also sheaths the entire west façade fronting Scottsdale Road.

A porch canopy, extending west and wrapping partially around the north façade, further defines the building's architectural style. Metal guy wires attach the canopy to the parapet cornice. Constructed with wood planks sheathed in wood shake shingles, the porch extends out above the windows. A scalloped canvas with stripes has been added to the porch fascia outside the Sugar Bowl business and provides "parlor" decoration.

Large display windows are a character-defining feature of the building. These extend from a foot above the ground to just below the porch ceiling. Arranged in bands, they wrap around the street corner and punctuate the main façades, showing off interior retail space activities. These display windows are fixed, with wood molding and sashes. Steel casement windows are found in the work and storage areas of the building off First Avenue and the east side parking lot. Double wood doors with arched glazed panels and solid rectangular panels provide entry to the Sugar Bowl Ice Cream Parlor. The entry to AZ-Accents is a single, contemporary glazed door with a metal frame. Two services doors provide access to both business spaces on the north and south sides of the building.

Extra western detailing is achieved with the Sugar Bowl signage. Large wood letters, in a rustic style font have been applied to the parapet walls on the two street facades. The signage is lighted at night by old-fashioned fixtures that cantilever from the cornice.



History

Western Motor Service designed this building in 1950 "especially for Scottsdale's Western atmosphere" and held their grand opening on December 15th. Their simple design combined modern retail elements with the emerging Old West Style intentionally adopted by downtown businesses in the early 1950s to attract tourists. Building facades were deliberately clad with

wood flush-board, and “false front” elements such as parapet walls that had been borrowed from “boom town” architecture, first seen almost 100 years earlier. In addition, a Western Style porch walkway extended over the display windows.

Reflecting both the retail and automotive services they offered, the building was originally divided into spaces for merchandising as well as automotive repairs. A band of large windows on the north and west street sides displayed an impressive selection of goods inside “on new and modern display counters and shelves.” These large, picture-frame windows and the emphasis on interior displays were two of the principal design characteristics of mid-twentieth century stores. These features created an “open front” that allowed a store’s entire interior to become the “display window” instead of just a front window zone. Functioning as the town’s “general store” Western Motor Service’s merchandise included a range of products from auto supplies, housewares, hardware, and gardening. Three auto bays were accessible from Scottsdale Road where services such as tire and battery checks, brake adjustments, and wheel alignments were provided.

As downtown Scottsdale businesses evolved, a pattern of building reuse and adaptation to the “Dodge City” architecture continued into the late 1950s. In 1958, the Sugar Bowl and Cancellation Shoe Center took over the Western Service space. The auto service bays were retrofitted to match the band of display windows in the original retail space at the building’s north end. The existing Western style overhang was also extended across the entire west façade on Scottsdale Road. Parlor pattern double doors into the Sugar Bowl replaced the original door and another entry door was added to the new, second retail space in the former auto bays. These modifications remained true to both modern storefront design principals and to the Old West architectural theme that officially characterized the downtown by that time.

Jack Huntress opened the Sugar Bowl Ice Cream Parlor on Christmas Eve 1958, capitalizing on a need for a family oriented downtown restaurant. After retiring as a Chrysler marketing and sales rep from Detroit he moved his family to Paradise Valley to take advantage of the lifestyle and the area’s natural beauty, a common Valley trend in the post World War II era. The idea for an ice cream parlor sprang to him one night after overhearing a patron at an establishment where he and his family were dining comment that children should not be in a restaurant that served alcohol. Not long thereafter Jack and a partner opened the Sugar Bowl, patterned after an old fashioned ice cream parlor in a San Francisco Hotel.

The business has become a Scottsdale institution, serving generations of local families and tourists. National exposure came early on when Bill Keane began featuring the Sugar Bowl in his Family Circus cartoon strips. Many of Keane’s drawings decorate the walls and the menu. Pat Thompson, who moved to Scottsdale in the 1950s and became a prominent commercial artist and owner of the Sketchbook art studio, designed the menu’s front cover, which has remained unchanged. Even the Huntress family is still involved. In 1981, Jack’s nephew Carroll Huntress came to work at the restaurant, eventually purchasing it 1985. Since it’s opening more than 45 years ago, The Sugar Bowl’s old-time parlor interior has changed very little and the building’s exterior continues to display the features and materials of a modern 1950s storefront in the unique downtown Scottsdale Western Style design theme.

Significance

The Sugar Bowl building is both historically and architecturally significant. It is important for its association with Scottsdale's Post World War II community planning and development patterns and for its association with the town's social history. It is representative of a period when the town became a major tourist destination and helps to illustrate the evolutionary pattern of downtown retail development during this vital era. The architecture of the building is significant for its ability to convey the principals of mid-twentieth century storefront design in addition to the Western Style deliberately adopted by downtown businesses as part of their postwar marketing efforts.

The physical features of the Sugar Bowl building continue to express their association with both the historic and architectural themes of significance. The building remains at its original corner location in its setting within the heart of bustling Old Town. The numerous art galleries, gift shops, restaurants, and entertainment venues that opened downtown during the postwar period made the area a prime destination for vacationing tourists from all over the Valley. Abutting wide sidewalks and one of the City's major roads, the Sugar Bowl building continues to prominently address passing pedestrian and automobile traffic, a typical feature of downtown retail establishments.

The blending of modern elements and Western Style architecture still convey the historic design intentions. These elements include a simple, open plan with large, picture-window displays that reflect the building's historic function as a retail center. In addition, porch walkways, false front parapet walls, and rustic signage express the Old West Style that prominent local businessmen consciously promoted in the postwar era of Scottsdale's downtown development.

Specific materials also articulate the historic significance of the Sugar Bowl. The use of concrete block for the building's exterior walls was decidedly modern as were the large panels of glazing. Block was the least expensive and most readily available building material in the metropolitan area as a result of the phenomenal postwar success of the locally operated Superlite Builders Supply Company. In addition, wood flush-board cladding and lettering were used to reinforce the building's Western styling. The Sugar Bowl's materials were machine-made and reflect the innovative manufacturing practices that became possible in the postwar era with the application of new industrial technologies.

The presence of the Sugar Bowl's physical features, which are largely intact, continues to convey a sense of the building's historic character and its association with postwar development patterns, social history, and architectural styles in downtown Scottsdale.