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LITCHFIELD PARK/GOODYEAR INDEPENDENT

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Student artists honored in Goodyear's Mayor Select Art Program

Poetic medicine offers path to healing at Goodyear library

By Mary Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A small group gathered in the Georgia T. Lord Library in Goodyear to explore an unconventional approach to wellness: poetic medicine. The workshop, titled "Writing for Wellness: A Poetic Medicine Approach," introduced participants to a practice that blends creative expression with concepts of care and resilience.

Dr. Rosemarie Dombrowski, the inaugural Poet Laureate of Phoenix and founding director of the nonprofit Revisionary Arts, led the session. Dombrowski teaches bioethics and medical humanism at the University of Arizona College of Medicine in Phoenix and has worked extensively in community health education.

"I work at the intersection of poetry and medicine, which is kind of a rare intersection of the Venn dia-

participation in several years, according to Dalton Attig, a recreation programmer for the city.

"The city of Goodyear really loves to support these young students and their artwork, we received so many great submissions," Attig said.

• See **Students** on page 27

• See **Healing** on page 26

By Mary Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The city of Goodyear recognized the creativity and talent of local high school artists during its annual Mayor Select Art Program reception at Goodyear City Hall.

Ethan Baker received the event's highest honor, winning Best in Show

for his piece titled "Normal Everyday Activities." Baker's work was selected from a competitive pool of entries submitted by Goodyear middle and high school students.

The juried art competition, hosted by the city's Arts and Culture Commission, featured 31 entries from 25 student artists, marking the highest

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COMMUNITY NEWS

IN BRIEF

Goodyear hosts a special election

Goodyear residents had until May 20 to submit ballots for the city's special election covering six ballot questions: four proposed amendments to the City Charter and two franchise agreements with private utility providers.

The proposed charter changes were recommended by the Charter Review Ad-Hoc Committee and, if approved, would permanently amend the city's foundational governing document. The two franchise questions ask voters to authorize private water companies to continue service within the city in exchange for franchise fees paid to Goodyear.

As a charter city, Goodyear operates under a locally adopted document that functions similarly to a constitution. The charter defines the city's council-manager form of government, qualifications and terms for elected officials, and the scope of local authority. Changes to the charter require voter approval.

Visit goodyearaz.gov for more information and yourvalley.net/goodyear-independent/ for coverage on election results.

Goodyear Fire adds two ambulances to city fleet

The Goodyear Fire Department is adding two ambulances to its fleet this spring, increasing the total

• See **Fire** on page 6

EMCC celebrates class of 2025

By Mary Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Estrella Mountain Community College honored its Class of 2025 on Friday, May 9, with a high-energy commencement ceremony at Desert Diamond Arena in Glendale. The event brought together hundreds of graduates and their families to celebrate years of dedication and achievement.

Located in Avondale, EMCC is part of the Maricopa County Community College District, the largest provider of higher education in Arizona. This spring, the district expects to confer degrees and certificates to 20,866 students across its 10 colleges.

"You have reached a milestone that signifies the end of one chapter and the beginning of another," said Donna Da-



Estrella Mountain Community College honors its Class of 2025 with a commencement ceremony. (Submitted photo/Estrella Mountain Community College)

vis, a member of the MCCCCD governing board. "Estrella Mountain Community College provided you a supportive environment to support your passions

and pave way for your future."

Graduates from across the district completed programs in high-demand

• See **Grads** on page 6

Trader Joe's coming to GSQ met with fanfare

By Mary Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The City of Goodyear formally announced a highly anticipated Trader Joe's as part of the next wave of tenants at GSQ, its growing downtown district, during what resembled a high-energy pep rally more than a standard press event. Desert Edge High School's marching band, color guard and cheerleaders kicked off the announcement in front of a crowd of community members, who were handed Hawaiian leis, branded shirts,

• See **TJ's** on page 7



Desert Edge High School celebrates with the City of Goodyear as Trader Joes comes to GSQ. (Mary Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)



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Fire

• From page 4

number of city-operated ambulances to four. The new units will be assigned to Fire Stations 184 and 185.

The expansion is part of the city's ongoing effort to reduce emergency response times and provide consistent care from the scene of an incident to the hospital.

"Public safety is a top priority for us and now with two additional ambulances going into service, we'll be bringing the total to four city of Goodyear ambulances serving the community," said Goodyear Mayor Joe Pizzillo. "The city previously relied solely on a regional contracted ambulance provider, so now we will offer quicker, more reliable responses when it matters most."

The city's ambulance service allows fire department personnel to manage patient care without interruption. Paramedics and emergency



The Goodyear Fire Department adds two new ambulances to its city fleet. (Submitted photo/City of Goodyear)

medical technicians coordinate with local hospitals to facilitate the transfer of medical information and ensure continuity of care.

"The opportunity to provide this level of service to our community is impactful, they expect the highest level of service and we deliver on that expectation," said Goodyear Fire Chief Paul Luizzi.

Visit goodyearaz.gov for more information.

Grads

• From page 4

fields. Health sciences led with 3,467 graduates, followed by business and management with 2,516, behavioral science and human services with 2,372 graduates, and nursing with 1,929 graduates.

More than 5,350 students are enrolled in the district's bachelor's degree programs, now in their second year. New degrees in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and business are set to launch this fall.

"At EMCC we learn together, support one another and show that great things happen when people believe in each other," said Dr. Rey Rivera, the college's president. "Growth rarely happens within the confines of our comfort zones. It blossoms where we dare to step outside, to take calculated risks and make bold moves, even when the path isn't clear."

The 2025 commencement cere-

mony began at 6 p.m. at the Glendale venue, with ticketed guests filling the arena to cheer on the graduates. The atmosphere was celebratory, marked by speeches, music, and an undercurrent of pride in the crowd.

Class speaker Jorge Berlanga reflected on the challenges students overcame to reach this point.

"We're finally done with our training arch and now we move forward with a degree in our hands into whatever lies ahead with our heads held high," Berlanga said. "It's easy to forget how far we've come, but if we hadn't pushed through those moments of uncertainty and hardships, we wouldn't be prepared for the adventures ahead."

"Graduation is a celebration of perseverance, resilience, opportunity, and transformation," said Dr. Steven R. Gonzales, Chancellor of Maricopa Community Colleges. "We are incredibly proud of each graduate as they step into the next phase of their lives."

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TJ's

• From page 4

insulated totes and stickers bearing the Trader Joe's logo.

Trader Joe's will occupy a 13,500-square-foot space at GSQ, marking the arrival of one of the most frequently requested grocers in Goodyear.

"I'm thrilled to lead the opening of Trader Joe's in Goodyear and to become part of a community that has shown such enthusiastic support," said Chris Warren, store captain at the future Goodyear Trader Joe's. "This location is a great fit for Trader Joe's, surrounded by growth, development and a strong sense of community. We're excited to bring our unique products and hire more local, friendly crew to serve as Goodyear's neighborhood grocery store."

Two additional businesses, Black Rock Coffee Bar and Firebirds Wood Fired Grill, were also announced as

part of the upcoming commercial lineup. Black Rock Coffee Bar will open a 1,460-square-foot drive-thru location, and Firebirds Wood Fired Grill will open a 5,658-square-foot restaurant building next to Trader Joe's along McDowell Road. Both are expected to open in 2026.

"We've worked closely with Trader Joe's for years to make this a reality for Goodyear and we're proud to see it come to fruition at GSQ," said Mike Ebert, managing partner at RED Development, the firm managing the commercial portion of the GSQ development. "This is the kind of project where every tenant contributes to something greater and is a true destination that reflects the community's energy and momentum. The addition of Trader Joe's and these renowned restaurants reflects not only the market's strength, but Goodyear's vibrant energy and the distinct sense of place we're creating at GSQ."

Located near the intersection of McDowell Road and Bullard Avenue,

GSQ is a more than 150-acre mixed-use development that includes Goodyear Civic Square, a recently completed complex with a new city hall, library, two-acre public park and office space. City officials have positioned GSQ as a future cultural and civic center with entertainment venues, a range of dining options, residential units, hotel accommodations and more office space.

"Goodyear couldn't be more thrilled that Trader Joe's has chosen to come to our great city," said Goodyear Mayor Joe Pizzillo. "This really is a dream come true for so many of our residents who've been asking for this unique grocer for many, many years. It'll be located in the heart of our growing downtown and will be the perfect addition. This announcement of Trader Joe's is a testament to where we are going as a city and that the most sought-after businesses are choosing to locate in Goodyear."

The GSQ project is being developed through a public-private partnership between the city and Globe Cor-

poration.

"The community has long voiced their desire for a Trader Joe's in Goodyear and it's been rewarding to bring that vision to life," said George F. Getz, chairman, president and co-CEO of Globe Corp. "Its arrival at GSQ underscores the caliber of this development and affirms our shared commitment with RED Development to shaping a vibrant, thoughtfully curated urban core that reflects the aspirations of the city and its residents."

Several businesses are already open at GSQ, including Bacchus Wine & Debauchery, BJ's Restaurant & Brewhouse, Cheddar's Scratch Kitchen, Copper & Sage, F45, Harkins Theatres, Miyu Nails & Spa, Over Easy, Spitz Mediterranean Street Food, The Stillery, Shake Shack and The Yard Milkshake Bar.

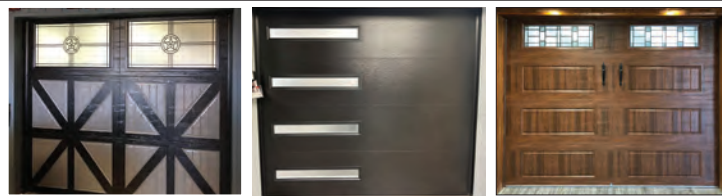
High Tide Seafood Bar & Grill is also slated to open soon.

More information about GSQ and Goodyear's downtown development is available at goodyearaz.gov.

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BUSINESS MOVES



FYZICAL Therapy & Balance Center hosts its ribbon cutting ceremony. (Submitted photo/Goodyear Economic Development)



O'Reilly Auto Parts celebrates its newest Goodyear location. (Submitted photo/Goodyear Economic Development)

1 Great American Title Agency
Now open at GEN1 in GSQ, Great American Title offers trusted title services to support real estate transactions across the West Valley.
1626 N. Litchfield Rd., Ste. 220, Goodyear, AZ 85395.

2 BPR Companies
Now located at GEN1 in GSQ, BPR Companies has established its Goodyear base

to support construction and development projects across the region.
15150 W. Park Place, Goodyear, AZ 85395.

3 O'Reilly Auto Parts
Now open at Canyon Trails Towne Center, O'Reilly Auto Parts offers auto supplies and expert support for drivers and DIYers alike.
16880 W. Yuma Rd., Goodyear, AZ 85338.

4 FYZICAL Therapy & Balance Center
The first West Valley location is now open in Goodyear, offering specialized therapy services focused on strength, recovery, and balance.
1325 N. Litchfield Rd., Ste. 140, Goodyear, AZ 85395.

5 Shake Shack
Officially open at GSQ, 15150 W. Park Place, Goodyear, AZ 85395.



BPR Companies opens its doors in GSQ. (Submitted photo/Goodyear Economic Development)

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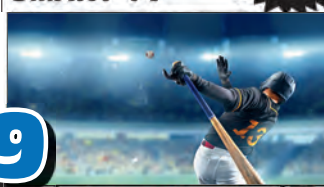
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BUSINESS

Goodyear kicks off zoning update seeking public input

By Mary Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Goodyear hosted its first public meeting on the city's full zoning ordinance update, giving residents a crash course in how land use regulations shape their communities and introducing opportunities for public input that will help guide the year-long process.

The event, held in collaboration with consulting firms Michael Baker International and Matrix Design Group, drew residents, city officials, and planners to begin shaping a more modern, flexible and com-

munity-focused zoning code.

"The state does not feel that we are doing enough and they are considering, every year, taking different abilities for the cities to regulate its own future away," said Christian Williams, city planning manager for Goodyear. "We want to be a part of the solution, we want to be in control of our own destiny, we want our citizens to be in control of their destiny."

At the start of the meeting was a primer on the relationship between the General Plan and the Zon-

• See **Zoning** on page 11



Matthew Klyzeiko, Matrix Design Group and the City of Goodyear seek public input on the developing zoning code. (Mary Goldmeier/Independent Newsmedia)

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Zoning

• From page 10

ing Ordinance. The General Plan serves as a broad, long-term blueprint for Goodyear's growth, outlining goals for land use, housing, transportation, open space, and more, while the Zoning Ordinance implements those goals through specific regulations.

The ordinance dictates what types of development can occur in different zones, from building heights to setbacks and parking requirements.

While the current update won't change existing zoning designations on private properties, it will revise development standards and aim to address inconsistencies between old rules and today's development patterns.

Presenters emphasized that this update will not change the zon-

ing map or raise property taxes. Property taxes are based on actual use, not zoning. Unless a property owner requests a change, zoning designations will remain intact.

However, aspects of the zoning code may be reorganized or modernized. Among the areas being reviewed are:

- ♦ Parking and landscaping standards
- ♦ Permit and approval processes
- ♦ Housing diversity and affordability strategies
- ♦ Public notification requirements
- ♦ Development near airports and military zones, particularly around Luke Air Force Base

Matthew Klyzeiko, associate vice president at Michael Baker International, said the goal is to build a zoning code that's not only functional but forward-thinking.

"The grand slam is if we can achieve all of this, have a code that

is functional, that is current, and then also continues to guide the city in a positive direction," said Klyzeiko. "It's all about balance. We are focusing on both neighborhood and community protection and also bringing that development."

One of the tools being explored is a model housing ordinance, which Goodyear could integrate into its broader zoning overhaul. The ordinance would provide a framework for increasing housing options and affordability by:

- ♦ Allowing for more diverse housing types, such as duplexes, townhouses, and accessory dwelling units
- ♦ Reducing parking requirements and minimum lot sizes
- ♦ Increasing maximum building heights
- ♦ Offering incentives like density bonuses and fee waivers to developers who build affordable housing

"We're looking for ways to write into code opportunities for diverse housing, affordable housing, in ways that are compatible with the community," said Laney Corey from Matrix Design Group. "We need to know what you think will be successful and enjoyable."

Throughout the process, city staff and consultants will continue to gather public feedback through meetings and online surveys. Presenters emphasized that resident input is key to crafting zoning standards that reflect Goodyear's needs and identity.

The update is expected to take approximately 12 months to complete. In the meantime, residents can follow the process at goodyear-az.gov/zoning.

As the city navigates growth and state pressures, officials say now is the time to take proactive steps to ensure that Goodyear's zoning supports its vision.

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IN BRIEF

Litchfield Park church reduces environmental impact

St. Peter's Episcopal Church reduces its environmental impact through solar panel installation.

St. Peter's Episcopal Church has installed 82 solar panels on the roof of its Celebration Hall, a system expected to generate 88,700 kilowatt-hours of energy annually and reduce the church's environmental footprint.

The panels span 2,420 square feet and were unveiled during a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by Litchfield Park Mayor Thomas Schoaf and members of the Southwest Valley Chamber of Commerce.

"This project is an example of the kind of leadership St. Peter's has exhibited since 1964," said Schoaf. "This project demonstrates the power of positive impact that can be made on our world and our community."

Bob Kerr, chairman of the church's Solar Panel Committee, said the system's energy production is equivalent to significant environmental offsets, about 88,700 kilowatt-hours per year. This amount of kilowatt-hours saved is equivalent to carbon emitted from over 4.8 million smartphones being charged.

Church leadership said the in-



St. Peter's Episcopal Church reduces its environmental impact through solar panel installation. (Submitted photo/Rebekah Singh)

stallation reflects its long-standing focus on environmental responsibility and stewardship.

St. Peter's Episcopal Church has served the Litchfield Park area since the early 1960s. Its campus includes a sanctuary, parish hall, thrift store, and the recently built Celebration Hall. The church is also home to St. Peter's Episcopal Montessori School, which offers programs for children from 12 months through elementary grades.

More information is available at stpetersaz.com.

Meals of Joy receives \$20,000 grant to support senior meal delivery

Meals of Joy, a nonprofit dedicated to delivering ready-to-eat meals to seniors in the West Valley, has received a \$20,000 grant from the Campbell's Company and the Campbell's Foundation.

The funding is part of the Foundation's Community Impact Grants program, which awarded a total of \$920,000 to 46 nonprofits this year.

The program, which focuses on sup-



Meals of Joy executive chef Kevin Barko with founder Larry Cervarich. (Submitted photo/Meals of Joy)

porting food access, nutrition education, healthy living, and neighborhood revitalization, allows Campbell's employees to nominate organizations serving their local communities. This year's recipients are located in 30 communities where Campbell's operates.

Meals of Joy currently delivers meals to seniors in West Valley cities, with plans to expand in the coming year. The organization expects to provide more than 40,000 meals this fiscal year, supported by a network of more than 75 volunteers who deliver meals Monday through Friday.

According to the nonprofit, the grant will help it continue serving seniors who may face food insecurity or limited mobility. Meals are prepared fresh daily, with menus rotating each month.

For more information on Meals of Joy, including meal options and volunteer opportunities, visit mealsofjoy.org.

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BUSINESS

Goodyear apartments host grand opening

A new 408-unit apartment complex is preparing to open its doors in Goodyear with a festive celebration in June.

Origin, a multifamily housing development by 29th Street Development, will host its grand opening on Thursday, June 5, with a themed event dubbed “Hawaiian Luau in the Desert.” The celebration is scheduled to begin at 6 p.m. at the apartment community’s site, 17445 W. Lower Buckeye Road.

The event will include coastal-inspired food, cocktails and live entertainment, aiming to blend tropical and Southwestern elements. Organizers said local partners, stakeholders and residents are invited to attend. Hawaiian themed attire is encouraged, and guests are asked to RSVP by May 23.



The Origin apartment complex opens its doors with celebration. (Submitted photo/Sharie Damm)

“This is more than just a ribbon-cutting—it’s a celebration of what Origin stands for: new beginnings, connection, and community,” said John Kitson, executive vice president of development at 29th Street.

The Origin community features one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments, along with resort-style amenities. According to the developer, the complex is designed to offer upscale living with convenient access to ma-

jor employers and outdoor recreation in Goodyear, a growing suburb in the Phoenix metro area.

The property is managed by 29th Street Living. More information is available at origingoodyear.com.

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THINGS TO DO

IN BRIEF



The Litchfield Park Recreation Center pool will open for the season with a dive-in movie event. (Submitted photo/Metro Creative Connection)

Litchfield Park Pool to reopen with summer event

The Litchfield Park Recreation Center pool will reopen for the season on Saturday, May 24, offering a full schedule of aquatics programs, recreational swim hours, and community events through the summer months.

Located at 100 S. Old Litchfield Road, the facility serves residents of Litchfield Park and the surrounding West Valley. Its aquatics programming includes youth swim lessons, adult water aerobics, and the Litchfield Lagartos summer swim team for children ages 4 to 18.

Open swim hours for the 2025 season are as follows:

- Monday through Thursday: 12:00–4:30 p.m. and 7:00–9:00 p.m.

- See **Pool** on page 16

West Valley students are selected for public art apprenticeships

By Mary Goldmeier

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Fifteen high school students from across the West Valley, including one from Goodyear, have been selected for the West Valley Arts Council's 2025 Gallery 37 summer program, an annual initiative that brings together young artists to design and construct a public art piece.

The students will collaborate at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale, working under the guidance of a professional teaching artist. Their final project will be installed in Tolleson as part of the Paseo de Artes, a public art corridor along Van Buren Street.

Ryan Williams, a professional artist and editor with Gallery 37, said students who complete the program gain real-world experience that translates beyond the art world.

"These students are very marketable when they're done with the program," Williams said. "It shows that they've done work with a municipality. They can talk about working in a group, collaboration — really 21st century skills. The creativity of collaboration, the communication skills."

Williams said the program offers a unique opportunity for young artists to grow while giving back to their communities.

The 2025 apprentices are Xander Armstrong, Rebecca Babida, Sienna Chisum, Desiree Dabney-Corona, Ashley Diaz, Gia DuBose, Vanessa Galvez, Brielle Garca, Andrea Gar-



The 2024 Gallery 37 project sits in the courtyard of its partner school, Estrella Mountain Community College. (Submitted photo/ West Valley Arts Council)

cia Barajas, Autumn Richards, Andrea Rios, Mia Robles, Jon Signs, Lan Truong and Ryu Zebell.

Participants represent the cities

of Avondale, El Mirage, Glendale, Goodyear, Peoria, Phoenix, Surprise and Tolleson. They attend a range of

- See **Public art** on page 16



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IN BRIEF**MAY 28****Foam Party**

Dance and play in a mountain of allergy-free foam at this outdoor splash party—swimwear and towels recommended!

Bullard Wash Amphitheater behind the Georgia T. Lord Library, 1900 N. Civic Square, Goodyear

10 a.m.–12 p.m.

JUNE 3**Magician Eric Giliam**

Enjoy a high-energy magic show packed with illusions, music, and comedy from former World Teen Magic Champion Eric Giliam.

Litchfield Park Library, Community Room, 101 W. Wigwam Blvd., Litchfield Park

10:15–11:15 a.m.

JUNE 19**Juneteenth Celebration**

Celebrate Juneteenth with live performances, educational speakers, hands-on activities, and local vendors at this free, family-friendly event.

Goodyear Recreation Campus, 420 S. Estrella Pkwy., Goodyear

5–9 p.m.

Agua Fria Food and Clothing Bank seeks volunteers ahead of summer months

By Mary Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

As summer approaches, the Agua Fria Food and Clothing Bank is calling on West Valley residents to lend a hand.

The organization stated it often sees a drop in volunteers each summer as snowbirds head out of state, making it an ideal time for year-round locals to get involved.

AFFCB is currently seeking front desk volunteers, drivers to pick up food donations from grocery stores, and help at its mobile pantry, which operates the first and third Saturday of each month at Barbara Robey Elementary School in Litchfield Park.

“We really rely on our partners,” said Brandon Vickers, operations manager for AFFCB. “There’s always a need for volunteers and donations, especially in the summer.”



Agua Fria Food and Clothing Bank seeks summer volunteers. (Submitted Photo/Agua Fria Food and Clothing Bank)

Vickers, who grew up in the West Valley, said giving back to the community that helped to raise him is part of what inspires many AFFCB volunteers.

“The summer months are especially hard on our clients, and extra water, food and nonperishable items can be lifesaving to have on hand,” Vickers said.

The organization also provides

emergency food boxes via a drive-thru at its main facility at 405 E. Harrison Drive. No commercial driver’s license is needed for volunteer drivers, and all shifts include training and support from AFFCB staff.

AFFCB was founded in 1981 and has expanded through the years to serve an array of needs beyond food assistance. Today, the nonprofit offers daily sack lunches, showers, clothing, senior-specific food programs, holiday assistance, school uniform drives, and baby care supplies.

The food bank also distributes USDA emergency food boxes through the Emergency Food Assistance Program and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program for seniors. All programs are free and require a brief application process.

Visit affcb.org for more information on volunteering or donating.

Pool

• From page 14

- Friday: 12:00–9:00 p.m.
 - Saturday: 10:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m.
 - Sunday: 1:00–7:00 p.m.
- On Memorial Day, Juneteenth, and

Independence Day, the pool will be open from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

In addition to regular programming, the city will host three “Dive-In Movie” events, inviting families to watch films while swimming or floating in the pool. Gates will open at 7:00 p.m., with each movie beginning at approx-

imately 7:30 p.m. General admission is \$6.

The Dive-In Movie schedule is as follows:

- Saturday, May 24 – Moana 2
- Saturday, June 14 – Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile
- Saturday, August 23 – Shark Tale

Public art

• From page 14

area high schools, including Apollo, Desert Edge, Paradise Honors, Valley Vista and others.

“Gallery 37 is a cornerstone of WVAC’s mission to nurture young artists and foster cultural vibrancy throughout the West Valley,” said Kathy Knecht, executive director of

the West Valley Arts Council. “This year’s cohort will not only sharpen their artistic talents but also leave a meaningful legacy for the Tolleson community.”

This summer, the 15 apprentices will gain college credit, a stipend for their work and hands-on experience focusing on youth development and regional public art projects, leaving a legacy as part of Gallery 37’s artists who have been active for more than

two decades.

Last year’s installation, unveiled Oct. 16 at Estrella Mountain Community College, was the result of a summer’s work by student artists and their instructors. Titled “Cultivating Community” and “Legacy of the Land,” the dual design creates multiple visual perspectives depending on where the viewer stands. The ribbon-cutting was facilitated by the Southwest Valley Chamber of Commerce and at-

tended by program participants.

“I saw photos before I saw the sculpture in person and thought it was two pieces, but it’s not. The creativity is mind-blowing,” said Kathy Knecht, executive director of the West Valley Arts Council. “I always felt like education was a vehicle to make the world a better place, and certainly this is another step in that journey.”

Visit westvalleyarts.org for more information.

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SPORTS

Canyon View's 5A title drive starts under Hood

By Richard Smith

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Even after fall ball, Coach Nick Swanson was not sure what to make of his inexperienced Canyon View baseball team.

But he knew Gonzaga-bound senior ace pitcher Landon Hood could lessen the growing pains.

"We lost all of our starters except for Colin Mowrey, our catcher. But it's been like that for three years in a row, where we've completely turned over because we've been so senior heavy. And our fall was rough. We were scratching our heads in the dugout with the coaching staff, just trying to figure out what we could do to be competitive," Swanson said. "We knew going into the season we had Landon Hood. We think he's the best pitcher in Arizona. Outside of that, we didn't have a lot of guys with experience."

Hood plays for and just graduated from the school in Waddell but lives in Goodyear.

During an 18-1 regular season the Jaguars performed better than expected across the board, which includes Hood despite his lofty standards. The pitcher finished with a 6-1 record, 1.21 ERA and 65 strikeouts in 57 2/3 innings as a



Canyon View senior pitcher Landon Hood delivers a pitch during a home game earlier this season. Hood entered a 5A playoff semifinal May 14 against Vail Cienega with an 0.37 ERA and 11-1 record. (Courtesy K7 Visuals/For Independent Newsmedia)

junior in 2024.

This season — including two playoff wins — Hood is borderline untouchable, sporting a 0.37 ERA, 11-1 record, seven complete games and 121 strikeouts in 75 innings.

"I've got a lot of confidence. I think we're going to go far. Every single dude is doing their jobs, so we'll have a good run at it," Hood said.

Canyon View's preseason tournament gave the team and its coaching staff confidence.

"In our first tournament of the year we played Liberty and lost 3-2. We gave up three unearned runs. And we knew that if there were things we could clean up, we would be very dangerous," Swanson said.

That was Hood's first start of the

season and his only loss, despite not having allowed an earned run.

He extracted a measure of revenge on April 23 at Liberty, tossing a complete game shutout against the Lions. By that point, the Jaguars were the top ranked team in 5A.

"This year the target on our back has been bigger. But I think we've handled it good," Hood said. "We're very clutch in those situations"

This young school in Waddell essentially started its varsity program after COVID-19 wiped out the 2020 season.

Swanson's squad reached the 5A quarterfinals in 2021, 2022 and 2023 before a first round loss last year.

But the coach said the program operated with a spotlight early.

"We preach every year that we're Canon View baseball. We always have a target on our backs," Swanson said. "Canyon View softball, Canyon View basketball, Canyon View wrestling, Canyon View girls track and field ... we're full of champions. Other teams are trying to bring us down. It's often times the other team's World Series when they play us."

Young stars like sophomore infielder Ricky Yurir and junior infielder/pitch-

• See **Hood** on page 21

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Estrella Foothills grabs 1st beach volleyball title

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

QUEEN CREEK — Christian Millhiser felt his undefeated Estrella Foothills beach volleyball team should have been seeded higher than No. 8 in this year's Division II team tournament.

"We were undefeated," Millhiser said after his Wolves rallied to beat Arcadia to win EFHS's first team state title in the sport. "That just said to us that we have to prove we're the best."

The Wolves' 3-2 win over No. 3 seed Arcadia at Casteel High School on April 30 capped a 16-0 season. That included state-tourney wins over Division II No. 1 Gilbert Christian and No. 4 seed Flagstaff.

The win over Arcadia was as memorable as any other. The championship was tied, 2-2, with the Wolves' No. 2 team of Emma Curry and Sadie Sny-

der and No. 3 team of Kaitley Petersen and Ally Caton getting wins.

The last two duos out on the sand were the No. 1 teams, with the title hinging on the performance of EFHS's Abby Stenz and Autumn Hill and their Arcadia opponents.

Stenz and Hill rallied after dropping the first set 21-11. They won 21-15 and 15-5 to start the on-court celebration.

"Abby and Autumn have been clutch for us all year," Millhiser said. "They aren't fazed by the pressure. Three times, we've needed them to win, and they've come through each time."

Caton, a senior, said a key for any volleyball player is to stay mentally in each set until the last point.

"Staying with it to the end is what got us here," she said.

• See **Title** on page 21



Estrella Foothills' Iliana Brown sets the ball for teammate Giselle Wochner during the pair's match against Arcadia in the Division II team championships April 30 in Queen Creek. (Independent News-media/Jason W. Brooks)

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SPORTS

Hood

• From page 18

er Brody Meyer emerged.

Yuriar missed most of his freshman season and leads the Jaguars in average (.495), home runs (three), hits (45), slugging percentage (.802) and RBI (39).

Senior Brock Berlan is the ignition, leading off with a team high .559 on base percentage and scoring 52 runs.

“He’s the table setter for us. As he goes, we go. He has great leadership qualities and great energy. He gives us a competitive at bat in that first at bat every game,” Swanson said.

These new foundation pieces emerged around the bedrock of Hood and stellar defensive catcher Mowrey.

They’ve worked together all four years, though only the last two were on varsity.

“We have a good battery. He knows when there’s the smallest thing wrong on

every pitch and he knows what to call,” Hood said. “He’s really good behind the plate. I have so much confidence in him and comfort with him.”

Meyer is Canyon View’s second most potent hitter and its top reliever, with an 0.54 ERA and two saves in 13 innings.

Junior Cason Hagerman settled in as second starter, with a 6-1 record and 1.85 ERA

“I like us in the box. I love us on the mound. If we can play defense, we’re going to win,” Swanson said “We’ve made a lot of errors this year. We kicked the ball around late. The second half of the season, we haven’t done that as much, and that’s why we’ve been on this long winning streak.”

As of press time, the 29-4 Jaguars needed one win in two games to reach their first 5A state final — with a clear plan.

“Just give Landon Hood the baseball and get out of his way,” Swanson said.



The Estrella Foothills Wolves pose with their school’s first girls beach volleyball team state trophy after winning the Division II state team title April 30 in Queen Creek. (Independent Newsmedia/ Jason W. Brooks)

Title

• From page 19

Curry said having the confidence of teammates makes a difference in beach volleyball. So does a strong per-

formance in indoor “floor” volleyball; Estrella won a state title with many of its beach players last fall.

“It’s really the same group of girls, so that’s a great memory for us and people know who we are now,” Curry said.

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EDUCATION

Agua Fria District breaks ground on arts academy

By Mary Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Agua Fria Union High School District and the city of Litchfield Park broke ground on the Hilltop Academy for the Arts on May 1, marking the start of a major investment in arts education and cultural development in the West Valley.

The groundbreaking ceremony, held at the historic Hilltop site, showcased the talents of student artists from across the district. A jazz band performed, actors presented a monologue on the history of La Loma, dancers and singers contributed to the celebration, a painter created art in real time, featuring a painting of a peacock, the new school's mascot and a symbol of Paul Litchfield's legacy.

"This is where their dreams will



Agua Fria Union High School District breaks ground on Hilltop Academy for the Arts in Litchfield Park. (Mary Goldmeier/Independent Newsmedia)

take shape," said Agua Fria Governing Board President Kristen Acton. "As a governing board, we are beyond excited. I had a hard time with that word 'excited' because it doesn't capture what we feel."

The Fine Arts Academy is scheduled to open in August 2026 ahead of the 2026-27 school year. A ribbon-cutting ceremony is planned to take place in about a year. The campus will include a 700-seat performing

arts center for student productions and community events.

"This project is part of a legacy," Acton said. "It reflects who we are and what we believe in. The students deserve real options. The community thrives through shared experiences in the arts. And the school should match students' passions."

The academy will offer pathways focused on arts and entertainment careers. Students will have the opportunity to earn industry-recognized credentials, college credits, and hands-on experience through internships and capstone projects. The school is designed to serve up to 450 students and fits into the district's 10-year strategic plan to expand academic options.

Visit aguafria.org for more information.

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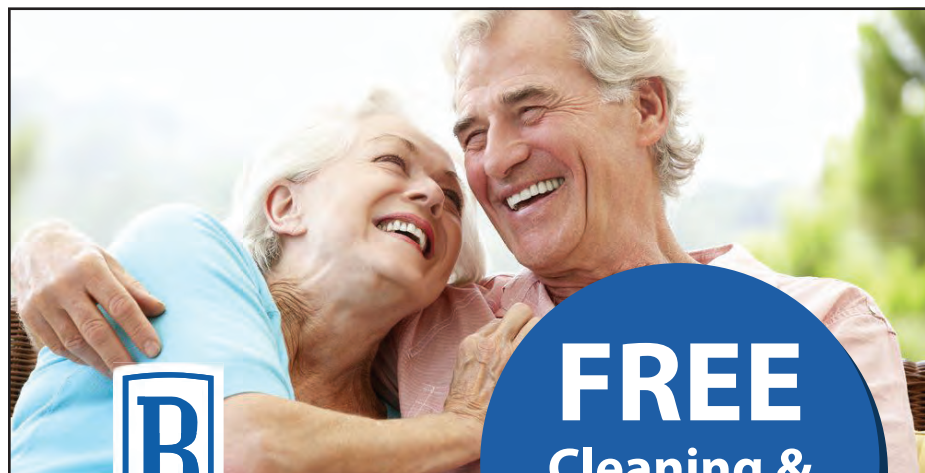
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EDUCATION

Liberty board places superintendent on leave

By Mary Goldmeier
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Liberty Elementary School District governing board voted to put Superintendent Court Monroe on leave following a closed-door meeting.



Court Monroe

The vote came after an executive session from which the public was excluded to confer with legal counsel regarding Monroe's contract, ongoing negotiations and potential litigation. It also comes after weeks of meetings where community members called for his removal.

Upon returning from the session, which is allowed under state law, the board approved a motion to send Monroe on administrative leave with pay until further notice. Board member Kellie Zimmerman was the only person to vote against the motion.

Monroe's role will be temporarily filled by Dr. Stephanie Mohorne, the district's assistant superintendent.

District officials have not commented on what contract changes are being discussed or how long Monroe will be on leave.

The action follows months of community concern regarding Monroe. At the district's February board meeting, a packed room of parents, teachers and residents called for Monroe's removal along with the ouster of then-board President Bryan Parks and Vice President Kris Kenyon.

Vicki Johnson, president of the Liberty Education Association, was among several speakers who

voiced frustration with district leadership, citing unprofessional conduct in legal matters, a lack of accountability and fiscal irresponsibility.

"We believe that our school board has not been adequately monitoring the actions of our superintendent, which we find unacceptable," said Johnson. "It is the board's responsibility to ensure that all students receive a quality education and that teachers are properly supported. This cannot be achieved under the leadership of Dr. Court Monroe. He must either resign or be removed by you as board members."

In the meetings that followed, public comments continued to urge the board to review Monroe's contract and begin seeking new leadership.

Monroe, who has served as superintendent since 2021, has not publicly responded to the recent calls for his resignation. His current contract runs through June 2027. In August 2024, Monroe received a salary increase signed off on by Michael Todd, who recently was reappointed to the board and now serves as board president.

Mohorne joined the district in 2023 with more than two decades of experience working in Iowa public schools as a teacher, principal, administrator and associate superintendent.

"Liberty is a family oriented district — between staff, students and families, I want to carry that feeling of community forward. Community is priceless and essential to a district," Mohorne stated.

For information, visit liberty25.org.

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NEIGHBORS

Percussionist Dom Moio breaks down Brazilian rhythm in Goodyear lecture

By Mary Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Jazz drummer and percussionist Dominic Moio brought more than four decades of musical experience to Goodyear's Hot Coffee and Art lecture series, where he led an presentation on Brazilian percussion and rhythm.

Speaking to a crowd of about 40 at the Goodyear Recreation Campus, Moio unpacked the cultural and musical foundations of Brazilian music through hands-on demonstrations of instruments like the pandeiro, tamborim, surdo, and cuíca. With humor, history, and technical insight, he explored how a mix of layered textures, distinct articulations, and regional influences all come

together to form musical styles such as samba, bossa nova, and maracatu.

"Brazilian music has been a love of mine since 1972," said Moio. "I've been trying to figure it out ever since."

Moio began playing drums in fifth grade. Early instruction from Dick Demers sparked both his musicianship and his interest in teaching. He went on to study with renowned drummers Bernard Purdie in New York and Alan Dawson in Boston, later dedicating his first book, "Be Bop Phrasing for Drums," to Dawson.

He played with jazz greats like Clark Terry, Don Doane, and Herb Pomeroy on the East Coast before heading west to join his brother Bill in Reno, Nevada.

There, he took up a post as house drummer for the "Hello Hollywood Hello," show at the MGM Grand from 1980 to 1984. Moio backed major entertainers such as Debbie Reynolds and Joan Rivers, while continuing to perform with jazz musicians like Don Menza and Ahmad Jamal.

Since moving to Phoenix in 1988, Moio has taught at Arizona State University and Mesa Community College, recorded more than 65 jazz CDs, and performed with figures including Conte Candoli and Shorty Rogers. But a turning point came when he met Cuban percussionist Walfredo Reyes Sr.

"Up until that point, I was a drum-

• See **Rhythm** on page 25



Percussionist Dom Moio breaks plays the cuíca at Goodyear's Hot Coffee and Art lecture. (Mary Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)



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INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

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NEIGHBORS

Rhythm

• From page 24

mer. I could play jazz drums, but I didn't know anything about percussion," Moio said.

Reyes challenged Moio's understanding of percussion and piqued his interest initially by playing congas with one hand while keeping time on a small drum kit with the other.

"It sounded like two people. I bought a set of congas that day, and that was the beginning."

At the Goodyear lecture, Moio demonstrated how Brazilian rhythms are built from the ground up—starting with the deep pulse of the surdo, a large bass drum that forms the heartbeat of samba and other regional styles.

"The surdo provides the low end," Moio explained. "It gives the music that foundational thump, like a bass drum in a marching band."

He noted that traditional surdos are quite large, often staying home as musicians age. For the workshop, he used a smaller repique, which mimics the tone of the surdo.

Moving up the frequency spectrum, Moio introduced the pandeiro, often described as Brazil's version of the tambourine. But unlike the handheld jingles common in Western pop music, the pandeiro's jingles are drier, set in a wooden frame designed for precise articulation.

"It's the hardest instrument I've ever tried to play," Moio said. "You're gripping it in one hand while using your thumb, fingertips, and palm to create completely different sounds."

He demonstrated the pandeiro's role as both a melodic and rhythmic instrument—capable of imitating both bass and snare drums—and explained how advanced players layer multiple rhythmic voices into a single handheld frame.

Then came the tamborim, a small, high-pitched frame drum typical-

ly struck with a flexible stick. Moio showed how the drum's sound cuts through the ensemble, making it a key element in samba schools and parades.

"You'll see 50 of these in a samba ensemble," he said. "They play sharp, syncopated rhythms that add intensity and brightness."

Moio also demonstrated shakers, caxixis, and the cuíca—a friction drum known for its squeaky, expressive tone. Sometimes called a "laughing drum," the cuíca is played by rubbing a stick mounted inside the drum's body, producing a vocal-like sound.

"It sounds funny, but it's a real instrument," Moio said. "I've heard it played with orchestras. In the right context, it adds character and soul."

While showcasing the instruments individually, Moio emphasized how each plays a distinct role in the rhythmic puzzle of Brazilian music. A traditional samba rhythm, for instance, is built by layering low-frequency surdo hits, mid-range pandeiro patterns, sharp tamborim accents, and shaker textures, each performed by a different musician or overdubbed by a percussionist who understands when to add or hold back.

"The biggest thing I teach percussion students is restraint," Moio said. "It's not about showing everything you can do, it's about knowing what fits."

He likened percussion arranging to cooking: "You don't throw everything into the sauce. You add the right ingredients at the right time."

Moio also discussed the influence of Afro-Brazilian religious music, pointing to regional variations in rhythm and instrumentation. In northern Brazil, he observed drummers playing hand-crafted instruments tuned over open flames, tools built from local materials and passed down through generations.

"They don't have commercial drums. They use what's available," he said. "You really feel how music is woven into daily life."

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FROM THE COVER

Healing

• From page 1

gram,” Dombrowski said. “I do palliative care work, so I’m trying to keep people alive through poetry.”

Her interest in the field stems in part from personal experience. “I have a 26-year-old son who has a profound disability. I don’t know that I would have survived without writing poetry,” Dombrowski said. “At first I didn’t know what it was called. I just knew it was helping me. Once I knew what it’s called and I started to understand what it had actually done for me, and what it was continuing to do, I had to start bringing in other people.”

Poetic medicine, as described by Dombrowski, is a therapy that incorporates elements of expressive writing, poetry reading, and therapeutic dialogue to benefit patients both mentally and physically. Poetic medicine encourages active emotional processing through the medium of poetry.

“The very first hospital founded by Benjamin Franklin instituted poetry therapy as a complementary modality,” Dombrowski said. The practice continued in various forms through the 20th century. It used to be practiced in clinical settings, especially by psychologists, through the ‘60s, ‘70s, and ‘80s.

Today it is called poetic medicine,



Rosemarie Dombrowski led Goodyear learners in a lecture on medicinal poetry. (Mary Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)

as activists like Dombrowski try to embed it more permanently in medical spaces.

“This work is important and poets always have done it historically. They have always been reframing our relationship the big kind of philosophical subjects, and we all have trouble wrapping our minds around: pain, loss, dying,” Dombrowski said. “Poets have spent hundreds of years of laboring. So why not turn to that? They’ve probably written as much on the subject as any scholar has.”

During the workshop, Dombrowski outlined the evidence supporting poetic medicine’s use across several areas of health care, including chronic illness, stress, aging, and grief.

“In 1999, a study published in (the Journal of the American Medical As-

sociation) found that expressive writing reduced symptoms of asthma and rheumatoid arthritis,” she said. “This was measurable, it wasn’t just about how the participants felt.”

Other studies show that rhythmic poetry, when read aloud, can increase heart rate variability, otherwise restored by diet, exercise and lifestyle changes

“We’ve known since at least 1997 that expressive writing can combat stress,” Dombrowski added.

Dombrowski said creating poetry as a group reduces isolation and reciting it increases the flow of oxygen to the brain, assisting with memory retention in aging individuals.

In the context of grief, Dombrowski shared her experience after the loss of her mother. “For the first eight or nine months, I was paralyzed. I tried everything from mindfulness to neuroscience, but it was poetry that helped me start to integrate that loss,” she said. “The research says the same thing. Writing about memories and loss can help people find meaning, and that’s the only treatment for grief that has shown long-term benefit.”

Following the discussion, participants engaged in writing and reflection activities. First, they read and discussed selected poems, including “I Worried” by Mary Oliver and Denise Levertov’s “Talking to Grief.” Participants were then invited to create metaphors for their own

experiences of grief or stress or to list out and reframe personal anxieties using the structure of a poem they had just read.

Dombrowski also introduced attendees to the “Poetry Pharmacy,” a project she curated at Banner-University Medical Center in Phoenix. The installation allows people to choose from labeled bottles containing printed poems on themes such as resilience, grief, mindfulness, or healing.

“It’s poetic medicine practiced in a passive way,” she said. “You grab the bottle, open it, and find a poem related to the theme on the label. It’s something people can do on their own time.”

She encouraged participants to think about how poetry could be integrated into everyday medical care. “Why not include a poem in the discharge papers, something about healing, or hope, or strength?” she said. “It wouldn’t be difficult and it might make a difference.”

Dombrowski’s nonprofit offers a free virtual community workshop every third Saturday of the month open to everyone. No writing experience is necessary. Revisionary Arts also offers specialized groups catered to veterans, people with dementia and adults with disabilities.

More information about Revisionary Arts programs and resources is available at revisionaryarts.org.

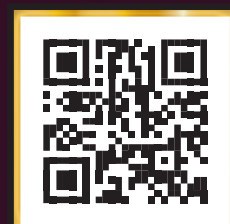


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FROM THE COVER

Students

• From page 1

Winners in each category received scholarships and awards during the May 8 ceremony at 1900 N. Civic Square. First-place winners were awarded \$250 scholarships, while runners-up received \$150. The Best in Show recipient earned a \$600 scholarship.

Among the winners was Persephone Preciado, who took first place in the Drawing and Painting category for her charcoal portrait titled "Reflection." The piece, her first attempt at working in charcoal, is a deeply personal self-portrait created as a way to process her senior year of high school.

"I made this as a reflection of my overall senior year," Preciado said. "I took the photo right at the start of this year and drew it now, so then at the end of it, I could look at what I did and who I was before I started. It's good to compare that to where I am now and the skills I've developed."

Preciado originally created the piece for a school assignment but later submitted it to the city competition. She plans to attend Arizona State University in the fall to study fine arts and business management with the goal of growing her mural art business.

"I'm a mural artist, and I can paint



Goodyear celebrates the winners of the Mayor Select Art Program. (Mary Goldmeier/Independent Newsmedia)

on large scales," she stated. "I'm known for realistic landscapes and portraits, but my style is versatile — I paint whatever my client wants. I hope I can be a full-time artist."

Goodyear Mayor Joe Pizzillo, who helped present the awards, praised the students for their exceptional creativity and technical skill.

"I'm a numbers guy, and I love art mainly because I can't do it," Pizzillo said. "I'm just fascinated by the art these students create. We've got a great group of young people with great art. It was very difficult to make decisions."

The Mayor Select Art Program is open to students in grades nine through 12 who live in or attend school in Goodyear.

For more information, visit goodyearaz.gov.

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The Litchfield Elementary School District students win first place in the Westside Impact Math Challenge. (Submitted photo/Sam Nuanez)

Litchfield school district wins all divisions at math challenge

The Litchfield Elementary School District won first place in all three grade-level divisions at the 2025 Westside Impact Math Challenge.

The annual academic event brought together student teams from more than 10 West Valley school districts to compete in problem-solving and math-third and fourth, fifth and sixth, and seventh and eighth grade divisions, respectively. Each team was led by district educators serving as coaches.

“This is an incredible accomplish-

ment for our students, coaches and school communities,” said Dr. Carter Davidson, LESD79 superintendent.

“This clean sweep shows the power of high expectations, rigorous instruction and passionate educators who believe in every student’s potential.”

The Westside Impact Math Challenge is held annually to promote collaboration, critical thinking and academic growth among elementary and middle school students.

Visit lesd79.org for more information.

Goodyear student named to Junior Achievement’s ‘18 Under 18’ list

West Point High School senior Nasar Bahody has been named one of Arizona’s top youth leaders in Junior Achievement of Arizona’s 2025 “18 Under 18” awards.

Bahody, 17, is being recognized for his wide-ranging impact in education, community service and scientific research. He has founded several organizations, including STEAM Through Leadership, West Point Surprise Squad and NeuroAdvocacy, a project focused on empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities.

These initiatives have collectively raised tens of thousands of dollars and impacted thousands of lives across the state.

“Each year, we are inspired by the remarkable ways our students excel—both in the classroom and in their communities,” stated Katherine Cecala, CEO of Junior Achievement of Arizona. “In such a short time, they achieve so much, reminding us that the future is in the hands of thoughtful, driven leaders who are already making a difference in the world around them.”

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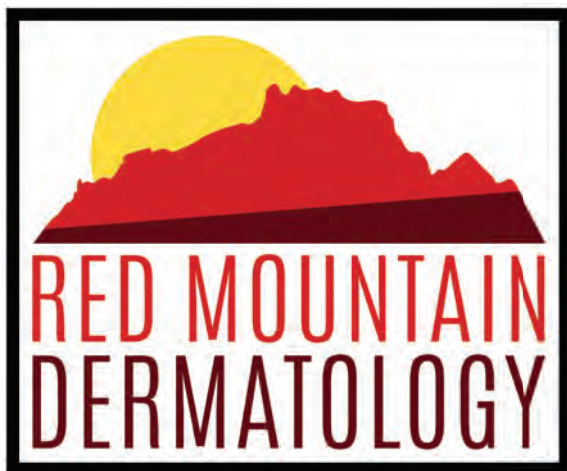
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