



Community

Fire district calls for \$33.8M bond election; **2**



APACHE JUNCTION/GOLD CANYON INDEPENDENT



Neighbors

Group raises funds for wrestling youth programs; **22**

June 2025 Volume 67 Issue 6 Your Nonpartisan Community Newspaper • YourValley.net

\$155M budget proposed for city of Apache Junction

\$21M for '25-26 earmarked for public safety

By Richard H. Dyer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A public hearing and adoption of the final \$155 million budget for fiscal year 2025-26 for the city of Apache Junction is slated for a Monday, June 16 meeting.

It starts at 7 p.m. in the city council chambers, 300 E. Superstition Blvd.

The proposed expenditures of the top five departments funded by the \$155,819,660 budget, according to city records, are:

- Public safety, \$21,087,797;
- Parks and recreation, \$8,899,028;
- Management services, \$6,327,043;
- General government operations, \$6,107,262; and
- Development services, \$3,992,266.

The draft balanced city budget represents the council's goals and objectives for the community, City Manager Bryant Powell said during a May 5 council budget work session.

He thanked the finance department for its work to "correlate where we ended the last fiscal year, where

• See **Budget** on page 10

The top proposed expenditure funded by the \$155,819,660 budget, according to city records, is for public safety, \$21,087,797. (Rayna Steffen, AJPD)

Shopping local helps economy, Apache Junction businesses

By Richard H. Dyer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Apache Junction, Gold Canyon and Mesa businesses — including the Apache Junction/Gold Canyon Independent newspaper — are offering discounts this summer to holders of a shop local card sold by the Apache Junction Area Chamber of Commerce.

The card costing \$2 — valid only for May 1-Oct. 31, 2025 — is available 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Friday at the chamber, 567 W. Apache Trail.

The list of where the cards can be used and discounts offered are at <https://www.ajchamber.com/shop-local>. Discounts range from 10% to 25%. There also are special discounts such as a free lunch with a tour of a facility or a free book from a church.

The chamber's shop local program began in May 2015 and was designed to stimulate local spending by creating an incentive for consumers to support local businesses and boost

• See **Shop Local** on page 12

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COMMUNITY NEWS

IN BRIEF

GOVERNMENT

Council approves telecommunications license

A telecommunications license agreement has been approved between Flying Bull Internet LLC — doing business as Novos Fiber — and the city of Apache Junction.

The Apache Junction City Council in a consent agenda with other items voted unanimously on May 6 to approve the agreement, authorizing City Engineer Emile Schmid to execute the agreement.

Novos Fiber plans to install and operate telecommunications fiber optic lines and related support equipment in a portion of the city's right of way.

LIBRARY

Apache Junction Public Library closure postponed

The anticipated closure of the Apache Junction Public Library, initially scheduled for Friday, May 16, and Saturday, May 17, has been postponed due to equipment shipping delays.

The library, 1177 N. Idaho Road, was initially set to close to allow for city contractors to safely remove and replace the Distribution Board 1 Service Entrance Section.

The electrical work will be rescheduled at a later date.

SEWER

Apache Junction Sewer District budget public hearing slated

A public hearing on this year's budget will be held at the June 24 meeting of the Apache Junction Sewer District board. The meeting starts at 8 a.m. in the District Board Room, 5661 S. Ironwood Drive.



The district is an all-hazards organization responding to more than just fire. Over 76% of all requests for emergency services include rescue and emergency medical services. (Independent Newsmedia, Arianna Grainey)

Superstition Fire & Medical District calls for November \$33.8M bond election

The board of directors for the Superstition Fire & Medical District voted unanimously recently to call for a special election to seek voter approval to issue bonds to provide funds to construct, renovate, improve, equip and furnish fire stations and other district facilities, acquire apparatus, vehicles and equipment, and other costs.

The \$33.8 million proposal will appear on a Nov. 4 special election ballot. The estimated average tax rate for the proposed bond authorization is 27 cents per \$100 of net assessed limited property value.

The April 16 decision was the

culmination of several months of work by a citizen's advisory committee that conducted a public process to explore a potential general obligation bond to address public safety needs, consider improvements and weigh possible costs to the taxpayers, according to a release.

The committee focused on the history of the district, how fire districts are funded in Arizona, current and future service levels, budgeting and financial issues, capital needs, and toured current facilities, it states.

Following their deliberative pro-

cess, the committee recommended a special election in 2025 to provide revenue for modern public safety facilities, vehicles and equipment.

"We appreciate our local residents who dedicated their time to review the issues facing our district," SFMD Fire Chief John Whitney said in the release. "Over the past 10 years, the annual call volume in the Superstition Fire & Medical District has increased by more than 60% from 8,000 calls in 2014 to nearly 13,000 calls in 2024. At the same time, we face capped

• See **SFMD** on page 5



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BUSINESS

IN BRIEF

Business licenses

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

There were 48 business licenses issued in April 2025 in the city of Apache Junction.

The following business licenses are listed by name — including doing business as or dba; city; contact name; and North American Industry Classification System (code). For the full list, go to YourValley.net.

- Dataworks Plus LLC; Greenville, South Carolina; Lisa Cole; Custom Computer Programming Services (541511).

- Thirty Second Design LLC dba Budget Blinds; Phoenix; Ken Bonham; Interior Design Services (541410).

- Decca Multi Family Builders Inc. Scottsdale; Kristen Zeno; New Single-Family Housing Construction (Except For-Sale Builders) (236115).

- Brothers HVAC Inc.; Peoria; Tina And Guy Swisher; Plumbing, Heating, And Air-Conditioning Contractors (238220).

- Pavion Corp.; Chantilly, Virginia; Lindsay Driscoll; Audio And Video Equipment Manufacturing (334310).

- Power Of Pain Foundation Inc. dba International Pain Foundation; Apache Junction; Ken Taylor; Civic And Social Organizations (813410).

- The Back Rub Company LLC; Phoenix; Tiffany Richards; Other Personal Care Services (812199).

- Apex Cleaning Services; Apache Junction; Gina Schaefer; Janitorial Services (561720).

- American Wolf Construction; Mesa; Richard Carns; New Single-Family Housing Construction (Except For-Sale Builders) (236115).

• See **Business** on page 14

March 2025 busiest month in history at Mesa Gateway Airport

By Connor Greenwall

SPECIAL TO INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Mesa Gateway Airport had its busiest month in history in March 2025, officials said.

More than 200,000 passengers traveled through the airport in March 2025, the most ever for the airport. March marked the fourth consecutive month of increased passenger activity, said Ryan Smith, the communications director of Mesa Gateway Airport.

The airport expects to see double-digit growth throughout the summer based on passenger bookings, Smith said.

In anticipation of the growth, the airport had been planning for years, Smith said. In 2024, the airport opened a new terminal with five new passenger gates to handle the additional volume.

Mesa Gateway Airport is the largest reliever airport in the greater Phoenix area, and helps take some of the passenger load from Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, the busiest airport in Arizona.

The airport started in 1941 as Mesa Military Airport, but was later renamed to Williams Air Base when it was acquired by the U.S. military and was used for flight training during World War II.

Williams Gateway Airport began passenger service in the 2000s and has continued to see year-after-year growth alongside the surrounding area.

In 2024, 1.88 million passengers flew through the airport, a 0.46% increase from 2023, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics.



Interior of the remodeled terminal in 2024 at Mesa Gateway Airport. (Sean Egan/Gateway Airport)

MESA GATEWAY AIRPORT

The airport is operated by the Mesa Gateway Airport Authority Board of Directors, which consists of representation from Apache Junction, Mesa, Queen Creek, Gilbert and the Gila River Indian Community.

The airport authority was formed to develop, reuse, operate and maintain the airport property and facilities at the former Williams Air Force Base, which closed in September 1993, according to <https://www.gatewayairport.com/leadership>.

After seeing a decline in passengers in 2020, the airport returned to and has exceeded its pre-COVID-19 pandemic numbers, following the trend set prior to 2020.

Increased passenger demand has driven development and growth around the airport and in east Mesa. Large industrial parks, shopping centers and subdivisions have been built in the rapidly growing area.

"It's caused a little bit of slowing and delays and getting where you need to go," said Keith Jorgensen, who has lived in Mesa near the airport for more than 20 years. "It's also

brought in jobs into the area, so it's a good thing for property value in your home as well."

Jorgensen said he was excited the airport and area continue to grow, but he has never flown out of the airport himself.

"It'd be awesome to be able to fly out of there and not have to drive to Phoenix, but every time we've looked, it seems like there's no flights that are available wherever we want," Jorgensen said.

Jorgensen said he will keep checking for flights out of Mesa Gateway

• See **Mesa Gateway** on page 14

COMMUNITY NEWS

SFMD

• From page 2

tax rates and reduced valuations that make addressing this growth a challenge. We thank them for their deliberation and hard work.”

It is the opinion of the SFMD board of directors that it will be challenging to address increases in the costs of emergency equipment and emergency response vehicles, combined with many current resources reaching the end of their useful life with current budget resources, the release states.

“The cost of personnel equipment (helmets, coats, gloves, etc.) to equip our public safety personnel has more than doubled since 2019. The cost of breathing apparatuses alone has nearly tripled in that time,” SFMD Governing Board Director Jason Moeller said in the release. “Many of our

vehicles are years past their service date — with rising repair costs and risks of being out of service. Several vehicles are near the end of their useful life and may take up to three years to replace. Our board of directors has determined that a bond would be an effective way to address these items.”

To meet the demands of the growing community, the bond recommendation includes funding for a new fire station (Station No. 266) to serve the Superstition Vistas area, which was annexed into the Superstition Fire and Medical District in 2021. Adding this station would potentially help ensure crews remain strategically located across the district — supporting faster response times for all residents, the release states.

In addition to the new station, the bond recommends funding for equipment, vehicles and improvements to existing facilities to increase capacity and efficiency, as well as address on-

going training needs.

“Bonds are used to finance large capital items like facility improvements and new equipment that are not typically covered by the regular maintenance and operations budget. The district sells bonds to investors to generate funding for the projects and then pays the investors back with interest over a period of 20 years. It is a way to plan for capital expenses that could help to avoid costly repairs or emergency replacement. We look forward to sharing information with the voters over the next few months, SFMD Governing Board Chair Kathleen Chamberlain said in the release.

The sale and issuance of general obligation bonds must first be authorized by a majority of the qualified electors of the district at a special bond election called for such purposes before the district can proceed. For information, voters can go to www.sfmd.az.gov or call 480-982-4440.

About the Superstition Fire and Medical District

Superstition Fire and Medical District employs 104 public safety personnel, 24 ambulance personnel and 14 support civilian staff serving the areas of Gold Canyon, Apache Junction and Superstition Vistas.

The district is an all-hazards organization responding to more than just fire. Over 76% of all requests for emergency services include rescue and emergency medical services.

The district has maintained response times with an average time of 4:33 minutes on emergency calls. The district uses fiscally responsible measures including pursuing grant opportunities, reducing pension liability, restructuring its health care system, and partnering with municipalities for shared services and purchasing, the release states.

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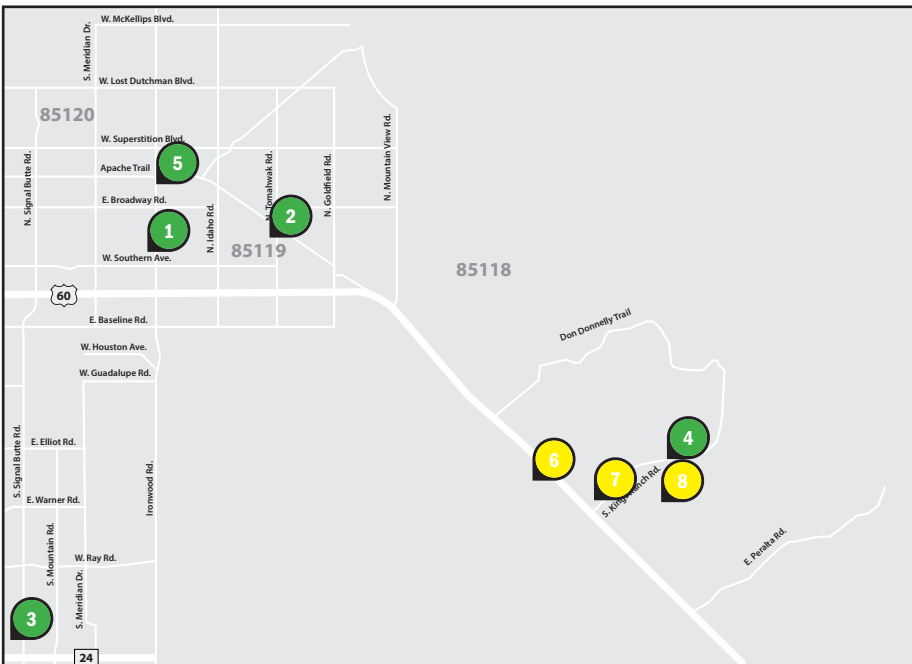
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BUSINESS MOVES



Map not to scale

Compiled by Richard H. Dyer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

IN THE NEWS

1 Brookdale Apache Junction, 2080 S. Ironwood Drive, has been recognized by U.S. News & World Report as Best Independent Living and Best Assisted Living among senior living communities across the nation, which includes high performance in activities, enrichment, management and staff. Residents and family members were surveyed in thousands of independent living, assisted living, memory care, and continuing care retirement communities across the country. Brookdale Apache Junction, achieved the highest possible rating.

2 A conditional-use permit has been approved to continue the use of an existing Apache Junction marijuana cultivation and infusion kitchen facility under new ownership. The property at 1575 E. 18th Ave. has been used for marijuana cultivation and infusion kitchen operations since 2014 pursuant to multiple conditional-use permits approved when management or ownership has changed. Scott

Vargas of **Border Health Inc.** and Cortex Holdings LLC, represented by Justin Brandt of Bianchi Brandt, is the applicant. Cortex Holdings LLC/Scott Vargas is the property owner.

3 Mesa Gateway Airport soared to new heights this March, achieving its busiest month in history, welcoming a record-breaking 261,536 total passengers. This surpasses the previous record from March 2022 by 9.3% and represents significant continued growth - with passenger numbers up 24% from March 2024 and flight activity increasing by an impressive 36%. Eight of the past 10 months have set year-over-year records. This spring, Allegiant Airlines boosted service to daily flights on nearly a dozen destinations, attracting sun-seeking travelers looking to enjoy Spring Training, restaurants, and other outdoor activities. The airport is operated by the Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport Authority. PMGAA consists of representation from Apache Junction, Mesa, Queen Creek, Gilbert, Gila River Indian Community. Go to www.gatewayairport.com.



BROOKDALE



4 The Gold Stallion Restaurant, 6030 S. Kings Ranch Road in Gold Canyon, participated in Arizona Restaurant Week May 16-25 and offered a three-course prix fixe meal with an appetizer, entree and dessert. As of May 15 there were 230 restaurants offering deals, according to <https://arizonarestaurantweek.com>. Go to <https://goldstallionaz.com>.

5 Reptile Junction, 90 S. Ironwood Drive in Apache Junction, May 17-18 offered a 15% discount as part of a grand reopening, according to a Facebook post @Reptilejunction-az. "We're so excited to celebrate our store's improvements and we hope you'll join us," it stated. "Come out and see our animal ambassadors — snag some adventurous photos, maybe purchase a reptile friend to take home, and be sure to tag us. Can't wait! #reptilejunction." Go to <https://www.reptilejunctionaz.com>.

NEW HOURS

6 Gold Canyon RV and Golf Resort, 7151 E. U.S. Highway 60 in Gold Canyon, has new hours for the summer. From May 1 to Sept.



MESA GATEWAY AIRPORT

30, the office will be open 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Friday; activities will be offered 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Friday; the rental office will be open 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Tuesday-Wednesday and 8 a.m.-1 p.m. Thursday; the clubhouse will be open 7 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 7 a.m.-2 p.m. Friday, with gym access via gate card 5 a.m.-10 p.m. daily; the mail room will be open 10 a.m.-noon Monday-Friday; and the laundry facility will be open 24/7. For information, call 480-576-2995.

7 My Sister's Cafe, 6822 S. Kings Ranch Road in Gold Canyon, is now also open Thursdays. "Join us for an expanded menu featuring fresh, locally-sourced ingredients and a cozy atmosphere. Whether you're stopping by for a quick sandwich or a leisurely dinner, we're thrilled to welcome you on Thursdays," it states at <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61557916690730>. The business is open 7 a.m.-2 p.m. and 4-8 p.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Call 480-982-0173.

8 North Star Halibut and Seafood, 6499 S. Kings Ranch Road in Gold Canyon, has new summer hours: 11 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Wednesday-Friday. "As fishing season in Alaska continues to wind up we will continue to get fresh seafood in," Jim Smith, on Facebook @jim.smith.460689, posted on a Gold Canyon community Facebook page.



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EDUCATION

SCHOOL NOTES

RECORDS

\$10K charged for public records request, AJUSD board decides

An individual representing a commercial business that seeks to be chosen for a future contract with Apache Junction Unified School District will be charged more than \$10,000 for public records regarding a closed bid process.

The AJUSD Governing Board on April 22 voted unanimously to charge \$10,550.

The company/vendor is seeking records concerning the district's eRate costs, Human Resources Director Sue Paschal told the governing board at an April 1 work session, according to the meeting's minutes.

"The person requesting the information would use the bids to use the information to increase their odds of getting a potential bid in the future. We plan to charge a fee of \$10,550 to provide this information," she said.

"The vendor would like to see what other companies provided and what we liked and disliked about each bid so they could have a better shot at being chosen in the future," Executive Director of Educational Services Meara Verna said to the governing board, according to the minutes.

Public records requests are outlined in AJUSD procedure 3-402.A Records — Disclosure of Public Records, which states in part "Any person is entitled to inspect (during regular office hours) public records in the custody of the district or to be furnished copies, printouts or photographs of any public record subject to applicable legal requirements and payment of relevant costs."

It states that once the records are ready, if a copy charge is assessed, the requester will pay in full prior to receiving material.

See the policy at https://www.board-policyonline.com/bl/?b=apache_junction#&hs=1788173.



A 39-page draft version of the document discussed by the EVIT board during a recent meeting has table-of-contents listings from active-shooter response protocols to windstorms, accounting for students in a disaster to hazardous materials spills and even war. (Metro Creative)

EVIT crisis manual update to include video training

By Richard H. Dyer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

East Valley Institute of Technology is preparing an updated manual for students and staff that lays out who to call and what to do in a variety of crisis situations.

A 39-page draft version of the document discussed by the EVIT board during a recent meeting has table-of-contents listings from active-shooter response protocols to windstorms, accounting for stu-

dents in a disaster to hazardous materials spills and even war.

John Zuccato, EVIT director of safety and student support, has retooled, reformatted and updated EVIT's crisis plan, Superintendent Chad Wilson told the board at a recent meeting.

"Crisis plans are incredibly important at organizations on a number of different levels — first and foremost to keep our students and staff safe," he said.

Zuccato said he worked with an employee of Valor Threat Protection to go through every EVIT building.

"The thing I love about EVIT is that we're unique and the challenges were very unique. And so where traditionally in for example in a lockdown situation it's really easy — you lock the door, close your windows and you're good to

• See **EVIT** on page 25

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FROM THE COVER

Budget

• From page 1

current revenues and current expenditures are at, and then to try to forecast where things are going. And in these times, sometimes that can be, you know, a little difficult.”

A total of \$3.5 million is set aside in the budget for work at the Apache Junction Rodeo Grounds, 1590 E. Lost Dutchman Blvd.

“A couple years ago we purchased land at the rodeo grounds and this will be the next phase, the next chapter as we get going through that,” Powell said.

A total of nine new general fund employees are in the budget, four new water employees and two grant-funded employees, Powell said.

“And this budget also has in it right around July 1 a 2.5% step increase for all of our staff. That is not quite to the



Finance Director Angelie Hawley (City of Apache Junction)

market that we compare to — it’s a little bit under — but the purpose of that is to keep the best we can in terms of managing what we’re not sure of in the marketplace,” he said.

The budget’s revenue go into three categories — general funds, special revenue funds and capital funds, Finance Director Angelie Hawley said



City Manager Bryant Powell (City of Apache Junction)

during the work session.

If council approves the proposed budget, some of the larger capital improvements planned include \$1.5 million for continued design of Weeke’s Wash, \$2 million for Palm Wash detention improvements, \$3 million for continued design for Southern Av-

• See **Budget** on page 12

LINE ITEMS IN BUDGET

The city of Apache Junction’s document for its tentative \$155 million budget for fiscal year 2025-26 includes line items of expenditures from the general fund such as:

- \$1,433,850 for south campus architectural design of police substation, library, park and maintenance yard.
- \$700,000 for construction of library reading garden.
- \$400,000 for aquatic center fencing and masonry replacement construction.
- \$150,000 for dog park shade structures.
- \$125,000 for surveillance cameras.
- \$100,000 for freestanding restrooms at public safety range.

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Substance Abuse Coalition Leaders of Arizona

This publication was made possible by grant number H79T1085739 from SAMHSA. The views, opinions and content of this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of SAMHSA or HHS.

How to use this Bingo Card

This card is intended to help build resilience in older children and tweens by helping them see the benefits of doing small things to help improve themselves and/or the world around them. Encourage your child to try for a Bingo up, across, or diagonal. Choose a small treat or reward they can earn when they get one. Maybe offer a larger reward if they fill their Bingo card by doing all the activities!

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Invite a friend to hang out	Leave an encouraging note where someone random will find it	Find a fun free exercise video and follow along	Choose a healthy alternative (fruits, veggies, water, exercise)
Reflect on what has gone right lately	Donate used items to a local shelter	Invite your family to sing a song or do a fun dance together	Make a silly video and share it with someone who needs cheering up

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Substance Abuse Coalition Leaders of Arizona

Source: AAP I This publication was made possible by grant number H79T1085739 from SAMHSA. The views, opinions and content of this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of SAMHSA or HHS.

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Civility Checklist

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☐ **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.

FROM THE COVER

Shop Local

• From page 1

the economy during the slower summer months, after the departure of winter visitors.

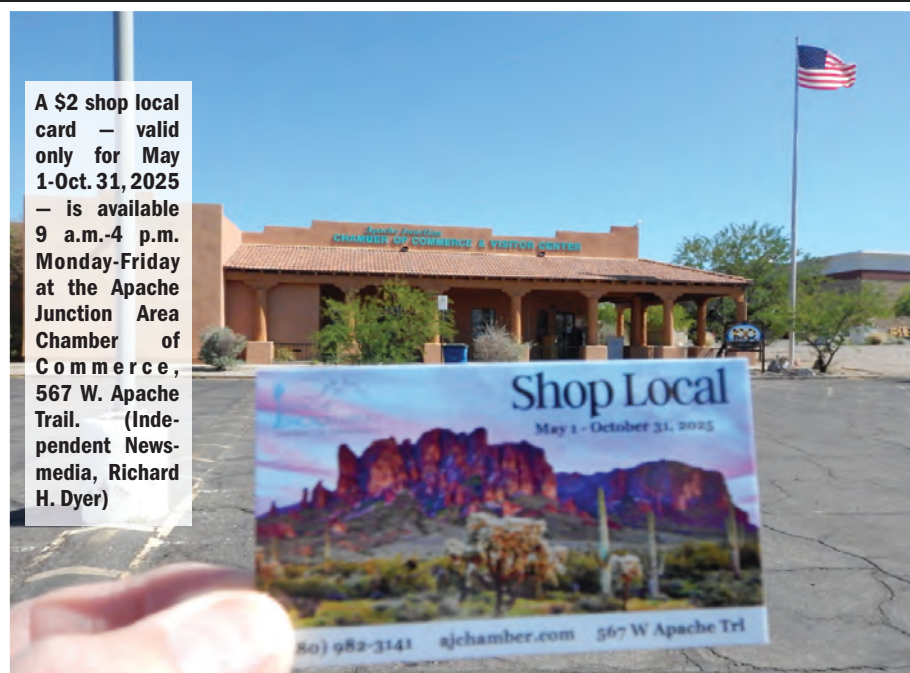
When the program launched, nonmember businesses were invited to participate for a fee. As the program has evolved, it has become an essential member benefit and is now open only to chamber members to participate.

The annual program's format has not changed for 2025, said Chamber President and CEO Mary Ann Przybylski.

"The shop local card does need to be purchased every year; there is a new card for each year," she said. "(T)he proceeds from the sale of the cards go toward the chamber's scholarship program."

Scott's Automotive of Apache Junction, 2085 W. Apache Trail, is offering 10% off a service up to \$150. It cannot be combined with other offers or coupons and excludes oil changes, tires and brakes.

Julie Larson, chief marketing of-



ficer at Scott's Automotive & Tire Centers Inc., said the business participates in the shop local program because it believes in investing in the communities that support it.

"The chamber's shop local program is a great way to connect with our neighbors, support other small businesses and show customers that when they shop local they're keep-

ing our town strong," she said.

The program's biggest benefit is the sense of community it builds, Larson said.

"We've met new customers, networked with fellow business owners and felt more connected to Apache Junction through the program. It's also a great way to remind people that local shops like ours offer not

just quality service — but real, personal relationships," she said.

Shopping local matters more than ever. With rising costs and economic uncertainty, small businesses are feeling the pressure, Larson said.

"Programs like this remind people that their choices have power. When you support a local business, you're helping real people — your neighbors, friends and families — stay in business and keep local jobs alive," she said.

One of the biggest challenges Scott's Automotive is facing is the ongoing shortage of skilled automotive technicians.

"Finding and retaining great talent in this industry is tough, especially when demand for quality service continues to grow. That's why we're committed to creating a workplace where technicians can build rewarding careers — because at the end of the day, our people are what set us apart," Larson said.

Richard H. Dyer can be reached at rdyer@iniusa.org, or on X @rhdyer. To voice your opinion on this story, connect with us at AzOpinions@iniusa.org.

Budget

• From page 10

venue and Palm Wash, \$1.35 million for fleet vehicle replacement and \$1.7

million for a south campus master plan, according to Hawley's presentation.

Councilmember Bryan Soller thanked city staff for their efforts to put forward a balanced budget.

"I want to thank you for having a balanced budget unlike the state that always wants to take our money. So thank you to all of the people that worked on our budget to make it balanced," he said.

The city's tentative FY 2025-26 budget is at <https://www.apachejunctionaz.gov/78/Current-Budget-Information>.

Richard H. Dyer can be reached at rdyer@iniusa.org, or on X @rhdyer. To voice your opinion on this story, connect with us at AzOpinions@iniusa.org.



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BUSINESS

Mesa Gateway

• From page 4

airport.

"I'm looking forward to more airliners possibly coming in there, and offering more options to fly to more places, and getting to check it out, because we haven't tried it yet," Jorgensen said.

The smaller, growing airport offers a different experience some passengers might not be used to.

"The weird part was getting on the plane, because you had to go outside onto the tarmac and go up the ramps," said Rachel Nye, a passenger who has flown at Mesa Gateway airport. "It was definitely a lot quicker and easier and more convenient than going to Sky Harbor."

The airport expects to have its busiest summer ever in 2025, Smith said.

"We're pretty positive about the summer and about the rest of the year, and hopefully things will stay consistent," Smith said.

Greenwall, a student at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, wrote the story about the continued growth of Gateway Airport for one of their classes.

Business

• From page 4

• Welch Companies Inc. dba Welch Electric; Chandler; Miranda Geyer; Electrical Contractors And Other Wiring Installation Contractors (238210).

• Mozzie Fox; Apache Junction; Laurie Debusk; Beauty Salons (812112).

• Dump N Delivery Services LLC; Apache Junction; Jimmy L Rush II; Landscaping Services (561730).

• 3 Dog Saloon LLC dba Dog Run Saloon; Apache Junction; John Cordova; Drinking Places (Alcoholic Beverages) (722410).

• AM Properties And Investments LLC; Gilbert; Robert Jarman; New Housing For-Sale Builders (236117).

• Ironwood Station LLC dba

Ironwood Station LLC; Mesa; Tina Reitzel; New Housing For-Sale Builders (236117).

• Lush Handmade Cosmetics LLC dba Lush Fresh Handmade Cosmetics; Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada; Nimeshika Gabbalage; Cosmetics, Beauty Supplies, And Perfume Retailers (456120).

• LLR Inc. dba Lularoe; Jackson, Wyoming; Jamie Ellis; Clothing And Clothing Accessories Retailers (458110).

• Lexisnexis Risk Solutions Fl Inc.; Newton, Massachusetts; Terence E Stone; All Other Information Services (519190).

• Lexisnexis Risk Data Management LLC; Newton, Massachusetts; Terence E Stone; All Other Information Services (519190).

• Unified Door And Hardware Group LLC; Tempe; Darin

Tuch; Other Miscellaneous Durable Goods Merchant Wholesalers (423990).

• 1836 Installations LLC; Tacoma, Washington; Tetiana Shaffer; Finish Carpentry Contractors (238350).

• Yellowstone Plumbing And Drains LLC; Queen Creek; Joshua Chasteen; Plumbing, Heating, And Air-Conditioning Contractors (238220).

• S-Comm Inc.; Raytown, Missouri; Anna Hanson; All Other Miscellaneous Retailers (459999).

• Electric-All-N-1-Llc; Apache Junction; Ed Gibson; Electrical Contractors And Other Wiring Installation Contractors (238210).

• Verde Valley Turf LLC; Phoenix; Stefin Gallison; Other Miscellaneous Durable Goods Merchant Wholesalers (423990).

"Advertising in the Independent Community Newspaper Has Been a Game-Changer for Our Business!"

At **Vero Chicago Pizza**, we've always prided ourselves on delivering the best pizza in town — fresh, flavorful, and made with love. But we knew that great food alone wasn't enough to stand out in such competitive market. That's when we decided to partner with the independent Newsmedia for our local advertising, and the results have been incredible!

Since we started running ads in the Gilbert and Chandler editions, we've seen a noticeable increase in foot traffic. Our weekday lunch specials are getting more attention, and we've had more families and new customers coming in to try us out. The exposure we've gotten has been invaluable — it feels like our restaurant has become a true local favorite!

The newspaper's readers really resonate with the personal, community-oriented approach we've taken in our ads. We've received so many positive comments from customers who say they saw our ad and decided to give us a try.

Thanks to the Independent Newsmedia, we're not just a pizzeria — we're part of the community, and it's been amazing to see the growth we've experienced. We highly recommend advertising here to anyone looking to connect with local customers!

Isaac Younan

— Isaac Younan, Owner



Fountain Hills • July 15, 2025 • Fountain Hills Community Center

Sun City • September 24, 2025 • Sundial Recreation Center

Sun City West • October 21, 2025 • Briarwood Country Club

Apache Junction • January 7, 2026 • Central Arizona College

Chandler • February 24, 2026 • Sun Lakes Country Club

Peoria • March 26, 2026 • Westbrook Village

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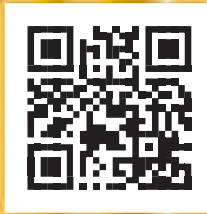
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OPINION

LETTERS TO THE NEWSROOM

SPEAK UP

Here are some comments about stories happening in your area:

APACHE JUNCTION COUNCIL TO DISCUSS INCREASING A MAYOR'S TERM TO 4 YEARS

"Four years, but we need term limits of two terms for mayor and council members too." — **Tim LaBorde** via story comment

MAYBE ONE DAY AZ DRIVERS WILL FIGURE OUT ROUNDABOUTS

"And parallel parking! LOL." — **REDragon88** via story comment

VALLEY LGBTQIA+ RESIDENTS DESERVE STABLE HOUSING, THRIVING LIVES

"They only deserve housing the same as anyone else. No special privileges." — **Jager** via story comment

LETTER — USING TAXPAYER MONEY FOR STADIUM RAISES READER'S IRE

"The stadium was built with

• See **Speak Up** on page 24

Appreciating the First Amendment

As I stood surrounded by colorful signs and slogans, made with intent and conviction, I felt appreciative of the opportunity to do so, but I now realize that the freedom to assemble and express ourselves is a fragile thing, an opportunity, that could be suppressed or even taken away.

I attended the 50501 demonstration in Apache Junction on April 19 to capture documentary video and pictures of the event. This demonstration was what one would expect from a peaceful demonstration: American citizens holding signs at intersections, making their views about issues known to the traffic driving by. Many passers-by honked and waved in solidarity, and, of course, some whose views were the polar opposite expressed their — let's call it "reactions." At times, tense, but overall, the demonstration remained peaceful and even pleasant with a sense of community.

There was a freelance reporter there conducting interviews and getting stories from some of the demonstrators. One of the attendees she interviewed was a European woman who grew up in the wake of Nazi Germany, and whose mother and family were subject to the hardships of targeted harassment by the German officials of that time - the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or NSDAP, which later became commonly known as the Nazis.

Her story was typical of the stories Europeans tell of this time, a warning echoing Arnold Schwarzenegger's Kristallnacht message after the Jan. 6 violent insurrectionist assault on the U.S. Capitol by supporters of Presi-

• See **Letters** on page 24

Apache Junction street work leaves section unpaved

The city chip sealed all of Starr and Cortez except for a quarter-mile right in the middle of each street.

Was told lack of funds to do whole street. Today they freshly striped all of the new pavement. They did not even give us the courtesy of fresh striping on our old and decrepit little left out section. Thirty years here and have never felt so unappreciated or unrepresented in all this time.

It really leaves one to question the oversight and leadership of our city departments. This is the tip of the iceberg to many.

I sent emails like this one to four council members and the vice mayor or asking for a response. I have not received any response from any of them. I did get a call from Bryant Powell, the city manager, and the best response I can get is basically in so many ways and words is "We missed it" and, "We will try to do better."

Why should the city be in such a financial situation they cannot chip seal — the cheapest option out there — 100% of the two streets, only 93%?

Feeling gaslit here.



The city of Apache Junction recently chip sealed all of Starr and Cortez except for a quarter-mile right in the middle of each street. (Terry Dunn)

Terry Dunn
Apache Junction

Take the Civility Pledge

Yes, I will do my part to help my community become a safe place for people to engage in civil discourse about public issues. Visit iniusa.org/civility-pledge/ to take the pledge.

Your Opinion

Our opinions page is to provide an open forum for our readers. We hope to stimulate debate, not to dominate or control it. We reserve the right to edit our opinions, and we insist on civility. Please include your name and phone number, so we can contact you for clarification or confirmation. We welcome your photo. All opinions must be no more than 300 words.

Those that are judged as personal attacks or complaints about neighbors, businesses or other opinion writers will not be considered. No person may submit more than two opinions for publication during a calendar month. Two submissions in the same issue will not be published. The content of a submission is the responsibility of the person who submitted it.

Speak Up

We support the use of pen names. Too many people don't speak up because they fear intimidation or even danger to their families and/or careers. Pen names are an important part of our nation's history.

Corrections

We will promptly correct all factual errors. We offer a "right of reply" to the people about whom we write. Readers who disagree with a news story are welcome to respond with a letter.

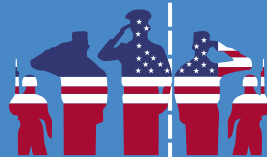
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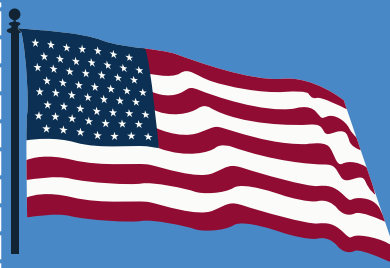
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THINGS TO DO



JUNE 1

Farm event

The last day of Vertuccio Farms' spring event to celebrate Arizona's fabulous sunflowers, Sunflower Days, has family-friendly activities, attractions and tasty snacks. Admission \$10 per person for adults.

Children 2 years of age and under are free with a paid adult. Parking is free. <https://vertuccio-farms.mazeplay.com/>

Open 3-7 p.m. Sunday
4011 S. Power Road in Mesa

JUNE 11



Coffee with a Cop

Join your neighbors and Apache Junction Police Department for coffee, donuts and conversation. 9-10 a.m.

Apache Junction Public Library
1177 N. Idaho Road
<https://www.facebook.com/events/1324898798720503>

JUNE 14

Cowboys & Cuties

Celebrate Father's Day with annual father-daughter barn dance hosted by Apache Junction Parks & Recreation. Activities include learning the two-step, rodeo fair-themed events and Western-style crafts. Catered dinner. Event is designed for fathers and their daughters, ages 4-14 years old. Fathers can be substituted with any father figure in a young lady's life.

4:30-6:30 p.m.
1035 N. Idaho Road
<https://www.facebook.com/events/1466943644271764>



Patriotic flag exchange event on Flag Day in Apache Junction

In celebration of Flag Day, the Apache Junction Veterans of Foreign Wars Post Nos. 7968 and 9399 auxiliaries, in conjunction with the city of Apache Junction, will host an American flag exchange on Saturday, June 14.

The event will take place 9 a.m.-1 p.m. at the Veterans Memorial Park gazebo, 1001 N. Idaho Road in Apache Junction, according to a release.

During the event, community members are invited to bring old, worn-out flags and exchange them for a new 3-foot-by-5-foot American flag. One flag may be exchanged per

- See **Flag Day** on page 26



During the event, community members are invited to bring old, worn-out flags and exchange them for a new 3-foot-by-5-foot American flag. One flag may be exchanged per person for the first 249 flags available, on a first-come, first-served basis. (Metro Creative)

CONCERT

The Cars tribute band Broken Lullaby headlines benefit concert

By Pam Burks
GOLD CANYON RESIDENT

Make a road trip to The Cars tribute band fundraiser concert in July and help raise money for an important Apache Junction Unified School District improvement project — upgrading the Cactus Canyon Junior High School sports field.

The Cars tribute band Broken Lullaby will bring you cool live music July 18 to break the summer heat. Broken Lullaby plays popular 1980s rock 'n' roll music by The Cars.

They will turbocharge your en-

gines and keep them revving through the entire concert. You won't want to miss out on The Cars experience.

Let's all vroom-vroom to the finish line and buy your tickets before they sell out. Tickets at https://ajpac.ludus.com/index.php?show_id=200483992 are \$25 per person for the show at the Apache Junction Performing Arts Center, 2525 S. Ironwood Drive.

Doors open to the concert at 5 p.m., the concert begins at 6 p.m. July 18. Come early. The first 100 purchasers at the student-run concession stand — serving a slice of pizza

and a beverage for \$5 — will receive a souvenir mini race car. The concession stand will be in the gym next to the Performing Arts Center and will open at 4 p.m.

Get your motors running and rev up your engines for a night of fun. You'll be dancing in your seats and helping your local school district earn money for essential improvements that will make us all proud.

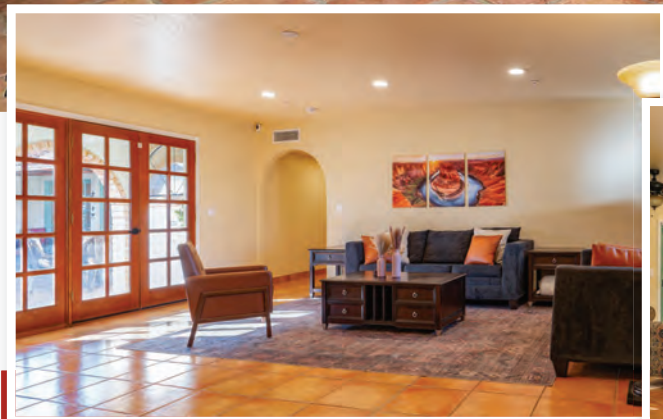
The students and staff want to be part of the solution by working together to improve their schools, one project at a time.

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NEIGHBORS

Youths win aerial drone championship in high school division

The Superstition Mountain Branch Boys & Girls Club team from Apache Junction recently earned the Championship Award in the high school division at an aerial drone competition.

"The team excelled across multiple categories," Anna Prakash-Ash-ton, co-founder of Education Empowers Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in Chandler that hosted the event, said in a release.

The team's coach — Angela Davis, the branch director for the Superstition Mountain Branch Boys & Girls Club, 2805 S. Ironwood Drive in Apache Junction, said she was surprised when the team of Avery Romero and Bryan Rivas Garay won in the high school division.

"I was surprised but know we had very strong members on both our teams. The teams met every day for the last three weeks, just working on fine tuning everything from the coding, to team work, communication and practice the piloting which just requires continuous practice," she said.

"With the help of Education Empowers Inc. we have been able to bring robotics and technology to all of our members. We will be working this summer on Coding Robots



In the center, Bryan Rivas Garay and Avery Romero of the Superstition Mountain Branch Boys & Girls Club team from Apache Junction recently earned the Championship Award in the high school division at an aerial drone competition. (Education Empowers Inc.)

so that when the next season of First Lego League starts, our members will have some experience with the coding to make it easier for them," Davis said. "We will continue working not only on coding the Lego robots but also getting some new members familiar with the drones and even the Edison Robots. The more opportunities and hands-on experiences we can give our members the better."

The aerial drone competition was held May 3 at St. Peter's Indian Mission Catholic School in Bapchule.

Fourteen youth teams from across Arizona competed in the event hosted by Education Empowers Inc. in partnership with local schools, tribal communities and Boys & Girls Clubs. The competition included three skills challenges — drone piloting challenge, autonomous drone coding challenge and the communications challenge.

Founded in 2017, Education Empowers Inc. delivers year-round hands-on STEAM programs in robotics, drones, AI, coding and sustainability for K-12 youth. The

AERIAL DRONE COMPETITION HIGHLIGHTS

Key highlights of the competition include:

- High School Division Champion: Superstition Mountain Branch Boys & Girls Club (Apache Junction).
- Middle School Division Champion: Saint Peter's Indian Mission Catholic School.
- The Best Communication Award: Chandler Community Drone Team.
- Judges Awards: HS – Saint Peter's Indian Mission Catholic School; and MS – Superstition Mountain Branch Boys & Girls Club
- Best Coach/Mentor: Bryan Rivas Garay (Superstition Mountain Branch BGC)
- Best Volunteer: Sam Biggs (Saint Peter's Indian Mission Catholic School)

nonprofit focuses on empowering underserved communities through education and career exploration.

Go to <http://www.educationempowers.org> or email contact@educationempowers.org.



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 4087 East Apache Trail (SR88) Apache Junction, AZ 85119

Superstition Mountain Lost Dutchman Museum

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NEIGHBORS

AJ Inner Circle hosts fundraiser in support of local wrestling programs

On the evening of May 9, the Apache Junction Inner Circle held a heartfelt and impactful fundraising event at the Moose Lodge in Apache Junction.

The event was dedicated to rallying support and raising funds for all levels of Apache Junction wrestling, from youth programs to high school competition, according to a release.

The evening featured inspirational guest speakers, including seven-time state champion coach, 1987 State Champion and AJHS Class of 1987 alumnus Roy Lopez; Hall of Fame Coach Glenn McMinn; and incoming AJHS Athletic Director Traston Yates, also an AJHS graduate. Their stories reflected the strength, legacy and potential of the Apache Junction wrestling community.

A special acknowledgment was made to Jerry Burgess Sr., president of the Moose Lodge, for his longstanding

philanthropy since 1969. Burgess was honored with an award from the Apache Junction Inner Circle for his unwavering support. He generously sponsored the evening's dinner and venue and donated checks to both the Black & Gold football program and Apache Junction Inner Circle, the release states.

With 81 attendees, the event marked a strong and positive step forward for the local wrestling community.

Apache Junction Inner Circle is a nonprofit organization founded by four successful AJHS alumni who have gone on to achieve excellence in their careers and continue to give back to their community:

- Glenn McMinn Jr. – Class of 1983, three-time State Champion, ASU graduate (1989), law degree recipient (1991), practicing attorney and entrepreneur.
- Kelly Branham – Class of 2002,

three-time High School All-American, three-time College All-American, AJHS' only Collegiate National Champion, now a world-traveling personal trainer transforming lives.

- Lauren Armagost – Class of 2007, successful roofing business owner for 13 years and devoted mother of two future Prospectors, she's the heart of the Apache Junction Inner Circle.

- Mark "Pun" Perkins – Class of 2002, three-time Arizona National Team Member, part of the 2002–03 NAIA National Championship team at Missouri Valley College, 2008 graduate of Pacific University, and now an insurance business owner in Tempe.

Guided by the motto "We over Me," AJ Inner Circle remains committed to strengthening the entire wrestling ecosystem in Apache Junction — supporting athletes, coaches and families alike.



Above, Mark Perkins and Jerry Burgess Sr. at the Apache Junction Inner Circle fundraiser. At right, Glenn McMinn at the Apache Junction Inner Circle fundraiser (Kelly Branham)



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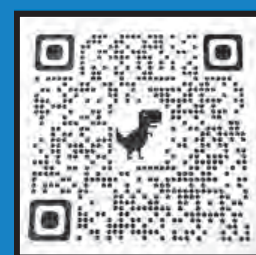


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OPINION

Letters

• From page 16

dent Donald Trump.

Kristallnacht, which occurred Nov. 9-10, 1938, was a devastating event in the rise of Nazi rule, where violent mobs, fueled by hatred and intolerance, targeted institutions and communities against fellow citizens who happened to be Jewish. Arnold Schwarzenegger recounts his family's memories of this time period and it is a message well worth heeding as are all messages of warning about the rise of fascism.

After the interview, I was speaking with the husband of this woman,

Speak Up

• From page 16

taxpayer dollars to bring in revenue to

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and at that time, some demonstrators were leaving the event to get ready for their Easter weekend. They said to us, "Thank you for coming out and joining us today." And the husband answered, not with a reciprocal "Thank you too," but with a thought-provoking comment that demonstrated a unique perspective that many of us may take for granted. He said, "Well, I appreciate the

AZ. But whoever is overseeing the stadium is not running it appropriately or mismanaging the revenue. The day-to-day overhead and salaries were paid. Now the stadium

opportunity to be able to come out here (and demonstrate)."

Whether you are one of the attendees of a demonstration, one of the people who drive by and honk in solidarity with demonstrators, or one of the drivers-by who disagrees wholeheartedly with a particular demonstration and expresses themselves "in their own way," we must ask ourselves: do we really appreciate the opportunity, the freedom, to be able to have peaceful demonstrations, or is this something we take for granted? Could it be that we can only truly appreciate this freedom when it is taken away or suppressed? I hope we will never learn appreciation that way.

needs some repairs and they are asking for more taxpayer money to do so. If the revenue stream doesn't keep up with the costs of the stadium, including maintenance and re-

You are an American, living in America! You can participate in peaceful demonstrations. You are free to support organizations that advocate for civil liberties. It's our tradition to contact our representatives with our concerns. It's our nature to engage in respectful and civil dialogue, and we must stay informed with reputable news sources to do so. Supporting a free and independent press makes sure we stay free and independent. We can vote! Stay vigilant! Let's uplift and support our marginalized communities, and learn about and support our First Amendment!

Eric Newlon
Mesa

pairs, why did they build it in the first place? Obviously, no feasibility reports were done first. This is a money pit." — I.O. via story comment.

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EDUCATION

EVIT

• From page 8

go. Well, when your classroom is (a) 4,000-square-foot auto shop, how does that work?" he told the board. "We tried to pair with the state standards on how to lock down a classroom and we're working with IT to facilitate some of those changes."

The document shown to the board is an outline for what the full document is to look like, Zuccato said.

"There's some details for each building. On this campus alone we covered 19 buildings and we have people in every building at all times of the day, and so it creates quite the challenge for us," he said of the main EVIT campus at 1601 W. Main St. in Mesa.

"Even in this place we have to consider what would happen if an airplane came down on our school and finding evacuation places," Zuccato said. "We had to define classrooms and shops and the differences and how to lock those down and protect our students from outside threats, from inside threats, and the line of communication and chain of command there."

The board is to approve the full

• See **EVIT** on page 26

CRISIS MANUAL

The draft EVIT crisis manual table of contents includes 25 sections:

- Crisis/safety committee members
- Incident command structure
- Emergency operations plan
- Communication protocol
- Contact information
- Responsibilities of the crisis/safety committee
- Immediate response protocol
- Major disturbances on campus
- Evacuation procedures
- Lockdown procedures
- Modified lockdown response
- Active shooter response protocol
- Fire procedures
- Bomb threat response protocol
- Explosion or threat of explosion response protocol
- Communicable disease policy
- Air pollution emergency
- Windstorm
- Death of a student or staff member
- Hazardous material spill
- Hazardous materials
- Fallen aircraft
- War
- Accounting for students in a disaster
- Reunification procedures

Source: EVIT



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EDUCATION

EVIT

• From page 25

manual at a future meeting. Also planned are videos produced by EVIT's marketing department for training new employees and for summer training, Zuccato said.

A printed version of the crisis manual will be available in each classroom for substitute teachers. Employees will be instructed to use an online version, EVIT Chief Academic Officer Ronda Doolen said.

"The paper documents really just there to back up in case you don't have access to the Internet," she said.

Each staff member will not be required to look at all training videos produced, Doolen said.

"It's going to be an assignment we do through Canvas. We have certain assignments they have to do every year, like blood-borne pathogens. This will be one of those depending on what building they're in they're going to have to watch procedures for their building. It is different depending on where you are on campus as to what your role is and what you are supposed to do," she said.

Richard H. Dyer can be reached at rdyer@iniusa.org, or on X @rhdyer. To voice your opinion on this story, connect with us at AzOpinions@iniusa.org.

EVIT

East Valley Institute of Technology is a public trade school providing 50 career training programs for East Valley high school students and Phoenix-area adults at two central campuses in Mesa. East Valley school districts include Apache Junction, Mesa, Queen Creek, Cave Creek, Chandler, Fountain Hills, Gilbert, Higley, J.O. Combs, Scottsdale and Tempe. Classes are 8-10:35 a.m. or noon-2:35 p.m. Monday through Friday. Classes with four-hour blocks are 7-11 a.m. or noon-4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Classes are also held at satellite campuses, according to <https://www.evit.edu>.

THINGS TO DO

Flag Day

• From page 18

person for the first 249 flags available, on a first-come, first-served basis.

Event organizers will also properly dispose of the old, traded flags. Attendees will also have the opportunity to spin a prize wheel to win local city of Apache Junction flags as well as other promotional items.

Community members of all ages are encouraged to attend, as the event will also feature a Pledge of Allegiance challenge for children ages 14 and under. Each child that can recite the Pledge of Allegiance will receive a goodie bag as a prize.

Observed annually across the U.S., Flag Day commemorates the adoption of the first U.S. flag by Continental Congress in the First Flag Resolution of June 14, 1777. Although the 200-year anniversary of this date was celebrated by flying flags on public buildings and holding remembrances in several cities, Flag Day wasn't officially recognized until President Harry Truman signed it into law in 1949.

For information about the American flag exchange event, go to www.apach Junctionaz.gov/flagexchange. To learn more about the VFW post auxiliary or to find a local auxiliary, go to www.vfwauxiliary.org.

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Gold Canyon PEO chapter ES presents scholarship to Apache Junction senior

Gold Canyon Chapter ES, P.E.O., a philanthropic educational organization, recently presented Apache Junction High School Senior Brianna Quintanar with the chapter's Patricia Mortensen Scholarship at the AJHS Academic Awards and Scholarship Night,

On May 5 Quintanar received \$1,500 to go toward her tuition at Arizona State University and she also received \$840 from the chapter to be spent toward coursework books.

The Chapter ES Book Club collected \$840 through books read throughout the year, giving a "penny-a-page" read toward this fund.

The scholarship amount was taken from the chapter's yearly fundraising projects such as pecan sales, magnet

sales and other fundraising efforts.

Chapter ES is one of approximately 6,000 chapters across the U.S. and Canada that raise money in various ways within their communities. These funds have contributed to more than \$420 million given in grants, scholarships, awards and loans to women in the U.S. and internationally.

The primary amount of Chapter ES's fundraising goes toward the P.E.O. international projects, with the remainder going toward P.E.O. Arizona state projects and its own Patricia Mortensen Scholarship, which goes to a young woman from a local high school each year.

For information about P.E.O., go to www.peointernational.org.



Apache Junction High School Senior Brianna Quintanar. (Gold Canyon Chapter ES, P.E.O.)

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