

25-05-09 TheBuzz web

Fri, Apr 18, 2025 2:39PM 39:45

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Titan II missile, decommissioned silos, Cold War, nuclear weapons, Titan II Missile Museum, Brad Elliott, Vandenberg Air Force Base, Davis Monthan Air Force Base, fuel handlers, space program, Vista de la Montagna, Acacia plant nursery, Doug Sanders, nuclear history, Arizona desert.

SPEAKERS

Doug Sanders, Nicole Cox, Brad Elliott, Tanya Mosely, Christopher Conover, News reel announcer, Nancy Yob



00:00

Following is an azpm original production.



Christopher Conover 00:08

Welcome to The Buzz. I'm Christopher Conover this week, Arizona's former Titan two missile sites



News reel announcer 00:22

deep within an underground silo, a mighty blast touches off the 450,000 pound thrust of the new Titan two missile, the most powerful in this country's arsenal. The great missile lifts easily out of its 155 foot pit and high into the air above California's Vandenberg Air Force Base. This is



Christopher Conover 00:39

the that's a 1963 Hearst newsreel showing Americans the first successful launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile from a silo. It comes courtesy of the UCLA Film and Television Archive in collaboration with the Packard Humanities Institute. At about the same time as that test took place, the US military was constructing 18 silos in the Arizona desert around Tucson. Those sites remained active until 1987 when a treaty with the Soviet Union required they be decommissioned. Today, those silos have a variety of owners. Two are still federal property sitting inside Ironwood National Monument and the Coronado National Forest. Others are on Pima county owned land, but most are privately owned, with some owners happy to talk about

their silo, and others preferring to keep quiet. To start this episode, we head to the most well known of Arizona's decommissioned silos, the Titan two missile Museum in Green Valley. That's where we caught up with the museum's Brad Elliot.

B

Brad Elliott 01:50

Why don't you go ahead and have a seat in the command center? All you gotta do say we've gone through the process. We have the code in here with the launch order that we have signifies that this is not a drill, and we are launching the missile today. So we would stand at far enough distance where no one can do it by themselves. We would wait for the time that is in our code, say, Let's go at 20, and then we turn that key. Go ahead, hold it for a few seconds. You can release and you can see now, launch enabled.

C

Christopher Conover 02:28

Launch enabled has lit up on the the board in front of me, target two is lit up. So that's, we'll assume, where it's going, Yes,

B

Brad Elliott 02:38

and that's classified the crew, nor us to this day, technically, have the information of what target two is. It decreases the humanity of it a little bit, right? But, yeah, our process is started. It's only going to take 58 seconds from when we turn that key to when that missile is on its way into sub orbital space.

C

Christopher Conover 02:58

Yeah, we've gotten another one. Stuff is lighting up. Yeah, ABS,

B

Brad Elliott 03:04

are it up? So now we know that the missile is running on its own electricity. Silo soft. The silo door is open, yeah, it's running on its own gyros. You can get the

C

Christopher Conover 03:17

next fire engine, yep. And lift off. Lift off.

B

Brad Elliott 03:22

That was 58 seconds, and World War Three just started, potentially the Apocalypse, and

C Christopher Conover 03:28
the missiles gone at this point.

B Brad Elliott 03:31
Essentially, your orders now are to wait to receive orders, assuming that this was a real life scenario, you potentially might not receive orders, right? Because if the idea behind this place, which piece through deterrence, because they don't want us to launch our missiles against them, it would create a situation of Mutually Assured Destruction, right? But the idea being the United States never launched this unless we thought that their nuclear missiles were coming to us. So if their nuclear missiles were coming to us, there probably isn't much up top by the time you would receive orders. So you're basically down here with about 30 days of oxygen. Or you could go up to the nuclear wasteland above these

C Christopher Conover 04:19
silos the ones around Tucson. Did they answer to Davis Monthan? Was that their command center right?

B Brad Elliott 04:26
Tucson, Tucson was chosen for the location of these 18 that were around Tucson so that they could be stationed out of Davis Monthan Air Force Base. Correct? Yeah.

C Christopher Conover 04:35
We now walk out of the control room and head down the tunnel to the missile silo,

B Brad Elliott 04:40
and again, another blast over here, 6000 pounds. They still stand a quarter of an inch off the ground, even though they were built in the 60s. This whole silo, you know, thanks to the American taxpayer and the ingenuity of American construction is built so well. All that, everything about it, you know, could still be operational if we needed it to be.

C Christopher Conover 05:06
And here on our right, we have what looked like space suits. And the sign says, those are the fuel handlers equipment.

B Brad Elliott 05:12

So, yeah, this is the they call them rafco suits. It's the rocket handlers fuel equipment. They do look like space suits. You see the helmets there? These are not ventilated suits, so in Arizona, this would be a difficult job in the summer and just dangerous in general, the fuel and oxidizer are extremely toxic chemicals. One of the reasons why they use the chemicals that they did is so that they could keep them stored on the missile, which is one of the reasons why this missile could launch so fast. The Titan one program you cannot keep the fuel and oxidizer stored on the missile, and it had to lift above ground to launch so many innovations and ingenuity went into the design of this missile that it could launch from underground with the fuel and oxidizer stored on it cooled. It had to be at around 60 degrees. And so getting and maintaining that that fuel was a very important job to the program and and potentially did they all those patches that you see on there are really just to ensure that none of those vapors could get in the suit. It's not a design technique, although it does add effect, for sure,

C Christopher Conover 06:24

would because there are two suits and maybe there were more the people, the fuel handlers. Was there just a two person crew in here, so the commander and Deputy Commander also were the fuel handlers also, were everything else, or were there other people with those jobs?

B Brad Elliott 06:44

So the crew in the missile silos a four person crew at all times. So you would have the deputy commander and the commander, and then you had two other positions that would do maintenance or communications, things like that, in that control room, almost everything in the silo is a no loan zone. They require two people to be everywhere. But with four people, you could have two groups. And rocket handlers would work in pairs as well, more so for the need of the job than anything else. And then there's other crews too. There was times where there would be more than four people on site because of whatever they needed, whether it was maintenance or different things like that. So yes, the alerts were 24 hours at a time. You would have four people stationed here, and unless they needed maintenance of some sort, especially with the fuel, then you would have more people come out. We came away. Now have to wear a hard hat. I think if you're over six feet tall,

C Christopher Conover 07:52

I was gonna say all three of us are ducking as we walk through this.

B Brad Elliott 07:56

I know I can walk through without ducking, because I've tested it extensively to make sure. But it's so close that I still feel weird about it, and I still duck a little bit, you know. So everything is on springs that the command center that we just came out, that three story building, essentially underground, is all attached to springs. And you can see that these are too the whole cable way. There's your view of the missile. It's 103 foot tall missile, 10 feet diameter. Most of the skin on the missile is about a dime to a quarter thick. It's a two stage rocket, so you would get separation

C Christopher Conover 08:40

right, we're almost right about looks like where we're looking,

B Brad Elliott 08:43

just below us, yeah, not a story below. It's a nine story silo, essentially, right. And at the bottom is the flame deflector, or known as the W so if this were to launch, all that, you know, like when you see a space shuttle launch, everything just goes right, those house bands out, and you see this massive cloud. Well, in the silo, it would all go straight down, up around the sides. It's actually kind of a really cool looking launch externally as well. You just see this, you know, giant structure rise out in these and these flames and steam coming out the side. And I say steam, because when this is launched, there's a giant tank in one of the in several of the stories down below us, and it dumps the water not only keeps this from just going up in flames because of the massive amount of firepower that it's generating, but also to reduce the noise so that it's just not everything's not shaking and vibrating from the amount of noise that this is going to create. It is so loud. So there's just so much power in this. Well, it does look like a big structure from here, but that amount of power in this little amount of space is shaking everything and torching everything. And I mean, this is going. Into space. This is a, this is a sub orbital launch. It's going to go, you know, 6000 miles in the matter of 30 minutes.

C Christopher Conover 10:10

People might see the the nuke side of this, the Titan two nuke side of this as a negative, but there was a lot of positive with the rocket part in other parts of history, right?

B Brad Elliott 10:20

Yeah, you can, you can see the benefits of humanity technologically as a rocket, besides just the fact that it was weapon. But it's interesting because we actually did film parts of Star Trek First Contact here, and there's a scene out there where Captain Bucha puts his hands on the rocket and and data asks him, you know, since you're emotional, you know, why are you emotional? He's like, it's, well, it's weird that, you know, such a weapon of mass destruction could be used to benefit humanity. And in the movie, it's because they used it to do the first warp drive. And anyway, I won't say anything else, but no spoilers here, but it's a really interesting concept. It's a fun concept. And you don't even have to really be a Trekkie to be like, Okay, that was pretty good movie, right? And in reality, that's, that's really what you're looking at. I mean, it is a weapon of mass destruction. This is a the nine megaton yield is three times more powerful than all the bombs dropped during World War Two, including the nuclear bombs from every country. And if you know anything about World War Two history, there's an immense amount of bombs dropped in World War Two. It's insane. It's three times more powerful than all that. Having that kind of power is insane. But, you know, it did go hand in hand with the space program. These were, these were used to achieve, you know, arguably humanity's greatest achievement. Even since then, you know, it's last launch into space was in 2003 it's, you know, it was used into the modern era, you know, for for getting satellites up into

space. And you don't even have to consider it vintage at that point anymore. This is a modern rocket that was used to go to space. But you can just almost take this story of Cold War fear and be like, Well, it did, you know, and build on it, to build on it, until you get to the point now where you're coming down to a relic of history in this in this missile silo, and teaching, you know, kids that might be interested in the space program now the early stages, and not only the excitement of space travel in the 60s, but the fear that came along with being in the space race, and therefore the arms race, and therefore the Cold War.

C Christopher Conover 12:36

The next stop is a spot that isn't on the typical tour. A small elevator will take us down several more stories, very small, very old elevator. Close the two doors and off we go down to the bottom.

B Brad Elliott 12:56

Level seven, you it will take us right to where the engines would be, so that you guys can see the thrust mount, affectionately known as the donut. That's what the whole missile is sitting on. The whole missile, again, is on springs too. You can see those next to us sitting on this and if it were come to launch, you know those electrical the when it becomes self powered and it's running on its batteries, you've got these explosive bolts here that would pop off, and then it would be free to lift off.

C Christopher Conover 13:43

As you said, the engines have been removed from this, but we're standing where the engines would be, and you can still see some of the where the fuels would come in and all of that.

B Brad Elliott 13:53

And just don't lean against this here, because that's not mandated to support you, but you can see the flame to foot. Oh yeah, yeah. And so, yeah, that would take the fire and steam, and you can see the nozzles where the water would come out again to help reduce noise and keep this place from just becoming a giant Inferno.

C Christopher Conover 14:14

This falls in the category of did not expect to be standing at the bottom of a silo at any point in my life, moment, yeah,

B Brad Elliott 14:24

and I think, you know, there's such a fascination within Hollywood and storytelling that, you know, you've got shows out right now, like there's the show silo that there was the fallout show

that came out not too long ago. You know, you've got even shows like Chernobyl, which I think is probably one of the best shows ever made, the mini series that uses equipment like you see in the command center, you know, again, thematically nuclear as well. You get all these themes that are out there in pop culture that. I really do connect to this place. And I think, you know, people come and visit us just for that, for that experience of feeling like you're in a silo or feeling like you're in a nuclear reactor, you know it's it does give you that vibe, and for good reason, and you know that it's you might be attracted by that thought of experiencing what a silo would feel like, and then get this crazy Cold War history lesson that's harrowing and kind of ingenious at the same time. And there's just a lot of emotions that go on. And I don't know if you felt it when you turn the key, but whenever I do it, I still get that tingly feeling like, what am I doing? This is crazy.

C Christopher Conover 15:45

Yeah, exactly. I mean, it is, thankfully a moment in history. We're not looking back on the time the key actually got turned for real. But I'm old enough to remember, you know, there were some moments where people wondered. From here, we headed back into the elevator, through the cable way, up the stairs and outside, where a windy day made most of what we recorded unusable. Push it up. Thanks for giving this tour to us. Absolutely. That that was Brad Elliot of the Titan two missile Museum. The museum was the one site that the disarmament treaty did not require to be filled in to this day, many of the sites that used to hold those missiles remain that way. But it doesn't mean the owners don't know about their land's history. One such spot is a little less than 30 minutes north of Tucson, in the community of Catalina. Today, it's where you'll find vista de la montagna, United Methodist Church. Nancy yob has attended the church since it first started. She tells us the story of how a site for worship came to stand on top of a former tool of mass destruction.

N Nancy Yob 17:05

Our conference decided we needed another Methodist Church in the northwest area. St Mark's was the farthest one out at McGee and la canada. The pastor there, Reverend Jerry Haas, helped get volunteers my mom and I were members of St Mark's, and he asked one day if anyone would like to help start a church out in Catalina, and we volunteered, and said, we'll help them get started, but we'll be back. And that was 35 years ago, and I haven't been back as a member. You'll be back soon, one of these days. So they started out here. We started at the school Coronavirus K through eight, and once we had enough money to put a down payment, he started looking for property. Reverend cook came, looked at the property, fell in love with the fact that it was a Titan missile site, and he's the one that came up with once a missile site, now a church with a mission, and they all turned swords into plowshares. He focused on this. They looked all around the Catalina area. There were several sites where a couple churches are now across the street, but they kept coming back to this one

C Christopher Conover 18:20

in the area. Is it widely known what sits under the church?



N

Nancy Yob 18:27

I think it is. It's been written up in the Saddlebrook papers. And we used to have a Catalina paper here for quite a few years now, a lot of the newer ones, I really doubt that they realize what was here.

C

Christopher Conover 18:42

Does the church do anything with the site? I could see, as you said, turning swords into plowshares. I could see how it could work its way in to sermons and things like that. But on a regular basis,

N

Nancy Yob 18:57

not really. It gets mentioned normally. On our anniversaries, we just celebrated our 35th charter. We have a time capsule buried up by the sanctuary. In nine more years, they'll open that up, but we don't do much to celebrate the fact that it was a missile site. So

C

Christopher Conover 19:19

as the site of the church sits, and the site of where the missile silo was, how much of the church's footprint, if any of the actual building, covers the silo, or any of the other things, or is it off to one side or

N

Nancy Yob 19:36

just up in the parking lot, you can see where there's, like, A water spigot up there. That's where the reservoir was, and the well, and the well is still there. We could get well water out of it, but we don't use it. The missile silo itself is just right at the edge of the parking lot. Before you walk into the sanctuary, the antenna and control center. Are just up by the Sun wheel. So the sun wheel, the center Cairn, is where the antenna was. There's one concrete opening that's been filled with concrete that was the quarters. And we were told that if we ever wanted to clear out the concrete, which several of the sites have, we could use it. That's just way too expensive, so we chose not to do that. But yeah, so when we dug the footers in the area for the sanctuary, huge, huge pieces of concrete, building size. We also found out they just filled it with a little bit of whatever was here.

C

Christopher Conover 20:46

I guess it makes sense the government was deactivating the site. What do we do with all this? Well, we have a big hole we need to fill. Just use that.

N

Nancy Yob 20:55

From what I remember, they said they didn't do that, that that the property was really you

could build on it. But when the Civil Engineer came out, we actually had to turn the church a different, a little bit of a different angle, and they had to put in a floating Foundation, because of the dirt and the concrete, everything that was in the ground.

C Christopher Conover 21:23

I have to ask, since you were an original member of this church, when Reverend Cook came and said, All right, we've got this site. Oh yeah, it used to be there was a nuke in there. What did the membership at the time say? How do you broach that subject?

N Nancy Yob 21:40

He was just excited about it ever since he stepped foot on this property. And you know, when you stand out in the parking lot and look at the mountains, it's beautiful. This is where we needed to be. And he just had such an excitement about him over this property and how much it meant to build it up as a church, not something of destruction,

C Christopher Conover 22:06

in some ways, very, I know we're in Catalina, but very Tucson, too, the spirit of Tucson, the metro area, if you will.

N Nancy Yob 22:14

When, when I first moved here, the site was still active. We worked at Hughes missile systems, you know, living next to a tight missile site and working at a missile company. So the missile site was nothing. It was like, Okay, this is, this is great.

C Christopher Conover 22:31

All right. Well, thanks for inviting us up. You're welcome. That was Nancy Yob of Vista de la Montagna, United Methodist Church. You're listening to The Buzz. After the break, we head into a silo that's been excavated. Stay with us.

T Tanya Mosely 22:51

This is Tanya Mosley, co host of Fresh Air. You'll see your favorite actors, directors and comedians on late night TV shows or YouTube. But what you get with Fresh Air is a deep dive. Spend some quality time with people like Billie Eilish, queer love Ariana Grande, Stephen Colbert and so many more. We ask questions you won't hear asked anywhere else. Listen to the Fresh Air podcast from NPR and W, H, Y by



Christopher Conover 22:31

C Christopher Conover 23:20

Welcome back to The Buzz. I'm Christopher Conover. We're looking at what became of the 18 former Titan, two missile silos that once dotted the Tucson area. Another former site sits in what used to be untouched desert near Interstate 10 and tangerine road. Some large land users eventually moved into the nearby area, including farms and the former breakers Water Park. Today, housing developments are going up in the area, but a longer term resident is Acacia plant nursery. We headed out to the site and visited with Doug Sanders, acacia's owner. Hey, Doug, hey, Zac, Christopher, sitting next to a variety of plants is an unassuming patch of dirt with a metal door flush with the ground. Hydraulics push the door open, and inside is what Sanders calls the elevator.

D Doug Sanders 24:18

It's just a commercial scissor lift, but it goes up 46 feet, so

C Christopher Conover 24:25

the lift carries you down what was a dynamited stairwell and into what used to be an electrical room.

D Doug Sanders 24:32

Everything in here is on springs and rails, so that in the event of a nuke striking nearby, Earth could rock violently, but all the equipment stays stable, and it could light stay on, and the generators keep running. And then, while the earth is molten slag, that can slide back a 750 ton door and shoot back. So we have four of those large doors in here.

C Christopher Conover 24:56

I got to ask, how did you how. How'd you guys excavate this? I kept I have one vision of you and a bunch of guys in shovels, but that seems impractical.

D Doug Sanders 25:09

The previous owner excavated it, and it took them years that area that we came down in the elevator had been back filled with a lot of heavy stuff. It took a sky crane to move some of the hundreds of tons chunks of concrete up and out of that area there to recover it, right? So it was, it was quite the ordeal to open this now, all of them are a little bit different in the different demolition crews as to what they put in those entrance portals. This one was unfortunate. They put this massive, massive piece of concrete in there. Some of the other ones just had loose debris. So different levels of expense to try and clean out the entrance portal, I can imagine. So this is called the decontamination room here. There used to be a cabinet here with a bunch of space suits in it. And from this point forward, you'd have to wear the space suits because the fuel was so toxic that a couple of deep breaths so that would kill you. But from this point forward, there used to be a tunnel here that went 180 feet. If you go to the museum, you can

still see that tunnel, right, but they were removed from every site in Arizona and just filled with dirt. So someday I'll probably just brick this up or something. I haven't decided what I'm going to do with

C Christopher Conover 26:22
the interior design for a former nuke.

D Doug Sanders 26:27
So I've restored the hydraulics on some of my doors, so you have to have a key and a combination to get into the safe to push the button to unlock these doors. I kind of lord it over the museum sometimes, because their hydraulic locks don't work on their doors, and mine do, and they tell me all they need is money, because I didn't take much. I just know how to do it. So this is the short cable way in the museum. Says columns that go this way, yes, but you remove all that stuff, you get this really cool tunnel effect. And I'm probably just going to put, like lights right hidden behind it, because it's just, it's just kind of

C Christopher Conover 27:10
a cool, it's a cool, yeah, metal tunnel.

D Doug Sanders 27:19
So this is the former command center. This is the whole building here. It's three stories. The floors are all floating on these massive springs you see over here, everything of value was taken. The military took all the equipment out, and then they had salvagers come in and took all the wires out of the conduits and copper and everything else. And then to make sure that the site could never be used again, they took sledgehammers and they smashed all the cabinetry and stuff. So there was really nothing of value in here, so it was all cut out and removed

C Christopher Conover 27:53
down another level.

D Doug Sanders 27:56
So this is the escape hatch. So one of the reasons that I was enthused about purchasing the site was it's one of the only sites that the escape hatch has been cleared out. So it's a 65 foot drop that was filled with concrete grout. They call it because it's the concrete without the pebbles. Yes, took six years with a jackhammer to remove all of the grout out of this, this escape hatch, but I wouldn't be comfortable down here if I didn't have two ways in and out, since if that elevator fails, I'd be trapped, right? So we have a ladder up the escape hatch. So

this is a fan on a thermostat. The first year I bought this, it was very hot down here. You would think the deeper you go underground, the cooler things get, but in Arizona, there's not much temperature difference because there's no moisture in the soil to give you that that feeling coolness. So when the sun heats up the desert, it's hot quite a ways down too, because very stuffy down here. So I tried putting air conditioning down here, and I spent \$1,000 a month in electricity, and it made no difference, because the walls are 10 feet thick, and the amount of trapped heat in those walls radiating forward, you could not overcome it by just trying to swap the air out. So what I do in the winter time, and I bring in the cold night air all winter long when the temperature is below a certain threshold, so it pumps cold air in here all winter long, and then by springtime, I can seal this place up and it'll stay nice and cool until next winter, right?

C Christopher Conover 29:26

We're supposed to go to 100 degrees today, first time this year, and it's quite pleasant down here, about 68 probably. I was going to ask you, what do you do with it?

D Doug Sanders 29:37

Well, we're planning on building a house up on top of it, so it's going to be above the command center, the elevator that we come down is the plans call for that to being in the garage. So basically, this will simply become my basement. I'm not a prepper. I don't have any food or water or guns, as you can see down here, but I'm a student of history, and it's really, really cool to me to own a piece of American history, and if it's. Part of my basement long term. Then, you know, hey, I'm at, I'm adding 10s of 1000s of square foot of storage to my house, right, exactly.

C Christopher Conover 30:07

And it, as you said, it's, it's a piece of history, and it's really cool to own a piece of especially this kind of history.

D Doug Sanders 30:15

You know, I always use when I was a kid, I used to see farmers farming in Gettysburg, and I always used to imagine, what are these farmers thinking as they're going across these fields knowing what happened, right where they were farming. And I thought how cool that would be every day to be walking on a piece of history, right? And I think that stuck with me all my life, and when this opportunity came along, and I said that would just be wonderful to have a piece of American history, and arguably a piece of world history when you think about the whole Cold War. Now, on the top level, if you seen the YouTube video, or if you been to any of the other sites, the top level has walls, big steel walls, and it separates bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom, storage, water tank, dining room. I removed all those wall walls. It took 14,000 pounds of steel off that top level alone, which, by the way, caused all these floors to come up six inches, because they're all springs, wow. So let's go ahead and go up and take a look at that top level.

C Christopher Conover 31:17

C Christopher Conover 31:17
I'll let you go first.

D Doug Sanders 31:21
This is the room that had all the steel. And as you see, it's now one big, open domed room. It kind of looks like a theater or a planetarium or something. I've had movies up here. We've taken projectors and done large screen on the dome. I've had 40 Boy Scouts and sleeping bags, eating popcorn, watching the movie War Games. It was an introduction to them as to what this what that whole world was all about.

C Christopher Conover 31:50
I have to ask, when you said you're a history buff, and when you saw the opportunity to buy this, you did, how does one find this is an opportunity. I don't think they put it on Zillow necessarily.

D Doug Sanders 32:03
It was actually

C Christopher Conover 32:04
really!

D Doug Sanders 32:05
I was looking for a place to build a retirement home. I was just looking for acreage. And then when I stumbled on this, it just life started clicking as to when I was a kid I saw on the cover of Popular Mechanics, I think it was they showed a cross section of a silo where somebody had put a house on top of it, and they had an airplane next to it, and their own runway, and I'm a pilot, and then they turned all the floors into various rooms. And I think that image has stuck with me ever since I was a child. And so I think a lot of things just kind of all of a sudden clicked and kind of came together for me. And it was they made it very attractive to me. Gotta do it.

C Christopher Conover 32:50
How did you sell it to your wife? Because we all have ideas, both men and women, but you got to go to your partner at some point and say, so I have this crazy idea. No, actually, I'm serious.

D Doug Sanders 33:01
My wife is a very loving woman. She's she's very patient with me, although I think she's pleased with what we've done with it.

with what we've done with it.

C Christopher Conover 33:14

I can relate to that. My wife is also a very patient woman.

D Doug Sanders 33:20

So I've had a couple of people come up here and do some recording up here, because the acoustics are a very natural echo. And just for fun, I'll give you a sample of that if you stand over here, and then if you as you talk, you can judge, judge the echo. And as we walk towards the center of the room, you'll notice that it gets deeper and louder and louder and deeper and louder. And right here, you're in the center of a speaker that's just pummels your chest with your own voice. It's kind of a cool effect.

C Christopher Conover 33:52

It is without raising your voice, it gets louder and changes to good study and acoustics.

D Doug Sanders 34:02

So I've had a couple of people record up here because it's a natural reverb instead of an artificial reverb. So you can choose your reverb level by where you stand in the room. Plus, you know how everybody sounds good singing in the shower. Oh, up here, it's got to be amazing. Everybody sounds amazing up here,

C Christopher Conover 34:20

despite the unique acoustics of the top floor, we headed down to the Les echoey second floor to continue our conversation. So we've wandered our way through here, and it is truly amazing. I've been through the museum, and they've done a great job restoring it, and the docents do amazing tours. But there's something different about seeing this one more raw, if you will.

D Doug Sanders 34:44

It's kind of post apocalyptic, yeah, maybe, maybe, but not as but not with. Some of them look very post apocalyptic because they haven't done anything yet. They still have all the smashed equipment and all that kind of stuff. So this is kind of like maybe a step further. How long have you been working on this? I've owned the property eight years. I go hot and cold. I'll go a year without doing anything, and then I'll spend a couple months doing some project down here, and then I get busy with with the business above ground.

C Christopher Conover 35:12

Christopher Conover 35:22

How often do people like us, or just enthusiasts for history and stuff, call you up and say, Do I understand correctly that you have a silo? I mean, is it something that's probably better term driving traffic.

D Doug Sanders 35:28

When I first bought the property, I would get people weekly, and I think that over the last eight years, I've given a lot of tours, and I've been very open about it, like I said, I'm not a prepper, so I'm not interested in secrecy. So I think most people who wanted to have a tour have already had a tour. I used to charge a bottle of wine.

C Christopher Conover 35:47

That's a good that's a nice fee, yeah.

D Doug Sanders 35:50

Well, the reason I would charge a bottle of wine was not because I drink. Everybody wanted me to stop what I'm doing right now and give them a tour. And I would say, Well, if you come back on Friday night at six o'clock and bring a bottle of wine, you can have a tour. So it basically was a little test to say, Well, if you're willing to do a little something in return for my time, then I'll give you some of my time. And I found about 80% of the people who really, you know, oh, can I go see it? It's like they never made the effort to come back.

C Christopher Conover 36:16

Let's talk about your business. You're running a nursery here, running a nursery on top of a silo. Were there any particular challenges to that? Or if you didn't know it was here, you'd never know

D Doug Sanders 36:33

the challenges are, there are certain places on the property where I have concrete that I that I can't plant things, but conversely, I can use that same concrete as a pad for buildings.

C Christopher Conover 36:44

So it works out in the end. It works out in the end. So you said that the dream is to build the house, retirement home. What's the timetable on that?

D Doug Sanders 36:56

I thought I would have started that by now. Since we already have the place, we've already

I thought I would have started that by now. Since we already have the plans, we've already paid the architect, we've already done all that stuff. We've already done the permitting process. We've done all that. The last step is they're trying to tell me that I'm in a flood plain. And if you look, I've got a 20 foot drop off on three sides of this property. It would take a Noah's Ark level event for this place to flood. But they said, Well, that's what FEMA says. So you need to fill out this exception form and have a hydrologist sign it. While we've done all the topo work, we've done everything else, and I haven't found an honest hydrologist that doesn't want 10 grand for his signature. So we just bought a new build house up in dove mountain for now. And then, soon as I find an HONEST hydrologist and I'll resume this process and start building on the house.

C Christopher Conover 37:38

Well, good luck. I can't help but just keep looking around, just because this is such a unique thing, especially because it is in its more raw state than you know, the nicely painted up, which I know this will be eventually the version of the museum. But thanks for taking some time out of your day for not a bottle of wine, giving us the tour.

D Doug Sanders 38:00

No problem. We're happy to share that

C Christopher Conover 38:03

was Doug Sanders, owner of acacia nursery and one of the Titan missile silos. Sanders has a YouTube channel that has a variety of videos from inside the silo. We'll link to it on this episode's web page, and that's The Buzz. After 311 episodes, we're putting the show on hiatus. Thanks to all of you who have listened for all of those years. You can still find all our past episodes online@azpm.org and subscribe to our show. Wherever you get your podcast, just search for the buzz. Arizona. We're also on the NPR app. This is also the final episode for producer Zac Ziegler in 2018 Zac and I sat down across a table with our then boss to design a show that became the buzz. Others have helped produce and shaped the show, but this version has always been Zac and my dream. Zac, thanks for putting up with all my crazy and bad ideas and also keeping the show moving forward. Maggie farmer helped produce this episode. Our music is by enter the haggis. I'm Christopher Conover, thanks for listening.

N Nicole Cox 39:35

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