

## AYC History: Tempe Town Lake

As told by George Sheller, July 2024

In the fall of 1966, James Elmore told his staff and students, "*Let's do something with the Salt River.*" That statement began a lifelong relationship with his concept of returning permanent water to the dry lakebed of the Salt River and birthing the "*Rio Salado Project.*" At the time, Jim was ASU's founding dean of Architecture at Arizona State University.

George Sheller, a freshman at ASU, spent the next five years living with the concept that grew in proportions. He was one of several students who designed the model for the project that was presented to community leaders. After graduation in 1971, George remained involved with the project and watched interest grow, especially in Tempe.

A massive proposal was presented in 1987, but voters turned the project down. Tempe's leadership, however, embraced it. Mayor Harry Mitchell was also a Rio Salado Development District board member who supported crafting dams to contain water fed by the Salt River Project's (SRP) canal system. Others joined Harry with their support, eventually resulting in a 3-mile-long body of water named Tempe Town Lake. <https://asura.asu.edu/james-w-elmore>

Fast forward to 1990, when George became the Rear Commodore of the Arizona Yacht Club (AYC); in the back of his mind lived the idea of putting AYC on the Rio Salado. This vision was yet to come true because the project was still in the concept and funding stages. A few years later, while George served as AYC's Commodore, the project was published, and the initial stages were ready to begin.

As the 92-93 Commodore, George proposed to the Board that the Club commit to becoming a Tempe-located Yacht Club. It would mean moving our post office address to Tempe from Scottsdale and our monthly meetings from Howard Johnson's hotel/restaurant on 24<sup>th</sup> Street to Tempe. The Board unanimously approved this change.

Once construction was complete, George, Jim Elmore, and other AYC members watched as the SRP valve was opened on June 2, 1999, and the lake began to fill. The lake's grand opening was held on November 6, and the Arizona Yacht Club was fully involved, providing sailboats to adorn the lake with movement and color. We even ferried the City of Tempe Staff around the lake on sailboats.

A group of Club members agreed that AYC needed a more significant commitment to the Lake project, so George, Tia Renshaw, Martin Lorch, Mike Yarnell, and a couple of other members decided to pursue a permanent Club presence on the shores of the TTL. They joined in with the Rio Salado Rowing Club and members of another paddling organization to form the Rio Salado Aquatic Center, LLC. This center was to become a facility for the three spots on the lake's north bank. The team worked with the City staff as an advisory group, raising funds and gaining sponsors for the facility.

After three years of effort, it became apparent that the City of Tempe would not support allocating a location to AYC for the project so we had to dissolve the LLC and refund all the monies raised to the donors, including the AYC.

Since then, the Club has run our Fall and Spring Series racing and the Summer Heat Stroke Series on the lake with TTL becoming an integral part of AYC's small-boat racing scene.