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An Edifice Complex

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By The Kaeru Kid
Nichi Bei Times Columnist

Have you heard of Arcosanti? This is a project of the Arcosanti Foundation to build a futuristic urban community for 5,000 residents. The foundation's stated goals are to "minimize the use of energy, raw materials and land, reducing waste and environmental pollution; and allow interaction with the surrounding natural environment." This concept was termed arcology, architecture coherent with ecology. It is located on Interstate 17 about 65 miles north of Phoenix, AZ at the Cordes Junction turn off for Prescott.

Located on a 4060 acre land preserve, the community needs only 25 acres because of the efficient design of compact structures solar oriented for efficient lighting and temperature control. Huge solar greenhouses not only provide gardening needs for public and private use but also provide winter heat. All businesses, schools, cultural activities, as well as apartments are within walking distance minimizing the need for automobiles. In this close knit community its design amazingly still provides privacy.

I first visited Arcosanti in the late 1970s when many acolytes of Paolo Soleri willingly contributed their labor for free or very low salary to help achieve this mutual Utopian goal. I wanted to see how much progress has been accomplished since then.

There were investors early on who supported his concepts but the majority of funds now come from the sale of unique bells made of ceramic and bronze. Since funds trickle in slowly, I would guess that less than 10 percent of the envisioned community has been finished.

Paolo Soleri is the Italian architect who first envisioned this project. Born in 1919, he graduated with highest honors in architecture from Politecnico di Torino in 1946. The following year he came to the U.S. to study with Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Arizona.

When he finished his apprenticeship, he was commissioned to design a structure in Phoenix and ended up marrying that person's daughter.

He returned to Italy in 1950 and was selected to plan a ceramics factory. While there he learned ceramic and silt casting techniques that he would incorporate into future projects for the rest of his life.

Upon his return to Scottsdale, AZ, he founded a non-profit group called Cosanti. Cosa means "things" in Italian and anti meaning "against." It was his way of protest against the status quo and he visualized simpler and more efficient construction techniques. Today the Cosanti

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