



Museum

River of time gets new director begins; **10**



FOUNTAIN HILLS TIMES

INDEPENDENT

Streets

Shea Boulevard widening contract gets extra cash; **8**



February 5, 2025

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NATURE

Fountain Hills Dark Sky Preservation ramping up efforts

Maintain town's International Dark Sky Community designation

By Bob Burns

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The construction of the International Dark Sky Discovery Center in Fountain Hills is an obvious physical reminder of the efforts in the community to preserve and educate the population about light pollution and its negative effects on people, plants and animals.

There is also work going on behind the scenes as the Discovery Center aims to open its doors to the public later this year.

Fountain Hills Dark Sky Preservation is now under the International Dark Sky Discovery Center's 501c3 and functions as an operating committee overseeing the Dark Sky Festival, Dark Sky Champion program and community education/awareness efforts, according to John Craft, vice

• See **Nature** on page 2

STATE OF THE TOWN



Fountain Hills Mayor Gerry Friedel greets residents following his State of the Town address Wednesday, Jan. 25. (Independent Newsmedia/Bob Burns)

Mayor Gerry Friedel delivers his inaugural address

Large crowd turns out to hear mayor's speech

By Bob Burns

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Fountain Hills Mayor Gerry Friedel delivered his inaugural State of the Town address to a capacity crowd of residents, staff and dig-

nitaries at the Community Center Wednesday morning, Jan. 25.

Friedel opened his remarks stating that success is achieved when everyone works together toward common goals for the community.

"The theater deals in drama," Friedel said. "We have town business to deal with. I pledge to do that."

He continued with praise for town staff saying they carry the heavy load.

"(The council) sets policy," Friedel said. "The staff implements policy and runs the town operations."

He introduced several key staff members and began to outline ongoing

• See **State of the Town** on page 2



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Winners announced: March 12, 2025

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State of the Town

• From page 1

ing projects the town is involved in.

The town currently has \$5.2 million in paving projects ongoing in the community, according to Friedel. He also announced that there is an effort to plan for reconstruction on Palomino Boulevard after the new fiscal year begins in July. Palomino Boulevard is a location where many citizen complaints come from regarding road conditions.

Friedel also stated that the council has allocated additional funding to wash maintenance in Fountain Hills. He said the town realizes there is a serious problem with fire and flooding hazards posed in the washes, and the additional funding will help address those issues.

Friedel also discussed the ongoing multi-million-dollar flood control project taking place at Golden Eagle Park. The park location is where three washes come together at a designated flood detention basin. Flooding several years ago caused significant damage to park facilities.

Friedel said the park is a major asset to the town drawing sports tournaments and other events. He said the current project is designed to control waterflow and mitigate its ability to cause damage.

Friedel also made a significant announcement regarding the Park Place development slated for the downtown area but has experienced significant delays. He said the developer is in the final stages of closing on financing for the project and work may begin by mid- to late spring on the next phase of the mixed-use commercial/residential development.

Friedel singled out Joe and Nancy Bill who have devoted more than a decade of their life to the International Dark Sky Discovery Center garnering more than 550 donors internationally. The 23,000 square-foot science facility is under construction aiming for a soft opening in the fall, Friedel said.

The town is nearing completion on a significant infill sidewalk project creating six to seven new miles of sidewalk contributing to pedestrian safety. The bulk of the project is grant funded.

"I want you to understand, these aren't Gerry's projects," Friedel said. "It is really staff, developers and people like the Bills behind these projects."

Friedel applauded the success of the first year of Fountain Hills Fire Department operations as a town department. He acknowledged his predecessor, former Mayor Ginny Dickey, for her inspiration and efforts to end the contract emergency services

and bring them in house.

"There has been no reduction in services, and they are doing a great job," Friedel said.

There are new initiatives that the mayor is bringing to the town including a Mayor's Business Spotlight to appreciate those who made Fountain Hills the base for their business. He also announced that in March they will initiate a Veteran of the Month program to recognize individuals from among the 2,800 veterans who live in Fountain Hills.

Future efforts

Friedel said he made a 100-day pledge when he took office to bring accountability to the office. "You have a right to know what is going on in this town," Friedel said.

He announced the formation of a law enforcement advisory committee to look at "what makes sense" for Fountain Hills, possibly having law enforcement follow the path of fire and emergency medical services away from a contract service with the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office. Friedel said he had spoken with Sheriff Jerry Sheridan who is supporting the process.

"This is not a reflection on the deputies who serve us in the community," Friedel said. "They do a great job for this town."

Another committee forming to assist

in planning is an Economic Development Committee, which has met once, and additional information regarding this group will be forthcoming.

Friedel said they would continue to set aside money for the future replacement of the liner for Fountain Lake. "The liner is in good shape now, but we know we will need to do this, and it will be an expensive project," Friedel said. "We don't want to have to tell residents we have a \$10 million to \$15 million project we didn't plan for."

Friedel noted that \$5 million has already been set aside.

He said the council will work with staff to prioritize and do all they can to address the backlog in street repairs. He also noted he has scheduled and already met with some of the town's working partners related to utility services, including SRP, EPCOR Water and the Sanitary District.

"We want to improve communication, and we are thankful to have these good partners," Friedel said.

Friedel closed his remarks with a pledge for government transparency.

"You have a moral right to know what is going on in the community," Friedel said.

Please send your comments to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines. Bob Burns can be reached at bburns@iniusa.org.

Dementia caregiver summit is Feb. 8

Second annual event held at Community Center

To help ease stress and provide vital assistance to caregivers of those with cognitive impairment, the Town of Fountain Hills and Dementia Friendly Fountain Hills will host its second annual Dementia Caregiver Summit on Saturday, Feb. 8, 2025.

The program is titled, "Empowering Dementia Caregivers: Strategies for Support, Communication & Self-Care." The

goal is to offer skills, techniques and strategies to relieve the stress of caregiving, build resilience and find joy and hope while dealing with a long and difficult journey.

Statistics show dementia caregivers suffer chronic illnesses or die prematurely due to the stress associated with caregiving. It is estimated that Arizona's population will soon exceed 150,000 people who have dementia and are over the age of 65.

The summit takes place from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Fountain Hills Community Center, 13001 N. La Montana Drive.

"Being a caregiver is exceptionally draining, both mentally and physically," said Fountain Hills Councilmember Peggy McMahon. "We hope this summit lets folks know they're not alone, there are resources available and a whole community to lean on."

Diseases grouped under the general term "dementia" are caused by abnormal brain changes. Dementia symptoms trigger a decline in thinking skills, also known as cognitive abilities, severe enough to impair daily life and independent function.

Several highly qualified and dynamic speakers will present and take questions from the audience. Vendors will also help connect those who attend with dementia caregiver related resources and/or services. A buffet breakfast is included with the event. As a bonus, attendees can attend a free virtual dementia tour the day before, on Friday, Feb. 7. Registration is required.

Full details and to register visit fountainhillsaz.gov/850/Dementia-Friendly-Fountain-Hills.

Nature

• From page 1

president for International Dark Sky Discovery Center board of directors and lead for the Preservation group. "We are raising awareness of the advantages of keeping our skies dark," Craft said. "We are not lighting compliance cops."

"This is about using 'smart' outdoor lighting."

Key objectives include using soft lighting and keeping it shielded toward the ground. Craft said there are also some locations using parking lot lighting activated by motion sensors that turn on when people pull into a parking spot and turn off after they have left the vehicle.

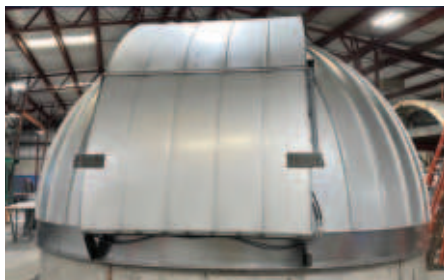
Most lighting issues are related to businesses, and the Fountain Hills Chamber of Commerce and the Town of Fountain Hills are cooperating with Dark Sky Preservation to get the word out to businesses and commercial properties, according to Craft.

Dark Sky Preservation has developed a recognition program, Dark Sky Champion, to encourage businesses and organizations to learn about and implement lighting practices that help maintain dark skies.

A release describing the program states, "Dark Sky Champion is a community award presented to recognized organizations and business entities that, by their very actions exemplify leadership qualities and practices in support of Fountain Hills' certification as a Dark Sky Community."

The Champion award will be reserved for organizations and entities that by their own volition have met measured attributes or engaged in Dark Sky Preservation to assist in achieving compliance.

It is anticipated that award recog-



The observatory dome for the International Dark Sky Discovery Center in Fountain Hills is completed and is being shipped from the factory in Illinois. It is expected to arrive in Fountain Hills within the week to be reassembled on the building. (Photo courtesy of International Dark Sky Discovery Center)

nition will be presented at a semi-annual public awards presentation.

The measured standards are described as meeting or exceeding the town's exterior lighting standards with shielded lights, CCT warm lights less than 3000K and avoiding light trespass.

Businesses that, where appropriate, promote complaint lighting products/services and have been a supporter of dark sky events.

Individuals, HOAs and building owners are also eligible for recognition when they maintain compliance with exterior lighting policies and practices and strive to meet or exceed local standards for exterior lighting.

Candidate selection will be done by a selection committee involving Dark Sky Preservation, the town and Chamber of Commerce. Referrals will come from those involved with these entities. Site visits will take place with follow-up findings and recommendations.

Paul's Ace Hardware is participating as a vendor to provide products and information related to dark sky compliance in Fountain Hills. A store display is expected shortly.

Please send your comments to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines. Bob Burns can be reached at bburns@iniusa.org.

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SHERIFF'S CALL LOG

Maricopa County Sheriff's weekly report

Deputy responses to recent calls

Maricopa County Sheriff's Office district 7 substation based in Fountain Hills is reporting that deputies responded to the following calls during the week from Thursday, Jan. 23 through Jan. 29.

Thursday, Jan. 23

*Town hall was closed and evacuated in the 16000 block of Avenue of the Fountains after a subject placed a suspicious package in the MCSO reception area of the town hall building resulting in the building being evacuated until the package could be verified safe.

Friday, Jan. 24

*Deputies received a report from a business in the 17000 block of Shea Blvd. that an unknown subject called the business and made a threat to commit a shooting at the business.

*A resident of the 16000 block of Ashbrook Drive reported that a subject was harassing a roommate by text

message.

Saturday, Jan. 25

*A resident of the 14000 block of Calle Del Oro reported that an unknown subject entered a residence without permission, grabbed property belonging to the homeowner, then left the residence.

*Deputies received a report from a driver that while attempting to back out of a parking space at a business a piece of rebar sticking up from a parking curb caught the vehicle's bumper causing damage to the vehicle.

Sunday, Jan. 26

*Deputies responded to the 16000 block of Shea Blvd. where it was reported that an unknown subject shoplifted items from a business.

*Deputies responded to Sunridge and Sierra Madre Drives where it was reported that an unknown driver had struck a stop sign causing it to fall over then left the area without making a report.

*A resident of the 16000 block of Ashbrook Drive reported a tenant

at a rental property attempted to fraudulently assume ownership of the property by contacting the mortgage company and requesting to assume the loan without speaking to the homeowner.

Monday, Jan. 27

*A resident of the 15000 block of Trevino Drive reported that an unknown subject made online threats to the complainant.

Tuesday, Jan. 28

*Deputies responded to the 13000 block of Fountain Hills Blvd. where it was reported that an unknown driver struck an unattended vehicle in the parking lot of a business then fled the area without reporting the incident. No injuries were reported.

*A resident of the 13000 block of Hamilton Drive reported a violation of a court order.

*Deputies made a traffic stop on Fountain Hills Boulevard at Ironwood Drive. The driver was stopped for failure to stop at a stop sign. Upon contacting the driver deputies initiated

a DUI investigation. Deputies report the driver was found to be well under the legal limit but was in possession of an open container of alcohol in the vehicle deputies reported. The driver was issued a criminal citation.

*A resident reported that an unknown subject removed the victim's vehicle keys from their gym bag while participating in a sporting event then stole the victim's vehicle from the parking lot of a park in the 14000 block of Del Cambre Avenue.

*Deputies responded to Palisades and Shea boulevards for a reported traffic collision. MCSO reported the collision occurred after a driver dropped an item on the floorboard and attempted to retrieve it while driving. The driver drifted out of their travel lane and side swiped another vehicle. No injuries were reported, no vehicles were towed.

*A resident of the 16000 block of Ashbrook Drive reported that the complainant's roommate took their property without permission and donated it to a thrift store.



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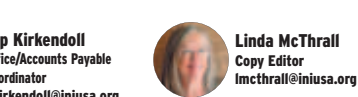
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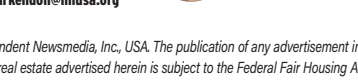
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Kip Kirkend

Check out upcoming activities

Week of Feb. 5 – Feb. 11

Fountain Hills Community Center is maintaining its schedule of week-day events at the Community Center, 13001 N. La Montana Drive at the Cutillo Civic Center. Activities and events generally require a Community Center membership for attendance

Activities are scheduled as follows:

Wednesday, Feb. 5

- *8 a.m., Back fit with Pilates.
- *9 a.m., Video gentle yoga; intermediate bridge; care cards.
- *10 a.m., Open paint studio.
- *12 p.m., Poker.
- *1 p.m., Scrabble/Rummikub; Euchre.
- *2 p.m., Open jam session; Arizona Travel Series #2.
- *5:45 p.m., Bunco.

*6:30 p.m., Ukulele for beginners.

Thursday, Feb. 6

- *8 a.m., Peer led exercise; aerobic chair exercise.
- *9 a.m., Video gentle yoga/Pilates; Tech Time with Mark.
- *9:30 a.m., Beginner line dancing.
- *10 a.m., Open paint studio; Spanish Club.
- *11 Quilts & More.
- *1 p.m., Table talk/women; Hand & Foot Cards; advanced Mah Jongg; mid/high improv line dancing; Golden Age of Radio; Great Decisions; No Greater Love.
- *4 p.m., Poker.
- *5 p.m., Open paint studio; movie.
- *6 p.m., Social dancing.

Friday, Feb. 7

- *8 a.m., Back fit with Pilates.
- *9 a.m., Aerobic chair exercise; intermediate bridge; Pinochle.

*1 p.m., Open table tennis; Mexican train dominoes; Woodcarvers/table top art; board games/Rummikub; traditional Mah Jongg; Siamese Mah Jongg; Matter of Balance; documentary series.

*2:30 p.m., Legal consultations (appointment required).

Saturday, Feb. 8

*Available for special events.

Sunday, Feb. 9

*Available for events.

Monday, Feb. 10

- *8 a.m., Back fit with Pilates.
- *9 a.m., Geri fit/fall prevention; open table tennis.
- *10 a.m., Men's Discussion Group.
- *10:30 a.m., Conversational Spanish.
- *11:45 a.m., Duplicate bridge.
- *12 p.m., Poker.

*12:30 p.m., American Sign Language.

*1 p.m., Cribbage; Pinochle; beginner Mah Jongg; High beg./low improv line dancing.

*2:30 p.m., Mah Jongg lessons.

*5 p.m., Aerobic chair exercise; Hand & Foot Cards.

*6:30 p.m., Mystery Book Club.

Tuesday, Feb. 11

*8 a.m., Peer led exercise; aerobic chair exercise.

*9 a.m., Video gentle yoga; women's poker.

*9:30 a.m., Intermediate line dancing.

*10 a.m., Hooks & Needles; open paint studio.

*10:30 a.m., Veterans to Veterans.

*12 p.m., American Sign Language.

*1 p.m., Bingo; Mah Jongg; movie.

*5:30 p.m., Open table tennis.



Bernard (Bernie) Burl

Bernard (Bernie) Burl, 87, of Casa Grande, AZ, formerly of Fountain

Hills, passed away peacefully on Jan 19th at home.

Born Jan 31st, 1937 in Frostburg, MD. He was the son of the late Thomas Burl and Freda (Quinn) Burl. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by a brother Arthur Burl; a half-sister, Davanna Quinn and a stepson, Dion Hartsock. Bernie attended Beall High School and was a driver for the Kelly Springfield Tire Company.

Bernie is survived by his loving wife Grace (Kifer) Hartsock Burl, 3 sister-in-laws Dolores (Warren) Howsare,

Clearville, PA; Lee Kifer, Bedford, PA and Cathy (Ted) Beers Shelsby, Darlington, MD; 2 nephews Brian Howsare, Wiley Ford, WV and Carlton (Shannon) Kifer, Niceville, FL; one niece Carisa (Brad) Bowser and 3 great nieces Morgan and Carlee Bowser and Lilly Kifer and 1 great nephew, Lincoln Kifer. Bernie dearly loved his nieces and nephews. He was elated when they would come to visit. Most of them got to visit him before he passed away.

Bernie was an avid car buff. He loved

Mustangs, especially ROUSH Mustangs. He was a member of the Southern AZ Mustang Club, Mustang Club of America and the ROUSH Owners and Enthusiasts. He and Grace traveled the US to car shows and events all over from east to west and north to south. This earned them the coveted Jack Roush Award and the Grace and Bernie "Many miles and many smiles" Award. It was through these travels that he met and made so many friends that have blessed his life. Bernie loved driving from Fountain Hills to Tucson

for the SAMC meetings and events. He was "Mustanger of the Year" for SAMC in 1997.

Bernie was a former member of Graceland Baptist Church in Short Gap, WV; Christ's Church of Fountain Hills, AZ; North Chapel, Fountain Hills and was presently attending Pinal County Cowboy Church in Casa Grande, AZ. Bernie loved his Lord and enjoyed doing Mission trips, feeding the homeless, taking care of the church vans; the weekly Bible studies and the Retired and Rambling group activities.

At Bernie's request

he will be cremated. A casual Celebration of Life Service will be held on Feb 15th at 2:00 pm at the J Warren Funeral Services, 525 N. Peart Road, Casa Grande, AZ. In honor of Bernie please wear your favorite car, truck, NASCAR, or club shirt. A reception will follow. If you plan to attend, please let Grace know so she can give a count to the catering service.

In lieu of flowers donations may be made to the Pinal County Cowboy Church; Reigning Grace Ranch; St Jude's Children's Hospital or a charity of your choice.

OPINIONS

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Can citizens save America's broken politics?

After observing American politics for more than six decades, I never imagined it could sink this low.

I realize that criticizing either Donald Trump or Joe Biden will offend many...Biden and Harris leaned far left of common-sense Americans and abused the separation of powers to impose their agenda. Meanwhile, Trump and Vance are authoritarians with little respect for the Constitution, using their power to reward supporters and punish dissenters.

Our Constitution established a government with a separation of powers because the Founders did not want an all-powerful president. Yet both Biden and Trump have disregarded constitutional limits on their power — something that should concern all of us, regardless of political affiliation...

As a citizen, you can take action:

- Speak out against overreaching presidents and in favor of our constitutional separation of powers.
- Don't idolize politicians, especially those who claim to be our "savior." All humans are flawed; none are perfect.
- Break out of partisan echo chambers. Expose yourself to diverse viewpoints, think independently, and engage in honest, civil discussions.
- Don't demonize friends who disagree. Listen respectfully, seek understanding, and learn from each other.
- Support the American Promise constitutional amendment to limit political spending so ordinary citizens — not just billionaires — have a voice in our democratic republic.
- Back the Open Primaries movement to ensure Americans don't have

to join a political party to have a say in choosing candidates.

• Consider alternatives like No Labels or the Forward Party instead of supporting major parties that prioritize power over national interest.

Joe Smyth
SCOTTSDALE

This opinion is edited for length and can be read in full online at [yourvalley.net/stories/can-citizens-save-americas-broken-politics](https://valley.net/stories/can-citizens-save-americas-broken-politics), 560038

It's always the season to be an angel for a neighbor in need

We've just completed the Christmas season. We passed by trees where we could pick paper ornaments and generously buy a toy for a child. Or maybe we chose to adopt a family through our churches and community organizations. It's practical, easy and heart-warming when we know the specific needs of a child or family.

At St. Vincent de Paul we wondered: What if that kind of "adopt a family" happened year-round?... How many people could we save from hardships and homelessness...?

That's the hope St. Vincent de Paul offers with its Angels on Call program, an app-based "adopt a family" experience. When our social work team identifies families facing financial hardship, they load their profiles and stories into the program's app. Through notifications, the app shares the needs of local families with a compassionate community of donor "Angels" ready and willing to help...

We have 440 Angels who have signed up by downloading Angels on Call in the App Store or Google Play. And I know from living in

Arizona for many years that if more Arizonans knew about Angels on Call, we might have thousands of Angels. But it starts with someone being number 441...

Ryan Corry
CHIEF PHILANTHROPY OFFICER,
SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL
PHOENIX

This opinion is edited for length and can be read in full online at [yourvalley.net/stories/its-always-the-season-to-be-an-angel-for-an-arizona-neighbor-in-need](https://valley.net/stories/its-always-the-season-to-be-an-angel-for-an-arizona-neighbor-in-need), 558134.

\$125 million in subsidies? Challenging Arizona's Hollywood handouts

Arizona politicians are eagerly forking over public funds to film companies that make movies in state — leaving taxpayers on the hook for up to \$125 million in subsidies every year.

But tax dollars should fund government functions — not movies. That's why the Goldwater Institute has filed a lawsuit on behalf of two taxpayers, challenging Arizona's unconstitutional tax subsidies for filmmakers.

Arizona has seen this picture before. Two decades ago, the Arizona Legislature enacted an "incentive" program for motion picture production that ended up costing the state millions, with little to show for it. After the state's own reports showed that lavish Hollywood handouts failed to generate even enough indirect benefits to the state to justify the program, it was allowed to expire in the wake of the Great Recession.

Then in 2022, when the state legislature controlled a \$5.3 billion

Opinion

• From page 6

surplus, film industry executives and lobbyists who for years had failed to revive a subsidy program seized their chance to get back in on the action. They cobbled together enough votes to enact the Arizona Motion Picture Production Pro-

gram, which provides up to \$125 million in refundable tax credits each year to qualified film production projects.

“Refundable” means that if a film company qualifies for more in credits than they owe in taxes, the state cuts them a check! That’s even worse than the old program, which only allowed for “transferable” credits, meaning the recipient could

transfer or sell the credit to someone else, but the state didn’t directly send them cash.

In short, the sequel is worse than the failed original...

Parker Jackson

STAFF ATTORNEY, GOLDWATER INSTITUTE

This opinion was edited for length and can be read in full online at yourvalley.net/stories/lights-cam-

era-125-million-in-subsidies-challenging-arizonas-hollywood-hand-outs,558115.

More online

Approved letters are published at fhtimes.com throughout the week. They will be published in the paper, space permitting.

ASTRONOMY

Planetary alignment provides celestial showcase

Fountain Hills’ dark skies provide great view

By Bob Burns

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

With the International Dark Sky Discovery Center quickly rising out of the ground in the Cutillo Civic Plaza area of Fountain Hills, it is no surprise that the town touts its dark sky credentials by reminding people of unusual or unique celestial events taking place in the heavens.

Right now, astronomers are talking about an unusual planetary alignment that will be visible largely to the naked eye over the next few weeks.

Vicky Derksen, host of the Night Sky Tourist podcast and serves on dark sky boards in Fountain Hills is posting to her social media sites, “The Parade of Planets: Your Quick

Guide.”

“All five visible planets—Venus, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars and soon Mercury—are viewable in the night sky right now,” Derksen said. “You can spot most of these cosmic neighbors after dinner with your naked eye. Mercury will join low on the western horizon in late February.

“Neptune and Uranus are also part of this celestial lineup, but you’ll need a telescope to see them.

Best part. This isn’t a one-night event. The parade lasts for several weeks, giving you plenty of chances to stargaze. Head outside after sunset and look west.”

Besides her podcast, Derksen is a member of the International Dark Sky Discovery Center board of directors as well as the Fountain Hills Dark Sky Association. She is also a mem-



Vicky Derksen with her telescope sets up for a Star Dudes program. (Photo courtesy of Vicky Derksen/Clayton Corey photo)

ber of the “Star Dudes,” who bring out their telescopes to offer people a

view of the dark skies.

Fountain Hills was designated as an International Dark Sky Community in 2018, just the 17th such locations in the world at the time. It is still the only dark sky designated community in proximity to a major metropolitan area.

The International Dark Sky Discovery Center will feature the Hyperspace Planetarium and an observatory with a 27.5-inch PlaneWave Telescope, the largest telescope in the Phoenix area. The facility will also include the Inspiration Theater, Immersion Zone and Einstein Exploration Station.

Please send your comments to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines. Bob Burns can be reached at bburns@iniusa.org.

Civility Checklist

How to engage in respectful, honest & civil dialogue about public issues.



☐ **Take the high road.** Respond to the topic — not the person. Refrain from demonizing others for their opinions. Assume those you disagree with are, like you, genuinely interested in improving the community.

☐ **Be respectful.** Bullying, public humiliation, insults, name-calling, harassment and threats directed at another person — or that person’s race, gender, religion, ethnicity, etc. — have no place in civil discussions. Find ways to respectfully disagree without questioning someone’s character or motives.

☐ **Be truthful.** Base your opinions/arguments on facts. Value honesty. Make only accurate statements when making your point and avoid exaggeration and stereotypes.

When appropriate, cite your sources of information that others may question.

☐ **Don’t misrepresent.** Always identify your opinions as opinions (not stating opinions as facts). Never misrepresent the views of others or falsely claim your opinions represent someone else. If quoting the words of others, identify and credit the source.

☐ **Listen and learn.** It’s both polite and respectful to listen to those we disagree with (as well as those we support) and be genuine in our attempts to understand their point of view. Expand your mind by thoughtfully seeking out views that don’t agree with your own.

☐ **Look for common ground.** When disagreeing with others, look for even small areas of agreement — which can be the gateway to working together for the greater good.

☐ **Respect privacy.** Keep private things private — whether it involves your own information or those with whom you disagree. Revealing private information about someone else is rude, unethical, potentially harmful and, in many cases, illegal.

☐ **Set a good example.** Practice civil behavior online as well as in public and in your interaction with others. Encourage others to practice these civil behaviors. And it’s OK to challenge disrespectful behavior — but be courteous, respectful and helpful in your approach.

CHARITY

Concours in the Hills is Feb. 15

Race cars, motorcycles, helicopters and more on display

Phoenix Children's 11th annual Concours in the Hills will take place Saturday, Feb. 15, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Fountain Park.

The "Greatest Car Show on Grass" will showcase breathtaking cars, motorcycles, helicopters and military vehicles, all supporting Phoenix Children's Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders as well as the Cardiothoracic Surgery Support Fund, according to a press release.

Concours in the Hills creator Peter Volny built a thriving advertising business around promoting the automobile industry. Migrating to Arizona, a "mecca" for car collectors, he



The 11th annual Concours in the Hills will commence Saturday, Feb. 15, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Fountain Park. (Photo courtesy of Concours in the Hills)

turned his passion for speed and exotic cars into the premier auto show that draws car enthusiasts from across the Southwest.

As a childhood cancer survivor, Phoenix Children's is a cause near to Volny's heart.

"We are honored to be celebrating the 11th anniversary of Concours in the Hills in 2024," Volny said. "The car enthusiast community is just as generous as it is passionate, creating a truly special event that attracts participants from across the country and around the world."

While the money raised has always gone to Phoenix Children's, Volny handed the reigns of the event over to Phoenix Children's in 2022. The auxiliary group, PCH50, now leads Concours in the Hills, with member Dr. Kris Birkeland as chair.

The group, also known as "The Fifty," has a mission to harness the energy, enthusiasm and experience of 50 driven community leaders as the next generation of supporters of Phoenix Children's.

The show is organized into sections

for domestics, imports, race cars, limited-edition exotics, off-road and motorcycles. Helicopters on display will range from civilian to military.

The show is supported by leading car clubs and dealers, including Ferrari, Lamborghini, Porsche, McLaren, Corvette, Viper, Ford GT, Audi, BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Mustang, Jaguar, Cadillac, Lotus and others.

The value of vehicles is many hundreds of millions, with several individual cars worth over \$10 million, the release said.

Concours in the Hills began in 2014 with 220 cars and 3,000 spectators. In 2024, there were approximately 50,000 spectators, 1,200 vehicles and more than 100 vendor and sponsor booths.

Event admission and parking are free to spectators.

STREETS

Town Council approves funding to complete design for Shea Boulevard widening

Contract with Kimley-Horn for \$99,891

By Bob Burns
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Fountain Hills Town Council has approved an amendment to an existing agreement with Kimley-Horn and Associates to complete the design phase of a widening project on Shea Boulevard through Fountain Hills.

The council voted unanimously to approve \$99,891.39 to complete the project design.

The Shea Boulevard widening project has been part of the Maricopa Association of Governments Arterial Life Cycle Program which is partially funded through the county half-cent transportation sales tax. The work

would be done in Fountain Hills with a grant of approximately \$1.8 million, 70% of the total cost. The town is responsible for funding the remainder.

There are two sections to the Shea work. The portion of the project being addressed with this funding includes the eastbound lanes between Palisades and Fountain Hills boulevards. It would be widened to three lanes as the westbound side already is.

Public Works Director Justin Weldy told the council in his staff report that Kimley-Horn submitted completed plans in late 2022, however, it was determined that additional engineering would be needed after geotechnical evaluations regarding slope stability.



This section of Shea Boulevard between Fountain Hills and Palisades boulevards is slated to be widened within the next few years. (Independent Newsmedia/Bob Burns)

"These investigations, performed by RAMM Engineering, have now been completed allowing the project to proceed," Weldy said.

Kimley-Horn will analyze the geotechnical finding and develop design alternatives for slope stability, and

incorporate the preferred alternative into the design, according to Weldy. He told the council that it might require retaining walls where the slope is too steep to obtain an acceptable slope for stability.

The plans are expected to be completed within Fiscal Year 2025, allowing construction to begin in FY 2026, according to Weldy.

The funding for the additional work is to come from the town's Capital Improvement Fund. The motion included authorization for budget transfers if necessary.

Please send your comments to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines. Bob Burns can be reached at bburns@iniusa.org.

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1:00 PM

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- **Top Gun-Maverick (2/7)** A thrilling aviation adventure.
- **Le Dolce Villa (2/15)** A 2025 romantic comedy.
- **Gladiator II (2/22)** A big-budget historical epic.

15

22

FEB.

15

A VALENTINE'S MUSIC SHOW

3:00 PM

Two talented Arizona musicians, brothers Sam and Josh Stefanski, are bringing music to our campus with a special singing and piano showcase!

Space is limited! Call 480-485-2950 to RSVP and visit FountainViewVillageAZ.com/news-events to learn more about these fun upcoming events.

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ENTERTAINMENT

PASS THE BATON

River of Time welcomes new executive director

Sherri Starkey takes on new leadership role

By Cyrus Guccione
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

With soon-to-be former Executive Director Cherie Koss stepping down from her leadership post, the River of Time Museum board has chosen its new executive director to lead the museum into its next chapter.

Effective Feb. 1, Sherri Starkey will be the new executive director at the River of Time Museum & Exploration Center, bringing with her a wealth of experience in the museum world.

Starkey has served as a board member for the Museum Association of Arizona (MAA) for over five years and has consulted for several museums throughout Arizona including the Deer Valley Petroglyph Preserve, the Maricopa County Justice Museum, the S'edav Va'aki Museum (formerly Pueblo Grande Museum) and the Tubac Presidio, to name a few.

She also consulted for the River of Time Museum during its 2018 Gala,

"Taste of P Bar Ranch."

Most recently, Starkey served as the director of museum operations at the Heritage Square Foundation and acting administration manager at the International Rescue Committee.

Starkey holds an Associate of Applied Science degree in Early Childhood Education from Northland Pioneer College, a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education from Prescott College and a Master's in Museum Studies from Arizona State University.

Water a priority

An Arizona native, Starkey says focusing on water and the desert is very close to her heart.



Sherri Starkey is the new executive director at the River of Time Museum & Exploration Center in Fountain Hills. (Photo courtesy of Sherri Starkey)

"I've got a lot of ideas but always want to tie back to our mission to engage, entertain, educate and inspire people about the Lower Verde Valley, the river that runs through it, and the life that water brings to the desert," Starkey says. "For me personally, I really want to do more with the desert flora and fauna and help people understand more about desert gardening."

Starkey says the museum's relationship with the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation in offering tours on the reservation is central to its mission of understanding the lives of those who came before. She is currently developing new events and programming and plans to expand on the museum's outreach and collaborations with the local business and nonprofit community.

Paying homage to its outgoing executive director, Starkey says Koss led the museum during one of its darkest periods, the COVID-19 pandemic, when roughly a third of small museums around the country closed and never reopened.

"This is my ninth year at the museum and to put that much time into it, you really hope that the things you work towards can be continued and transition well," Koss said. "Our visions are very aligned."

Starkey says for the past few weeks, she has become a sponge as she learns as much as she can in preparation for her new role.

Taking the reigns at the River of Time, Starkey says she feels blessed to be part of a community that appreciates the art, history and culture of the Lower Verde Valley.

"If there's anything you'd like to discuss or if you simply wish to get acquainted, please don't hesitate to reach out," Starkey said in her address to the community last week. "Your insights and expertise are invaluable to our collective success."

To contact the museum executive director, call 480-837-2612 or send an email to director@riveroftime.center.

Please send your comments to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines. Cyrus Guccione can be reached at cguccione@iniusa.org

PRESERVING HISTORY

Cherie Koss bids farewell to River of Time Museum

Former executive director leaves post after nine years

By Cyrus Guccione
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Before the doors open at the L. Alan Cruikshank River of Time Museum & Exploration Center in

Fountain Hills, Cherie Koss looked forward to showing up before anyone arrived to get work done.

In those early hours, she imagined the characters living inside the museum coming to life, envisioning the stories they might tell if they could move and speak.

"It's sort of the 'Night at the Mu-

seum' idea, that when we're not here, some of the statues and things have their own lives," Koss said. "I just imagined all the different characters that are alive and moving around. It's special to come into a place like this."

After nine years, Koss is stepping down from her post as the executive director of the museum, taking with

her countless memories, a deep appreciation for the community's history and the impact of the connections she's fostered through her work.

"I've met the goals that I set for myself when I took over and I have some other things I want to be do-

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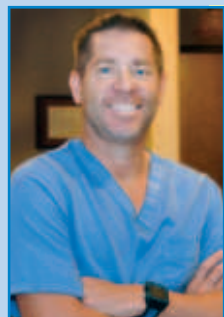


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Museum

• From page 10

ing,” Koss said. “It’s time for me professionally to pursue some new challenges.”

Planning to pursue consulting and contract work, Koss says she hopes to reengage with her passion of educating people.

With a degree in natural resource interpretation, Koss spent nearly 20 years at the San Diego Zoo which has received numerous awards for its exhibits, programs and conservation efforts since its establishment in 1916.

What Koss enjoyed the most was developing programs that were interactive - that sparked people’s imagination and got them involved.

“Wildlife education is my passion and I hope to get back to working with some zoos, aquariums and museums,” she added.

As Koss passes the baton to incoming Executive Director Sherri Starkey, she does so knowing that her work will continue, including the work done during the 18 months that

“It’s time for me professionally to pursue some new challenges.”

Cherie Koss

Former executive director of the River of Time Museum & Exploration Center

the museum was closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

During that time, Koss and her dedicated staff secured several grants to rebrand and renovate the museum and obtained its Museum Operations Certification from the American Alliance of Museums.

The museum board established its first long-range strategic plan and secured a multi-format publicity strategy during the pandemic.

“We really accomplished a lot in a short period of time,” Koss said.

One of her proudest accomplishments was obtaining the museum’s PAL certification which enhances the accessibility for sensory-challenged visitors.

As a certified Pal’s Place, the River of Time ensures its accessibility to guests with developmental disabilities.

“Among the many partnerships that



Cherie Koss recently announced her departure as the River of Time Museum’s executive director. (Independent Newsmedia/Cyrus Guccione)

have enriched our work, our relationship with the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation stands out as a true highlight,” Koss wrote in her recent address. “The trust and shared vision we have cultivated with the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation through the extremely popular River of Time/FMYN tours will remain a cornerstone of our legacy.”

The River of Time Museum belongs to the community, Koss says. And as it enters its next phase of leadership, she hopes the community will support it as the rich resource of his-

tory that it is.

“I’ve worked at a lot of different organizations and to have something like this in a town of this size is pretty extraordinary,” Koss said.

As Koss prepares to step away, she leaves behind a legacy of growth and transformation with vibrant stories that make the River of Time unique.

As the museum lights dim and the doors lock at the end of each working day, one can’t help but wonder about the statue of Jack Swilling, known to many as the father of Phoenix, towering near the exhibits.

“It’s funny,” Koss says, “Jack Swilling just looks like, if we’re not looking, he’s getting into trouble.”

Perhaps, in the quiet hours of the early morning or late at night he comes alive - continuing the stories that Koss loved to imagine and ensuring the River of Time remains a place where history isn’t just preserved but feels alive.

Please send your comments to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines. Cyrus Guccione can be reached at cguccione@iniusa.org.

RECREATION

Annual Skateboard Classic returns to Fountain Hills

Feb. 8 at Desert Vista Park

The Skateboard Classic presented by Musco Lighting is back for 2025 at the newly renovated Desert Vista Skate Park in Fountain Hills.

Participate or join the competition from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 8.

Pre-registration required to compete is now underway. The fees are \$20 to enter but free to watch. Open divisions for com-

petitors include 18+, 13-17, and 12 and under. Also there are sponsored divisions for male and female competitors. Skaters are encouraged to register early as each division has a limited number of spots.

Skaters will bring their best 90-second run out to the park to win some swag and up to \$500 in gift card prizes for first through third place in each division.

The event will also feature a DJ, food truck, and local shops including Brilliant Victory Skateboards, Skate it Forward, Tig3r12 Clothing, Phoenix Skateboards, Shado Clothing, Skate True and more will be on site handing out swag.

Visit fountainhillsaz.gov/SkateClassicRegistration to register.

To learn more about this event, contact Sarah Lind at slind@fountainhillsaz.gov.



Skaters perform at the Skateboard Classic competition in Fountain Hills. (Photo courtesy of Town of Fountain Hills)



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SCHOOLS

RECRUITING

Kiwanis K-Kids looking for new recruits

Students create promotion posters

By Cameron Chester
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Kiwanis K-Kids focused on one word at its Wednesday, Jan. 22, meeting.

Promotion. The organization decided its task was to create posters to help promote and recruit members for the club. The K-Kids goal is adding at least 20 new members, and they have various ideas to help recruit new students to join.

"The kids have asked if they can make announcements during school," said club leader Marcia Hoenle. "If the kids get an announcement during school, they can put some history up promoting it, and I've given them

forms so they can give their friends the forms to sign up and I think that we will get more participation."

During the meeting, students used bright posters and markers to create big signs that should catch interested students' attention in the hallways. The number of K-Kids has dwindled in size over the past few years, but that didn't stop the great work this organization continues to do, Hoenle said.

K-Kids supports the community by assisting or sending care packages to local shelters and retirement homes in the Fountain Hills community. Also, members have taught students how to strive for more and be leaders in the world.

Kiwanis K-Kid member Devin Gest shared why joining this club not



Kiwanis K-Kids member Aurora Robinson creates a promotion poster. (Independent Newsmedia/Cameron Chester)

only benefits the community but also McDowell Mountain Elementary and the students.

"I think people should join because it's a fun learning experience, and people can also do other things they never tried or learned before,"

Gest said. "You can sign up at the table some days when the cafeteria is open. You can have a pancake breakfast, the art fair, send toys to the animal shelters and other fun things that happen when we have meetings. It's a very fun learning experience, and the club helps our environment."

Students at McDowell Mountain Elementary School will have a chance for the rest of the school year to join a fun and exciting young club that protects its community values while learning how to navigate through life by being a leader.

Please send your comments to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility

Guidelines. Cameron Chester can be reached at cchester@iniusa.org.

Fountain Hills High School preparing for the future

Students learning the criteria for the next level

By Cameron Chester
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Fountain Hills High School hosted a Future Freshmen Night at the school's lecture hall.

The event focused on teaching the upcoming freshmen and their parents the criteria to be successful at the next educational level. During the meeting, Fountain Hills High School Principal Barrie Pinto, teachers Kristinia Robinson and Siirri Julian discussed the various types of diplomas, credits needed, classes and extracurricular activities offered at the high school.

Pinto shared more on the main

purpose of the introduction to the upcoming freshmen.

"The main goal is, first, to ease incoming freshmen parents' and students' worries about what high school is all about and, you know, what kind of classes do I have to take, how many credits do I have to have?" Pinto said. "We like to do it early so that there's time for discussions and conversations at home. We talked about the three different diplomas. If they must really make that decision kind of day one of ninth grade, and we want to give families an opportunity to discuss that and decide."

Parents and students also learned that Fountain Hills students must have a certain amount of community ser-



Fountain Hills High School teachers Kristinia Robinson and Siirri Julian discuss their PowerPoint presentation during the Future Freshmen Night. (Independent Newsmedia/Cameron Chester)

vice hours and career practicum work site hours in order to graduate. Fountain Hills High School offers three types of diplomas: Standard Diploma, Diploma with Honors, and Diploma with Highest Distinction. The goal of

the school's graduation program is to honor and reward academic success.

"The other reason that we do it early is because we want to know the interest, level of different courses so that we can plan our staffing and things for next year," said Pinto. "We only start in August, but I have to do all the planning. So, planning early with eighth graders, we kind of get an idea of which road, which diploma kids want to take. Then I can allocate the resources for honors or advanced placement classes as needed."

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CLUBS

POLITICS

Republican Club elects new officers

Cecil Yates honored

The Fountain Hills Republican Club elected new officers for the 2025-2026 term at the recent annual meeting when they also heard from State Representative Joseph Chaplik and State Senator John Kavanagh about expected legislation in 2025.

Elected were Dr. Dennis Cooper as president and Charmaine Roth as second vice president and membership chairman.

Re-elected were Boe James as first vice president and program chair, Susan

Sirls as third vice president and hospitality chair, Barry Worlborsky as treasurer and Debbie Skehen as secretary.

As usual at FHRC meetings, all elected officials present were also given an opportunity to make short remarks.

In appreciation of his six years as club president, First Vice President Boe James presented outgoing president Cecil Yates with an carved wooden elephant as a gift.

For more information about Fountain Hills Republican Club, visit fountainhillsrepublicanclub.com.



The Fountain Hills Republican Club board expressed their appreciation of the soon to be past-President Cecil Yates for his leadership. Yates has served with distinction for the past six years. (Photo courtesy of FHRC)

CONNECTION

Valley Singles celebrates 25 years

Social club motto: 'Don't do it alone'

By Cyrus Guccione
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

What began as a personal quest for connection after what she described as a “nasty divorce,” Fountain Hills resident and founder of Valley Singles Debbie Dehner says her social club has blossomed into a thriving community of singles who socialize, “stay busy” and embrace all that the Valley has to offer.

Now, after 25 years, Dehner says she is amazed she’s been doing this for so long.

“I’ve met so many people in the club, and it makes me happy to make other people happy,” Dehner said.

Hosting weekly gatherings like game nights, hikes, dinners and social outings, Valley Singles grew from 25 members to now over 200 members. Dehner takes credit for at least two marriages on account of her club.

The club was initially named the Fountain Hills Social Club, but Dehner started to field questions like, “Do I have to be from Fountain Hills to join?”

Wanting everyone 50 years of age and above to feel welcome, Dehner renamed the club Valley Singles and her motto is “Don’t Do it Alone.”

Dehner makes it clear that Valley Singles is not a dating or matchmaking service; It’s a group of social singles who get together for a variety of activities.

To ring in its silver anniversary, Dehner and 95 others gathered Sat-



Debbie Dehner (left) celebrates 25 years as the founder of the Fountain Hills-based social club, Valley Singles. She is pictured with her late husband Paul Martin. (Photo courtesy of Debbie Dehner)

urday, Jan. 18, at the VFW Post 3513 to celebrate together.

VIP club members Edwardo and Marijo Ortiz met during a club outing to The Monastery Bar & Grill in Mesa. The pair danced all night, says Dehner.

Edwardo and Marijo have been married for 10 years.

Pam and James Brenner also met through the club.

“James was one of my original members. He came out one night and asked me, ‘Hey, who’s that girl at the end of the table?’ And I said, ‘That’s Pam, she’s a sweetheart,’” recalled Dehner. “I introduced him and they clicked and the rest is history.”

To inquire about Valley Singles and its upcoming events, visit meetup.com/valley-singles/ or send an email to Dehner at valleysingles2000@gmail.com.

Please send your comments to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines. Cyrus Guccione can be reached at cguccione@iniusa.org.

ARTS & CULTURE

Fountain Hills students invited to enter art contest

2025 Dark Sky Festival

Students in Fountain Hills will have the chance to win cash and showcase their art with a contest for the annual Dark Sky Festival in March.

To enter, the student must attend a Fountain Hills School or be a Fountain Hills resident.

Students K-12 can submit drawings or paintings (no digital art) illustrating the community's dark sky. This year's theme is "The Night Shift: Critters That Crave the Dark Sky."

Students can begin their work anytime, at home or as a school assignment, but can only enter one art piece. Entries must be original drawings or paintings. Sizes can be 8.5" x 11" to 22" x 28", vertical or horizontal orientation. No matted, mounted or framed submissions will be accepted. No digital art or A-I generated art will be accepted.

Complete guidelines and entry blanks may be obtained from art teachers at each school. Home schooled students can get more information or entry blanks from peggy.yeargain@gmail.com or cindycarolcouture@hotmail.com.

All artwork must be submitted with an official entry form, signed by

the parent or legal guardian and taped to the back.

Grade level prize categories include Kindergarten, 1-3, 4-5, 6-8, 9-10 and 11-12. The top 10 pieces from each grade level category will be on display in the Community Center during the week leading to the festival.

Kindergarten winners will receive \$25 each for the top three entries. Grades 1-12 first place winners in each category will receive \$100, second place \$50 and third place \$25. Winners will be notified by email. Prizes for the top three entries will be awarded at 4 p.m. on the Community Center Ballroom stage during the Dark Sky Festival on Saturday, March 29. Students will be notified of their top three status prior to the festival but will find out their prize placement during the ceremony.

The deadline to submit artwork to the student's art teacher, school office, or to Peggy Yeargain or Cindy Couture is Thursday, Feb. 27. The submissions will be picked up the day after the deadline at each Fountain Hills School office, or you may contact Couture or Yeargain to drop them off. All entries will be returned to the school for pick up or may be picked up from the contest organizers in April.

TOWN COUNCIL APPROVES ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR WASH MAINTENANCE

The Town Council unanimously approved additional funding to have a landscape company expand its maintenance operations in the washes to cut down on hazards, including fire threat. If you missed our earlier reporting, you can catch up online at fhtimes.com/stories/fountain-hills-town-council-approves-additional-funding-for-wash-maintenance,559388.



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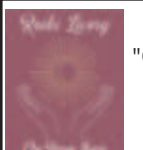
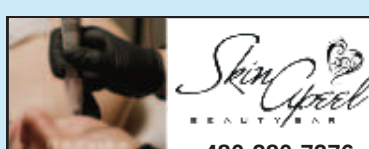
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RELIGION

DEDICATION

Ascension priest celebrates 30 years of ordination

Fr. Jilson says 'Excitement has never been lost'

By Cyrus Guccione
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

At the end of each day, when the parishioners have left and the sanctuary is quiet, The Rev. Father Jilson Panakkal can be found alone in an hour of private adoration before the blessed sacrament, praying and listening to God.

"That hour gives me the courage I need every day," Panakkal said. "I submit everything to the Lord and I feel at ease."

Celebrating 30 years of his priestly ordination, Panakkal says his journey has been full of excitement and challenges. As the priest at the Church of the Ascension in Fountain Hills, Panakkal thanks his staff, volunteers and parishioners for accepting him and making him feel like family.

"Most of all, I am grateful to God for choosing me to become a priest," he said.

One of eight siblings, Panakkal found his calling to priesthood at an early age.

Panakkal's journey to priesthood began in India where, beginning in the 10th grade, he began 12 years of seminary formation at the St. Joseph's Pontifical Seminary under the Jesuit formation.

His early inspirations were his parents who were devout Catholics



The Rev. Father Jilson Panakkal celebrates 30 years of ordination in the Catholic church. (Independent Newsmedia/Cyrus Guccione)

and exemplary in their faith and dedication to the church. Igniting in him a passion to follow a similar path, three of his older siblings also joined the church clergy.

Panakkal served as an altar server for six years, assisting the priest in celebrating and performing Mass.

"When you are working so closely with the priest, you feel like you are connected to Jesus more than anything," he said. "I wanted a closer relationship with Jesus and I became attracted to holy Mass and priesthood."

During his major seminary, Panakkal obtained degrees in history, social science, economics, theol-

ogy and philosophy.

He was 27 years of age when he was ultimately found worthy of priesthood.

Panakkal spent a decade working in the Diocese in India before obtaining his doctorate degree in Canon Law at the Pontifical Urban University of Rome.

He returned to work in the tribunal in India for seven years before eventually joining the Roman Catholic Diocese of Phoenix in 2017. He became the pastor at the Ascension in 2021.

Looking back on 30 years of ordination, Panakkal says he has "matured" in his priesthood. He enjoys

the serenity of Fountain Hills where he offers spiritual and social fellowship to his parishioners.

Now in his fourth year at the Ascension, Panakkal says the church has grown in both community openness and fellowship.

From the church's youth development, religious education and outreach ministries—such as supporting clothing and food for the homeless in Maricopa County and building homes for families in India—Panakkal expresses gratitude to God for these accomplishments and the church members for believing in the true spirit of faith in action.

"I am grateful to the people around me for their prayers and support," he said. "They are a gift and they have become my family."

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Fr. Jilson became a priest at the age of 27. (Independent Newsmedia/Cyrus Guccione)

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SPORTS

Fountain Hills winter sports finds ways to win toward end of season

Falcons' sports dominating at the right time

By Cameron Chester
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Boys Basketball

The Fountain Hills High School boys varsity basketball team earned two great wins last week.

In their first game, they defeated Highland Preparatory West in dominating fashion 72-28. The Falcons were on both sides of the ball clicking on all cylinders. Junior Ahren Lloyd was a perennial offensive weapon for the Falcons, scoring 19 points. Senior Lucas Grieco is having a stellar season and continued his positive scoring streak adding 12 points.

Fountain Hills faced Madison Highland Preparatory next and defeated the Heat by 22 points, 55-33. The Falcons once again showed how efficient they can be on both sides of the ball. Fountain Hills defense put a lot of pressure on the Heat and made it tough for them to find a basket with ease. The Falcons are enjoying a three-game win streak and have a high case of morale on their side as this season continues.

The next big game will be an away re-

gion game against Rancho Solano Preparatory on Tuesday, Feb. 6, at 7 p.m.

Girls Basketball

The Fountain Hills High School varsity girls basketball is on fire right now and dominating their opposing competition recently.

Earning a seven-game winning streak, the Lady Falcons have been a big problem for opponents offensively thanks to senior captains Seilah Smith and Kaylee Lewis. Fountain Hills dominated Highland Preparatory West 71-5 then handled Madison Highland Preparatory 62-7.

Smith shared why the Falcons have been on a great run recently and how her game has improved.

"We compete hard in each game, simple as that," Smith said. "We leave everything out there on the court and make sure each teammate understands the assignment. Shifting and finding open lanes has improved a lot for the team and myself. I'm keeping defenders on their toes, and that helps finding open teammates whenever I need to dish out the ball."

The Lady Falcons' next big game is an away region game against Rancho Solano Preparatory on Tuesday,

Feb. 6, at 5:30 p.m.

Wrestling

The Fountain Hills High School wrestling team competed at Valley Christian, and the Falcons went 2-0 beating Valley, 60-12 and Hayden High School, 53-18.

"With the season winding down we are trying to correct the little things that can cost us matches and also trying to stay healthy and in the best shape," said head coach Luke Salzman. "We have one more tournament and two more duals before the Sectional tournament."

Girls Soccer

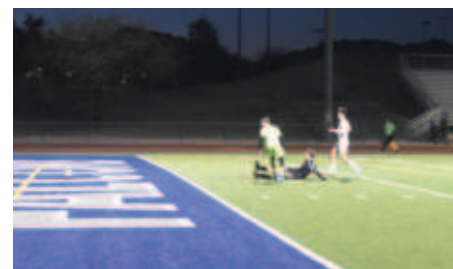
The Fountain Hills High School varsity girls soccer team competed with heart and didn't let the score falter their competitive spirit.

However, the Falcons suffered a 4-0 loss to the Cicero Preparatory Academy Centurions. The Centurions' high paced offense was hard for the Falcons to match.

With only a few games left, the Falcons have to find adjustments to at least finish the season with one win.

Boys Soccer

The Fountain Hills High School varsity boys soccer team is building up steam toward the end of the season.



Fountain Hills High School senior Tyler Griggs nearly scores a goal during the match against Cicero Preparatory Academy. (Independent News-media/Cameron Chester)

Having a two-game win streak under their belts, the Falcons have high morale around the team. Fountain Hills in the first game dominated the North Phoenix Preparatory Academy Gladiators, 7-4. Senior Tyler Griggs led the scoring with four goals, and junior Mason Meyen scored two goals.

The following game, the Falcons defeated the Cicero Preparatory Academy Centurions, 4-1. Griggs again led the scoring, bagging two goals while junior Alec Kimmel and senior JD Manely each scored one goal.

Fountain Hills is finding its groove at the right time before the end of the season.

Please send your comments to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility

Guidelines. Cameron Chester can be reached at cchester@iniusa.org.

SPORTS BRIEFS

Bogey boys hit the links

The Bogey Boys played their regular round at Orange Tree on Monday, January 27. The winning team at -13 was Tim Zaspal, Chris Sudak, David Murphy, and Lee Miller. Low

net for the day was David Murphy with 69. Brad Strehlow won low net in A/B flight with 71. Strehlow and Mike Hoops each won two of the seven skins.

The Wednesday travel group played at Aguila Golf Course in

Phoenix on January 29. The winning team at -3 was Rich Piatchek, Alan Lindsay, Rod Eaton, and Wayne Bumgardner. Closest to the pin winners were Jim Kidwell, Chris Sudak, Rod Eaton, and Alan Lindsay.

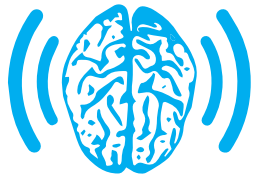
The Bogey Boys have opened a window for those interesting in joining the group. Potential players can go to azgolf.com, click on join/renew, then search the club directory for "Bogey Boys of AZ".

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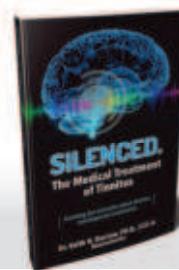
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BUSINESS

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DeGeorge Partners plans 'Retirement Next Steps' workshops

Navigate retirement with expert guidance

DeGeorge Partners, Russ Lyon Sotheby's International Realty has released its schedule for the first half of 2025 for the Retirements Next Steps Workshop series.

This informative workshop series is designed to offer insights and guidance for those preparing for or currently navigating retirement, according to a press release.

Each session will feature industry leaders addressing key topics to help attendees make informed choices about their future.

"We are excited to bring this comprehensive workshop series into 2025 to continue helping individuals navigate the complexities of retirement planning," said Jill Templeton-Hais-



DeGeorge Partners is hosting its "Retirement Next Steps" workshops. Register by calling 303-204-4432. (Metro Creative)

lip, Realtor and Senior Real Estate Specialist at DeGeorge Partners. "Our goal is to provide attendees with the knowledge and tools necessary to make informed decisions and create a fulfilling retirement."

Upcoming sessions include:

Feb. 27: Navigating the Senior Journey

Explore the variety of options available to older adults and why senior living is an excellent choice for maintaining independence, comfort and class with Jeannie Grates of Co-gir Senior Living.

March 27: How to Choose Senior Living

A beginner's guide to confidently making senior living decisions with clarity and knowledge with Julia Moon of New Day Lifestyles.

April 24: Safety in the Home

Learn practical tips for enhancing home security in retirement with Karen and Josh Logan of Guardian Training and Consulting.

May 22: Reverse and Home Equity

Conversion Mortgages

Discover how reverse mortgages have evolved into a powerful financial tool, including their use for purchasing a new home and offering retirees more flexibility with Richelle Hopkins of Mutual of Omaha.

Karen DeGeorge, principal of DeGeorge Partners and a leading Realtor in Fountain Hills will also be featured in the workshops.

With 23 years of experience, DeGeorge is an Accredited Buyer Representative, Short Sale and Relocation Resource and a Certified Luxury Home Marketing Specialist.

The workshops are free, but registration is required due to limited seating.

To register or for more information, contact Templeton-Haislip at 303-204-4432 or email Jill@degeorgepartners.com.

HERE KITTY KITTY

Fearless Kitty to host free microchip event Feb. 8

Dogs and cats welcome

Fearless Kitty Rescue is hosting a free microchip event for cats and dogs Saturday, Feb. 8, from 10 a.m. to noon.

This is the first of four planned microchip events in 2025.

A microchip is the best way to ensure pets are quickly identified and reunited with their families, accord-

ing to a press release.

The American Veterinary Medical Association has reported that one in three pets will go missing at some point. Of those, only 22% of dogs and less than 2% of cats are returned to their families.

The percentage rises dramatically if the dog or cat is microchipped.

The microchip event will be held in the north parking lot of Fearless



Fearless Kitty Rescue in Fountain Hills is hosting a free microchip event Saturday, Feb. 8, from 10 a.m. to noon. (Metro Creative)

Kitty Rescue, 16832 E. Avenue of the Fountains,

The event is free thanks to donation of microchips by fi-NANO. There are no appointments required, however, cats must be in carriers and dogs must be on leashes.

Another clinic is planned for May 3.

To learn more, visit fearlesskittyrescue.org.



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January 13, 2025 - January 17, 2025

The Verdes

17045 E Bobwhite Way	\$499,900	29679 N Juventino Way	\$1,550,456
17910 E Cindercone Rd	\$885,000	17404 E Monument Ct	\$2,499,000
28225 N Crook Ct	\$645,000	27101 N Palo Fiero Rd	\$1,480,000
16912 E Desert Vista Trl	\$1,250,000	17948 E Slide Rock Dr	\$980,027
25515 N Forest Rd Unit 1	\$385,000	17856 E Stocking Trl	\$1,125,000
17701 E Fort Verde Rd	\$800,000		

Homes sold this period: 11

Same period last year: 2

Median Price: \$980,027

Median Price: \$911,909

Average price: \$1,099,944

Average price: \$911,909

Fountain Hills

16214 E Bainbridge Ave	\$625,000	14102 E Highland Ave	\$1,489,995
17010 E Calle Del Flores	\$460,000	16111 E Kingstree Blvd, #3	\$621,000
17031 E El Lago Blvd, #2112	\$372,000	10801 N Mangrum Ct	\$898,000
15559 E Golden Eagle Blvd	\$582,628	17011 E Monterey Dr	\$1,055,000
17237 E Grande Blvd, #206	\$508,000		

Homes sold this period: 9

Same period last year: 12

Median Price: \$621,000

Median Price: \$635,500

Average price: \$734,625

Average price: \$589,667

Properties listed may have been sold by various Brokers &/or Owners.

GOVERNMENT

Fountain Hills Town Council approves zoning amendment

Allows permit for displaying vehicles in neighborhood commercial zoning

By Bob Burns

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A small commercial plaza has occupied the corner of Fountain Hills and Glenbrook boulevards since the 1970s and over the past 50 years has been occupied by a variety of businesses including a convenience market with gas pumps, restaurants, bike shops and even a small gym.

It has almost never been empty and currently there is a shop for the sale of e-bikes and a variety of golf carts.

A year or so ago, the applicants, Christine Sheppard or Phyllis Krikorian-Meagher, the property owners, discovered they had run afoul of town zoning regulations by displaying golf carts for sale in the parking lot, which is not permitted in the C-1 neighborhood light commercial zoning district. After a visit from code enforcement officers, the applicants went to the town to ask how they could legally display the carts outside.



A golf cart sales business wants to display vehicles outdoors in front of the shop on Fountain Hills Boulevard but needs help to address zoning issues. (Independent Newsmedia/Bob Burns)

Staff at Town Hall initially recommended a zoning amendment to change the site to C-2, where outdoor display of vehicles is allowed. That plan was prepared and went to the Planning and Zoning Commission where there was resistance from not only commission members, but residents who did not want the zoning changed to allow more intense commercial uses at the location near churches, an elementary school and residential neighborhoods.

However, both commission members and the residents told staff they had no objection to this business be-

ing allowed to display vehicles in the parking lot; they just wanted to be sure some potential future owner could not have more intense commercial use.

Development Services Director John Wesley said the option for that would be to a zoning amendment to allow the vehicle display in C-1 zoning with a special use permit only. The commission directed staff to take that approach.

This all took place last fall, and the applicant had some concern about the time it would take to get the rules changed and the special use permit. That was mostly rectified at the suggestion of a resident that staff should not take any enforcement action, particularly since there were no complaints related to the location.

In December, the Planning and Zoning Commission heard the zoning amendment and recommended it be approved by the town council. The ordinance allows for the display of vehicles up to one-ton within the C-C and C-1 zoning districts with a special use permit. The permit application allows staff, the commission

and council to consider other circumstances related to the location that might make the use inappropriate or add stipulations to the permit.

Staff had some concerns related to the amount of parking available for the shopping center but suggested limiting the display to a small area at the corner of the lot.

The council voted 6-1 in favor of the zoning amendment with Councilmember Peggy McMahon casting the dissenting vote. McMahon said she had concerns about the expansion of the business into a much larger dealership operation.

"I think this goes beyond the scope of the objective for this amendment," she said.

The Planning and Zoning Commission recommended approval of the special use permit at its January meeting, however, the council still needs to consider the actual special use permit.

Please send your comments to AZOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines. Bob Burns can be reached at bburns@iniusa.org.



VOLUNTEER RETIREMENT

Paul Appeldorn has been a fixture as a volunteer for Noon Kiwanis-sponsored blood drives in Fountain Hills for nearly two decades. The blood drive held Jan. 24-25 was his last as he has decided to retire from that aspect of his local volunteer efforts. Paul will still be around taking part in other community service projects. (Independent Newsmedia/Bob Burns)

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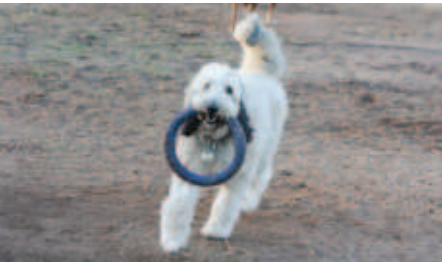
Fountain Hills' Desert Vista Dog Park turns 25

Mayor Friedel plans \$50k for park upgrades

By Cyrus Guccione
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Community members and their canine companions gathered at the Desert Vista Dog Park Tuesday, Jan. 28, to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the park.

Council members Gayle Earle and Rick Watts were present at the ceremony along with Fountain Hills Mayor



Dogs enjoyed a morning of fun at the park. (Independent Newsmedia/Cyrus Guccione)



Dog owners come from Fountain Hills, Scottsdale and Mesa to bring their pets to the Desert Vista Dog Park. (Independent Newsmedia/Cyrus Guccione)



Vice president of the Association of Dog Owners Groups (ADOG) Bill Hindman speaks to the gathered public Tuesday, Jan. 28. (Independent Newsmedia/Cyrus Guccione)

or Gerry Friedel, who announced that he plans on approving \$50,000 in the town budget to upgrade the dog park.

According to Friedel, the funds will go toward additional trees at the park, improved drainage, new signage, weed control and fine grading.

"This town is pleased to be able to do that and with the support of our council members, we're going to get that approved in the next budget so we can address those needs," he said. "We have one of the best dog parks in the East Valley and we want to keep it that way."

History of ADOG

The Association of Dog Owners Group (ADOG) was formed in 1998 to advocate for a permanent dog park in Fountain Hills.

Spearheaded by the late Fountain Hills resident Kim Marshburn, ADOG's efforts, including research and community outreach, led to the Town Council approving the creation of the Desert Vista Off-Leash Recreational Facility (OLRF) in September 1998, which opened in December 1999.

Since then, ADOG has raised funds to enhance the park with features like water stations, shade structures and a splash pad, while also supporting local dog welfare initiatives.

As a non-profit, ADOG continues to rely on donations and community support to improve the park and foster a strong bond between dog owners and the community.

"We've come a long way," added Bill Hindman, vice president of ADOG who says the dog park is the first-ever planned municipal dog park in Arizona.

Hindman thanked Community Services Director Kevin Snipes and Parks Superintendent Brandon Putman for their efforts in maintaining and improving the park.



Community members and dog owners gathered at the Desert Vista Dog Park in Fountain Hills to commemorate its 25th anniversary. (Independent Newsmedia/Cyrus Guccione)

Community spirit

Fountain Hills resident Chris Vandell has been coming to the dog park for the last 12 years. His dog, Vinny, loves seeing his friends and Vandell has a group chat with a few other parkgoers called "The Fountain Hills Dog Park Posse."

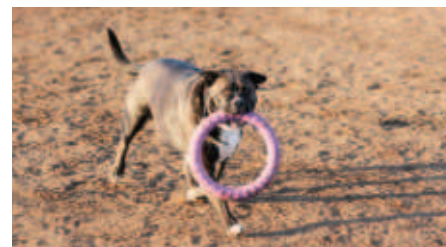
"I've come here even when I don't have Vinny because I love being around these dogs," Vandell said. "A lot of people come from Scottsdale and Mesa to enjoy this park."

Debbie Edmundson enjoys coming to the park with her dog, Finley. A snowbird from Calgary, Alberta, Edmundson says Hindman has led the charge in making the Desert Vista Dog Park an important

part of the community.

"The people are great and the dogs are very good," she said. "Everyone here is so welcoming."

Please send your comments to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines. Cyrus Guccione can be reached at cguccione@iniusa.org



The Desert Vista Dog Park is open daily from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. (Independent Newsmedia/Cyrus Guccione)



Randy Forsberg and one of his dogs, Goofy, visit the park twice a day. (Independent Newsmedia/Cyrus Guccione)

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THE VERDE COMMUNITIES

VERDE EVENTS

2025 Verdes ASU lecture series ongoing

Events scheduled through early March

Verdes residents and their guests are invited to attend the 2025 Verdes ASU lecture series at the Community Church of the Verdes. All programs are held at 4 p.m. Tuesdays.

The series continues Tuesday, Feb. 11, when Volcanoes of Arizona is the topic. Professor Steve Semken from the School of Earth and Space Exploration presents this program.

Tuesday, Feb. 18, Professor Jeffrey Kordower, ASU-Banner Neurodegenerative Disease Research Center School of Life Sciences, will speak on Pathogenesis and Exper-

imental Therapies for Movement Disorders.

ASU Explores the Solar System will be the topic Tuesday, Feb. 25, with Professor David Williams, School of Earth and Space Exploration.

The lecture series traditionally concludes each year with a musical performance as is the case on Tuesday, March 4. Dr. Wesley Skinner, School of Music, and Professor Meng Yuan, Cleveland Institute of Music, will present French Impressions: A Tour of French Music for Cello and Piano.

Rio Verde resident and RVCA member Frank Haggard organizes the annual lecture series.

EVENT SERIES

Community Church of the Verdes host lectures, concerts

Americana in concert Feb. 7

The Performing Arts Committee of the Community Church of the Verdes is hosting a series of concerts and lectures for the 2025 season.

Americana will perform in concert at the church Friday, Feb. 7. This group pays tribute to the music of the '60s and '70s with music from the Mamas and Papas, Simon and Garfunkel, Crosby, Stills and Nash, Carole King, Credence Clearwater,

Linda Ronstadt and more.

TOBY, A Tribute to Toby Keith, is Friday, March 7. The concert is a ride through the heart and soul of country music with the ultimate tribute band to the bad boy of country music. Hollywood Yates takes center stage singing country music anthems like "How Do You Like Me Now," "Should Have Been a Cowboy" and "I Love This Bar."

Concerts start at 7 p.m. Tickets

WILDFIRE

Verde volunteers clean up brush for Firewise certification

Dry conditions bring potential for brush fires in area

The Verde Communities have begun their annual border maintenance efforts in January to maintain the Firewise certification for the communities, according to Firewise coordinator Diane Newcomb.

Volunteers are working behind Rio Verde on the boundary with McDowell Mountain Regional Park. The county granted permission to continue with the annual cleanup activity on park land.

"The vegetation is not as lush as it has been in past years due to the severe drought, but we are removing dead vegetation and trimming where

necessary," Newcomb said.

"There are no words for the devastation in California. Our fuel systems are drastically different from theirs, but wildfires and high winds are an extremely dangerous combination under any circumstances. We only hope that people can learn from some of tragedy in California and try to do more to their own backyards, towns and states."

Both Rio Verde and Tonto Verde have been certified as Firewise communities by the National Fire Protection Association for a number of years. The experience of the 1995 Rio Fire prompted local residents to bring wildfire mitigation efforts to the forefront.

are \$40.

Tickets may be purchased anytime during church office hours, Monday-Thursday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; or at the table in the Rio Verde Post Office, from 4 to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday the week of each concert.

The free lecture series continues Monday, Feb. 17, with David Danford, director of Business and Industry at Hillsdale College. He will speak about the free "Online Courses for Lifelong Learners" offered through Hillsdale College.

Monday, March 10 with Pat Miles closes out the lecture series for the

season. After losing her husband to cancer, Miles found healing by writing about grief, loss and planning her own mortality. She reveals how her husband's untimely death affected every aspect of her life and parallels how others have dealt with the grief, financial upsets and daily life changes that come with a painful loss.

Miles prepares her audiences for problems such as the shock of loss, cognitive decline, finding support, grieving, family disputes and caring for yourself after the loss.

The lectures take place at 4 p.m. All events are at the Community Church of the Verdes.



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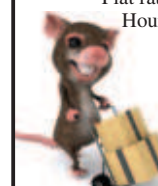
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Creditors are notified to present claims by mail to Holly Dahlen, Trustee, at 33515 N 141st. ST, Scottsdale, Arizona 85262 within three weeks of this notice first published on January 29, 2025.

Publish: Fountain Hills Times Independent
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Weekly Market Update for 85268

Data Source: Altos Research, Inc.
January 28, 2025

\$1,150,000	104
MEDIAN LIST PRICE	AVERAGE DAYS ON MARKET
\$402	153
PRICE PER SQFT	INVENTORY

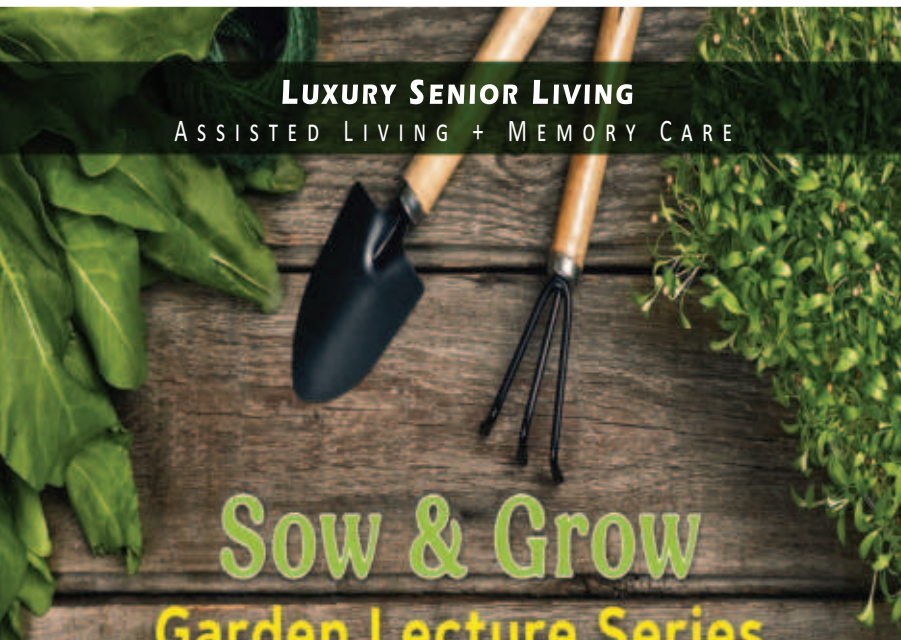
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