

John F. Long

John F. Long symbolizes the explosive growth of post-war Phoenix, Arizona. An unassuming but supremely confident man whose character was forged during the Depression, many view him as a visionary, whose innovative building techniques spread from his native Arizona around the world. A humanitarian whose philanthropy and generosity are far reaching, Long describes himself as “a lone wolf,” an ordinary, hard-working man who, when he sees something that needs to be done, does it.

He is Arizona’s largest homebuilder and among the top ten in the nation. Born in Phoenix on May 17, 1920, Mr. Long worked on the family farm during his youth, graduated from high school in 1939, served four years in the Army Air Corps during World War II, and engaged in two short disappointing ventures in business before finally hitting his stride.

With money he was able to save after his second failed venture in business in 1946 along with a GI Loan, he bought a lot on North 23rd Avenue in Phoenix and purchased options on two adjoining lots. On May 1947 he married his wife, Mary, and decided to build a home. Together the newlyweds constructed their home at a materials cost of \$4,200.00. However, a surprise opportunity to sell for \$8,500.00 launched him on his fabulous homebuilding career. Indeed, his six-month \$4,300.00 profit appealed to him more than working for someone. He thought he would build a few houses on the adjoining lots then get out of the business. But succeeding homes sold easily and by 1949 he had hired six men to help him. When prospects approached he would put down his tools, brush a hand at his clothes to wipe away the dust, and lean over a pickup truck’s fender to transact business. Between 1951 and 1954 he built nearly 1,600 homes in West Phoenix.

In the fall of 1954, Mr. Long started the Maryvale development, named for his wife Mary. Today, 5,000 home Maryvale continues to grow from what was open farmland west of Phoenix and he leads the company known as John F. Long Properties. The industry and community awards, which began pouring in during the 1950s, continue unabated. Reports of his indefatigable work ethic and generosity of spirit grew to legendary proportions and the history of John F. Long’s participation in the growth of Arizona remains to be written. “I didn’t have any intention of getting into homebuilding in a big way and I didn’t do any market research,” he recalls, “we tried with each house to build it better and easier. Soon it just seemed the thing to do.”