



City of Phoenix

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

Staff Report: Z-111-25-7 September 30, 2025

Historic Preservation Commission

Hearing Date:

October 20, 2025

Central City Village Planning

Committee Meeting Date:

October 20, 2025

Planning Commission Hearing Date:

November 6, 2025

Request From:

DTC-Downtown Gateway (.28 acres)

Request To:

DTC Downtown Gateway HP (.28 acres)

Proposal:

Historic Preservation Overlay for KPHO Building

Location:

Approximately 250 feet south of the southeast corner of 1st Avenue and McKinley Street

Owner:

First Studio LLC

Applicant:

City of Phoenix Historic Preservation Commission

Representative:

Kevin Weight, Principal Planner

Staff Recommendation:

Approval

Background

In April 2025, staff received a request from Julia Taggart, President of the Sunnyslope Historical Society, to consider the subject property for HP zoning. In July 2025, Ms. Taggart provided an Ownership Authorization Form and Proposition 207 Waiver signed by the owner, First Studio, LLC and, staff completed an historic property inventory form for the subject property. On July 14, 2025, the HP Commission initiated HP zoning for the subject property.

History

In 1948 John B. Mills, the majority owner of the Westward Ho Hotel, joined three Texas oilmen in forming the Phoenix Television Company. Mills, along with R.L. Wheelock, W.L. Pickans, and H.H. Coffield applied to the Federal Communications Commission for authorization to operate what would become the first television station in Arizona. The original plan for the station was for it to be located atop the Westward Ho Hotel, but after inspection by a DuMont Corporation engineer it was deemed unsuitable and,

instead, the broadcast tower was mounted to the top of the Westward Ho. This resulted in Phoenix Television purchasing land for the studio building, which was next door to the Westward Ho, from the Roosevelt Council of the Boy Scouts of America in August 1949. Designed by T. Lawrence Milligan, construction of the 53-foot by 152-foot, two-story masonry block box building with flat roof and parapets began the following month, and by November 1949 the KPHO studio was broadcasting test patterns. The building was designed with two studio rooms as well as two broadcasting rooms and offices. The start of broadcast television in Arizona was December 4, 1949. Arizona Governor Edward Garvey and Senators Ernest McFarland and Carl Hayden appeared on camera as part of the dedication program. This was a pivotal moment in Phoenix media and cultural history. As the sole television station in Phoenix, KPHO carried all four broadcast networks: ABC, CBS, NBC and DuMont Television. The transformative medium of television had a profound impact on Phoenix media and culture.

Even with all four television networks, the demand for content outpaced the ability of networks to provide it. This need in the emerging medium of television fueled a pioneering mindset that drove the creation of innovative locally produced programming. An example of this was the Lew King Ranger Show. Originally a weekly live talent show staged at the Fox Theater, it transitioned to radio in 1947 and with the need for content debuted on KPHO in 1950. Lew King helped launch the careers of singers Tanya Tucker, Marty Robbins, and Wayne Newton, to name a few. King clearly influenced the careers of hopeful artists, and he also impacted the cultural landscape of Phoenix. Over 200,000 children signed up to be a Ranger on Lew's show. The title came with a badge, a membership card and a sworn obligation to be a good citizen.

As other Phoenix stations were licensed beginning in 1953, KPHO began losing network affiliations, and as a result, had a pressing need for even more broadcast content to stay competitive. KPHO purchased a cartoon package in 1954 with the idea of presenting a children's show but couldn't find a host. Hosting duties were turned down by multiple KPHO personalities. Finally, a man named Bill Thompson who has been working split shifts between the KPHO art department and studio crew appealed for an opportunity to host. KPHO's Program Director Bob Martin had seen Thompson's character Wallace Snead appear on KPHO's Golddust Charlie show and relented. What Thompson ultimately developed became a mainstay of Arizona popular culture for decades.

At its outset, the show It's Wallace? incorporated not only the cartoon package, but also Bill Thompson's skewed sense of humor. Thompson realized a one-man show would not be sustainable for himself in the long run and he asked another studio employee, Ladimir Kwiatkowski, to join him in front of the camera. Thompson bestowed the nickname Ladmo on Ladimir, thus beginning the partnership of Wallace and Ladmo. In 1960, a recently discharged member of the US Army and son of vaudeville parents, named Pat McMahon decided to visit Phoenix. McMahon pursued an announcing job at KPHO and was able to watch the show in person. One day Bill Thompson asked

McMahon to join Wallace and Ladmo for a bit. Thus, the trio was born. McMahon brought a plethora of characters to the show, which added a frenetic depth to an already creative show, that ultimately became The Wallace and Ladmo Show in 1970. With its iconic Ladmo Bags and humor that never talked down to kids, the show became a cultural touchstone for Arizonans, both young and old.

The Wallace and Ladmo Show was the type of innovative programming that helped shape the post-war community identity of Phoenix, particularly that of Phoenix children, and had an impact that is still felt today. One child impacted by the show was filmmaker Steven Spielberg, who said in an interview, "I lived in Phoenix Arizona for over a decade, and I watched them every day, and even when I grew up and was supposed to be too old to watch them, I still watched them, because they were very hip. They always kept abreast of the times. They were Saturday Night Live before Saturday Night Live. They were Second City before Second City." While KPHO moved its operations from the 631 N 1st Ave building to one along Interstate 17 in 1972, the show continued to run on the KPHO network until filming its final episode in December of 1989.

With the relocation of the KPHO studio in 1972, the building at 631 N 1st Ave became home to several radio stations before being acquired by Ken Easley and Randy Murray in 2002. The building has since become a shared multi-use office space, home to a variety of creative entrepreneurs including video and audio production.

Eligibility Criteria

The eligibility criteria for HP overlay zoning and listing on the PHPR are set forth in Section 807.D of the City of Phoenix Zoning Ordinance. To qualify, a property must demonstrate significance in local, regional, state, or national history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, or culture, according to one or more of the following criteria:

- A. The property is associated with the events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history;
- B. The property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
- C. The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, represents the work of a master, possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. The property has yielded or may likely yield information integral to the understanding of our prehistory or history.

In addition to the significance requirement, the property must also be at least 50 years old or have achieved significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance. The property must also possess sufficient integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association to convey its significance.

Evaluation

Criterion A - Historic Events/Trends

The KPHO building is significant under Criterion A at the local level in the area of Communication and Entertainment for its association with KPHO-TV, Arizona's first television station. The building provided studio space and broadcasting rooms first for live and subsequently prerecorded programming in front of studio audiences. The period of significance dates from 1949, when the building was constructed, to 1972, when KHPO moved its operations to a building located along Interstate 17.

The KPHO-TV studio was pathbreaking as the first television studio to transmit television programming in Arizona. As new stations entered the market, KPHO shifted to develop its own programming creating award winning local shows that left lasting impacts on the community and local popular culture, such as the Wallace and Ladmo Show. These television broadcasts provided shared cultural referents for many Arizonans during the post-war era and fostered a greater sense of community.

Integrity

Remodeling took place which covered the casement combination windows, but in 2002 the property was purchased, and restoration work began. The original window openings on the west façade were restored and windows installed. The footprint of the building has remained largely unchanged since initial construction, and the 2002 remodel restored important components to the primary façade, resulting in excellent integrity. The KPHO Building retains sufficient integrity to clearly convey its significance.

Boundary Justification

Section 807.E states that, when applying the evaluation criteria in Section 807.D, the boundaries of a historic district should be drawn as carefully as possible to ensure that:

1. The district contains documented historic, architectural, archaeological, or natural resources;
2. The district boundaries coincide with documented historic boundaries such as early roadways, canals, subdivision plats or property lines;
3. Other district boundaries coincide with logical physical or manmade features and reflect recognized neighborhood or area boundaries; and
4. Other non-historic resources or vacant land is included where necessary to create appropriate boundaries to assist in meeting the criteria in Section 807.D.

The proposed HP zoning boundary encompasses .28 gross acres. It has been drawn to include the subject property in its entirety as well as the adjacent portion of the right way, as is customary in rezoning cases. The proposed boundary contains the

documented historic resources and follows parcel lines and street monument lines as much as possible.

Findings

The rezoning request Z-111-25-7 to establish Historic Preservation (HP) overlay zoning for the subject property should be approved for the following reasons:

1. The property meets the significance, age, and integrity requirements for HP overlay zoning set forth in Section 807.D of the Zoning Ordinance; and
2. The proposed boundaries meet the eligibility criteria outlined in Section 807.E.

Stipulations

None

Writer

Helana Ruter

September 30, 2025

Exhibits

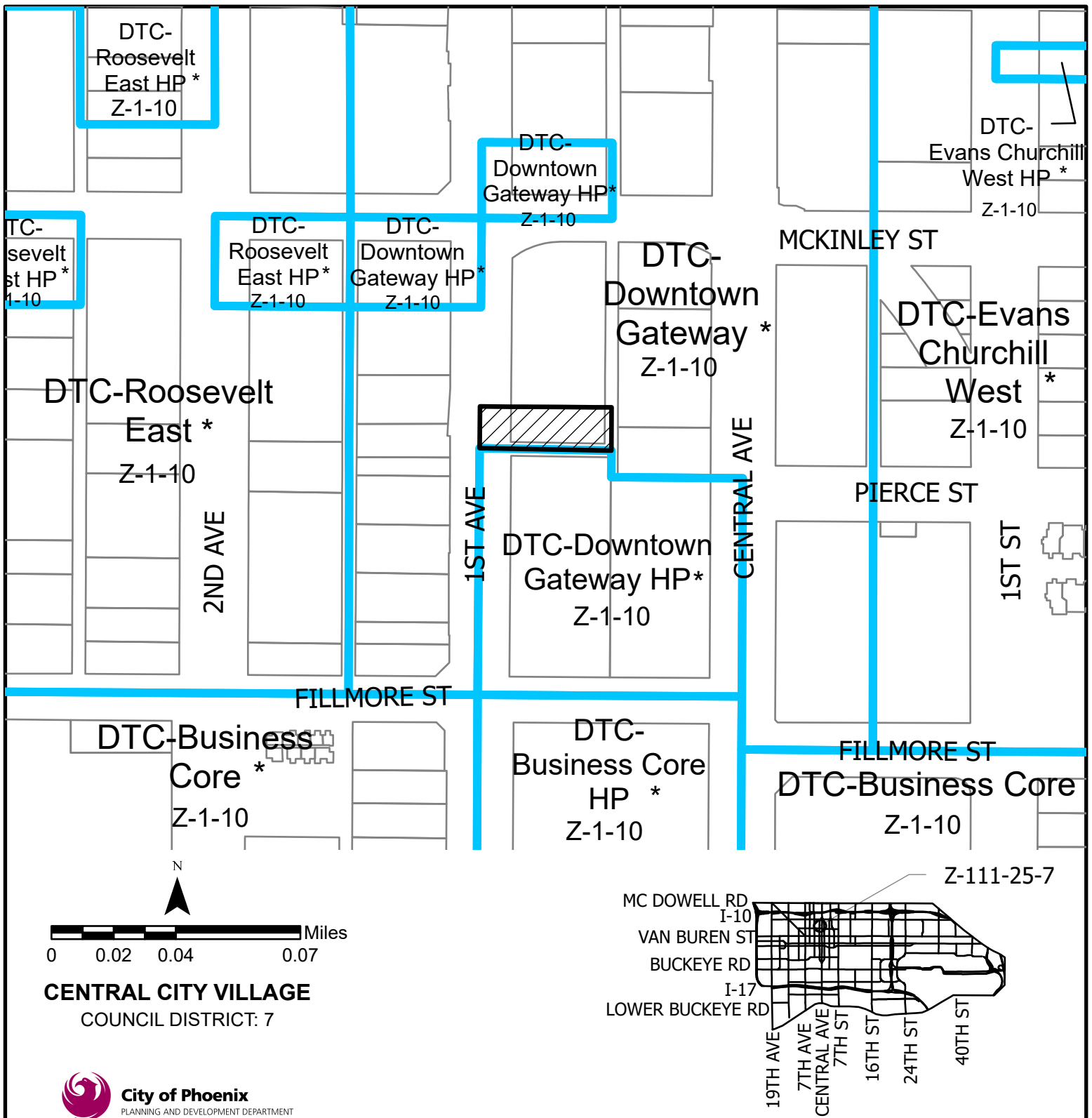
Sketch Map (1 page)

Aerial (1 page)

Site Photos (2 pages)

Archival Photos (4 pages)

Newspaper Articles (2 pages)



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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------------|--|
| APPLICANT'S NAME: City of Phoenix Historic Preservation Commission | | REQUESTED CHANGE: | |
| APPLICATION NO: Z-111-25-7 | | FROM: DTC-Downtown Gateway (0.28 ac.) | |
| DATE: 8/12/2025 | | TO: DTC-Downtown Gateway HP (0.28 ac.) | |
| REVISION DATES: | | | |
| AERIAL PHOTO & QUARTER SEC. NO. QS 11-27 | | | |
| ZONING MAP F-8 | | | |
| GROSS AREA INCLUDING 1/2 STREET AND ALLEY DEDICATION IS APPROX. 0.28 Acres | | | |
| MULTIPLES PERMITTED | | * UNITS P.R.D OPTION | |
| DTC-Downtown Gateway | | N/A | |
| DTC-Downtown Gateway HP | | N/A | |

* Maximum Units Allowed with P.R.D. Bonus



Proposed Historic Preservation (HP) Zoning Overlay shown in purple

Z-111-25-7
631 N 1st Ave
KPHO Building



Photo 1. Front (western façade) of building, looking east from Central Avenue, Google Streetview June 2024



Photo 2. Northern façade, looking southwest, April 2025

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Photo 3. Western (front) and southern facades, looking northeast, Google Streetview June 2024



Photo 4. Front façade, looking southeast, April 2025

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631 N 1st Ave
KPHO Building

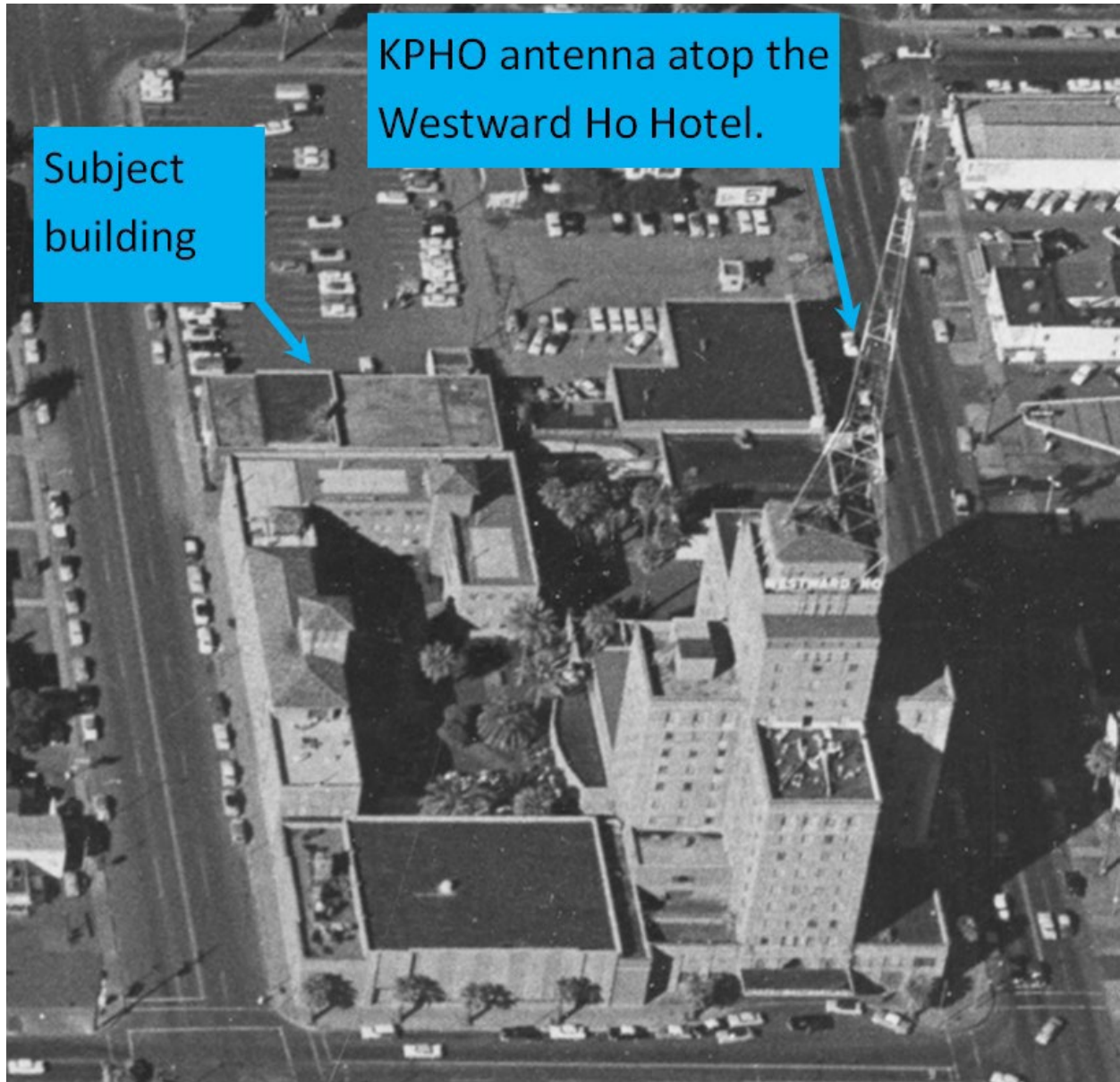


Photo 5. 1957 Oblique Aerial photo

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631 N 1st Ave
KPHO Building



Photo 6. View of KPHO Building with Westward Ho and Tower in the rear ground. Photo courtesy of First Studio, ca. 1950.

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631 N 1st Ave
KPHO Building



Photo 7. KPHO interior television studio room, courtesy of First Studio



Photo 8. KPHO interior television studio room, courtesy of First Studio

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631 N 1st Ave
KPHO Building



Photo 9. John F. Kennedy passing by building, 1961, courtesy of First Studio



Photo 10. Gold Dust Charlie set at KPHO building, courtesy of First Studio

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First Phoenix TV Broadcast Set Sunday

KPHO-TV will go on the air at 5:30 p. m. Sunday.

Appearing before the camera in a dedication program will be Governor Garvey, Senators Ernest W. McFarland and Carl Hayden; Rex Schepp, president of KPHO and KPHO-TV; John B. Mills, vice-president; Walter Stiles, chief engineer, and others responsible for bringing video to Phoenix.

Five network package shows, most of them tops in entertainment, will be presented during the 4½ hours the station is on the air.

These will include: Philco Show, 6:20 to 7 p. m.; This Is Show Business, 7:30 to 8 p. m.; Charlie Ruggles Show, 8 to 8:30 p. m.; Front Row Center, a variety program, 8:30 to 9 p. m., and Fred Waring Show, 9 to 10 p. m.

The only two local shows will be the Central Arizona Light and Power Company News, 7 to 7:20 p. m., and Piano Playhouse, 7:20 to 7:30 p. m.

Z-111-25-7
631 N 1st Ave
KPHO Building

ALL EDITIONS 13

KPHO-TV

NOW a FULL DAY of TV ENTERTAINMENT
4 MORE HOURS "5" Channel

MONDAY thru FRIDAY
Starting at **9:45 a.m.**
CARTOONLAND
CARTOON FUN BEFORE THE MOVIES START TO RUN

10:05 a.m. REX ALLEN WESTERN THEATRE
Arizona's own Rex Allen in absolutely first run post '48 Western Westerns

11:15 a.m. Morning Movietime

Mon. 11—Rex Allen in "Hills of Oklahoma"
Tues. 12—Rex Allen in "Silver City Bonanza"
Wed. 13—Rex Allen in "Thunder in God's Country"
Thurs. 14—Rex Allen in "Utah Wagon Trails"
Fri. 15—Rex Allen in "Colorado Sundown"

12:45 p.m. "CISCO KID"
Different, Complete Adventures with **CISCO and PANTO**
MONDAY thru FRIDAY

1:15 p.m. "AFTERNOON NEWS"
STAN GALLAGHER
Reports national news via UPI and Telenews Plus and local news about you from the **SUN COMMUNITY PAPERS**
sent to you by U.S. MAIL!

1:30 p.m. AFTERNOON MOVIE TIME

Mon. 11—Dana Andrews, Virginia Gilmore in "Berlin Correspondent"
Tues. 12—Richard Travis, Brenda Joyce in "The Postman Didn't Ring"
Wed. 13—William Gargan, Carole Landis in "Behind Green Lights"
Thurs. 14—Signe Hasso in "Strange Triangle"
Fri. 15—Lynn Bari, Alan Curtis in "We Go Fast"

COMING, MONDAY, MAY 18th, ALL **FIRST RUN** FEATURES

3 P.M. MY LITTLE MARGIE
"MOST FUN OUT FROM UNDER THE HOTTEST SUN" with GALE STORM. Monday thru Friday

3:30 p.m. "It's Wallace?"

5:00 MONDAY—BENGAL LANCERS
5:00 TUESDAY—WOODY WOODPECKER
4:30 WEDNESDAY—SKY KING & PENNY
5:00 WEDNESDAY—SUPERMAN
5:00 THURSDAY—HUCKLEBERRY HOUND
5:00 FRIDAY—FARMER AL FALFA

5:30 p.m. "Life of Riley"
William Bendix in 30 minutes of Fun... Monday thru Friday for you!

Watch for KPHO-TV's DAILY AD
KPHO-TV Channel 5 in Phoenix · Affiliated with Better Homes & Gardens Magazine

KHPO-TV Advertisement, Arizona Republic, May 10, 1959