

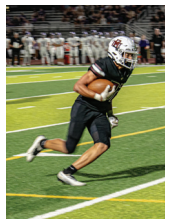
Business

Dutch Bros, Small Sliders approved near downtown; **4**

GLENDALE
INDEPENDENT

Sports

Mountain Ridge football season preview; **10**



August 2025 Volume 31 Issue 8 Your Nonpartisan Community Newspaper · YourValley.net

MAG figures show decline in Glendale's homeless

By Richard Smith
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

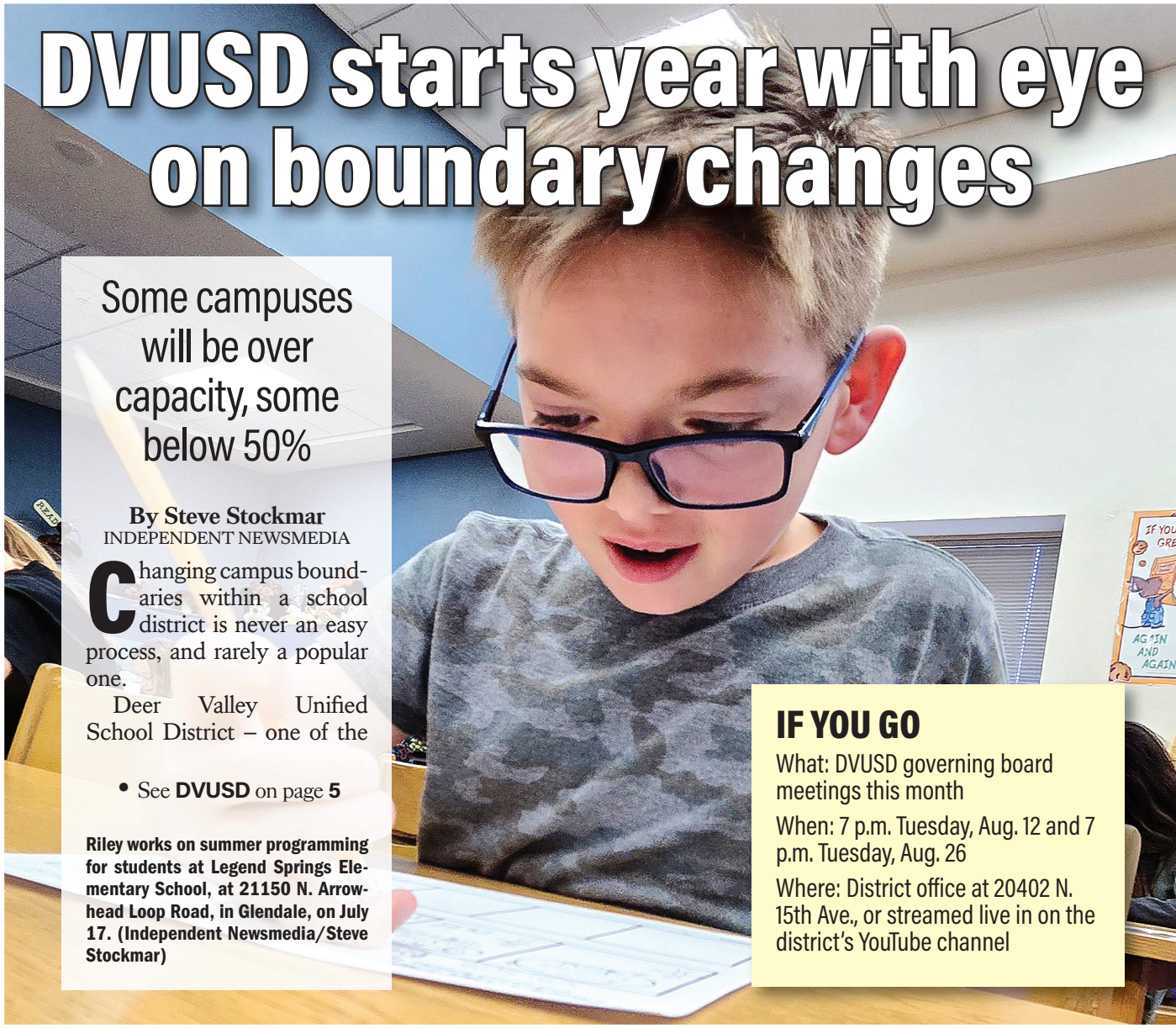
While homelessness is up in general throughout Maricopa County, according to Maricopa Association of Government's annual Point-in-Time count, Glendale saw a nearly 20% decrease in unsheltered people.

Volunteers fanned out across Maricopa County on Jan. 29 to count those experiencing homelessness in the county. Glendale's number was 169 — the city's lowest since 2017 — and a sign of progress from the 2024 count of 211 unsheltered people.

With Family Promise Legacy Village opening a 22-unit shipping container village of transitional housing in June and a Veterans Community Project under construction with 50 smaller cottages for veterans scheduled to open in 2027, there's a belief that the num-

• See **MAG** on page **22**

DVUSD starts year with eye on boundary changes



Some campuses will be over capacity, some below 50%

By Steve Stockmar
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Changing campus boundaries within a school district is never an easy process, and rarely a popular one.

Deer Valley Unified School District – one of the

• See **DVUSD** on page **5**

Riley works on summer programming for students at Legend Springs Elementary School, at 21150 N. Arrowhead Loop Road, in Glendale, on July 17. (Independent Newsmedia/Steve Stockmar)

IF YOU GO

What: DVUSD governing board meetings this month

When: 7 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 12 and 7 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 26

Where: District office at 20402 N. 15th Ave., or streamed live in on the district's YouTube channel

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COMMUNITY NEWS

IN BRIEF

SUPPORT

City sets up annual Stand Up for Veterans event

Glendale's 12th annual Stand Up for Veterans is scheduled for 8 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 11, at Arizona Christian University, 1 W. Firestorm Way, Glendale.

Stand Up provides free legal aid, job opportunities, career support, Motor Vehicle Department services, health check-ups, veterinary services, a blood drive, haircuts, and a barbecue lunch.

Those interested in participating should visit triplemaz.com and register.

Each year, donors and volunteers support veterans. For information call Mayor Jerry Weiers' office at 623-930-2260.

CLASSES

Foothills Rec Center host line dancing, belly dancing

Foothills Recreation & Aquatic Center, 5600 W. Union Hills Drive, will play host to a pair of classes Aug. 7. They are:

• Beginner Country Line Dance from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. Learn the basic steps of line dancing. No partner is needed. Ages 15 and up are welcome. Cost for the eight-week class is $60 per resident and $70 per non-resident.

• Beginner Belly Dancing from 6 to 7 p.m. Learn the basics of belly dance movements. Ages 15 and up are welcome.

Cost for the eight-week class is $60 per resident and $70 per non-resident.

STATE FARM STADIUM

Split council approves VAI to operate black lot parking

By Richard Smith
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA



VAI Global Development President Grant Fisher looks out on the VAI Resort site under construction during a tour in Glendale in May 2023. (Independent Newsmedia/Steve Stockmar)

In recent years, one of the most divisive issues facing the Glendale City Council has been the deals proposed by city staff regarding VAI Resort, particularly the parking lots nearby.

The final council meetings for six weeks, on June 24, were the latest in this debate. In the workshop, the council debated an agreement with VAI Resort to manage parking at the 4,011 spaces at the black lot south of State Farm Stadium near the resort.

The proposal passed by a 4-3 vote, with Mayor Jerry Weiers and council members Ray Malnar, Leandro Baldenegro and Dianna Guzman voting for this 25-year contract due in large part to its $500,000 in annual revenue for Glendale.

Vice Mayor Lauren Tolmachoff and council members Bart Turner and Lupe Conchas believe the city had better revenue sharing deals offered that would bring its taxpayers more money.

"I know there are concerns that we are giving something away to the VAI Resort. I don't see it that way. I see the VAI Resort providing us a great service," Malnar said. "We have little to no risk."

During the June 24 voting meeting, Tolmachoff moved to table the vote until a new city manager is hired, but it was denied by the same 4-3 vote.

Turner pointed out the item was discussed only an hour or so earlier that day in a workshop and placed on the consent agenda for a simple yes vote along with 42 other items. The contract was pulled from the consent agenda and discussed.

"I wouldn't do this agreement if I owned this property myself. And I won't do this agreement for my taxpayers and people that put trust in me when they voted me into office. This is a big transfer of money from our taxpayers over to an enterprise that I hope will be successful, but not at the cost of taking money out of our taxpayers' pockets. Parking was not part of the deal that brought VAI to Glendale," Turner said.

Glendale finished construction on the $27.2 million Black Lot in 2018 and the project included a $3.5 million pedestrian passageway under Cardinals Way. The lot is now designed to fulfill the city's requirements to provide parking for Arizona Cardinals games.

VAI will not manage the lot or collect revenue from it on NFL event days or mega event days — those that have 40,000 or more attendees.

• See VAI on page 12

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BUSINESS

IN BRIEF

AWARD

Glendale man partners in top landscaping business to work for

Glendale resident and entrepreneur Mike DiFabbio's company, Encore Landscape Management, was named one of only 26 companies in the nation as best places to work by Lawn & Landscape Magazine earliest this summer.

"We are thrilled to receive this prestigious recognition for another year," stated Encore Landscape Management partners Juan Hernandez, Mike DiFabbio and John Garigen in a press release. "Being named one of the best places to work by Lawn & Landscape is a reflection of our team-first culture and the incredible people who show up every day with pride, purpose, and passion."

Phoenix-based Encore Landscape Management offers a number of services, including landscape maintenance, design, installation, tree care, water management and plant health care services.

The company was also named one of the best places to work in 2022 and 2024.

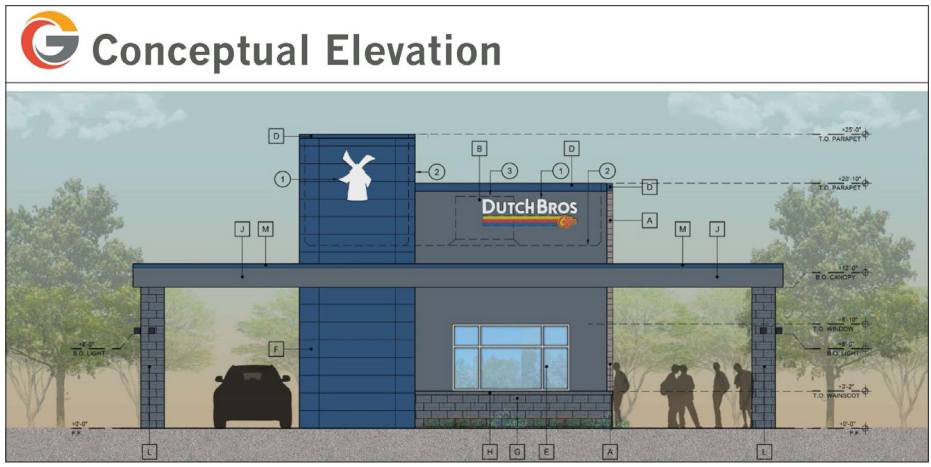
The second part of the survey process consisted of an employee survey that measured the employees' experience. This part of the process was worth approximately 75% of the total evaluation.

For information on Encore Landscape Management, visit www.encorelm.com or call 602-568-2582.

DUTCH BROS

Drive-thrus approved 1 mile north of downtown

By Richard Smith
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA



Elevations for a Dutch Bros. Coffee shop planned for 5960 W. Northern Ave. in Glendale. The city's planning commission unanimously approved a conditional use permit for the coffee shop June 26. (City of Glendale)

Two drive-through restaurants without the indoor restaurant part will go up on the northwest corner of 59th and Northern avenues in Glendale.

One is a well known drive through in Dutch Bros. Coffee., while the other, Smalls Sliders, is just starting to grow into Arizona.

During the June 26 Glendale Planning Commission meeting, commissioners unanimously approved conditional use permits for Dutch Bros. at 5960 W. Northern Ave., and Smalls Sliders at 5950 Northern.

Neither project a mile north of downtown requires council approval.

Portland-based Cole Valley Partners, owns both properties. Mitchell Reynolds spoke June 26 on its behalf.

"We started this about a year ago and purchased the lot. We worked on getting the existing buildings demolished," Reynolds said.

"We're really excited to get this going."

Planner Amy Schwenner said this land was formerly owned by the Salvation Army, which now operates just to the west.

A single-family community is just north of the two proposed drive.

Drive through signs must be posted at least 100 feet from any residential use. The menu board and speaker are approximately 180 feet from the back door of the nearest resident.

"Transportation has required a deceleration lane to be added on Northern Avenue and planning has emphasized the importance of a landscape buffer on the north property line and enhanced shad opportunities for on-site uses," Schwenner said.

Dutch Bros. will have shielded light fixtures, a six-foot high block wall and trees along the rear property line.

The coffee chain's outdoor space for dining will be open from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Atlanta-based Smalls Sliders will be next door. East of the slider restaurant is an Auto Zone. The drive through will have shared access off Northern.

Small Sliders board and speaker are approximately 180 feet from the back door of the nearest resident.

The interior for employees is 800 square feet with an additional 1,600 square feet of shaded canopy. It is also primarily drive through for customers and will be open from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m.

No residents attended the neighborhood meetings or made comments to city staff since notices were first mailed in late March.

The only complaint at the planning meeting was more of a general lament about traffic nearby than anything to do with these two plans.

"Development in this part of Glendale is encouraged and appreciated. I live pretty close to this and ... the traffic on Northern is horrendous. I have to make a left-hand turn east of this major intersection from the north, headed east, on a routine basis. In heavy traffic hours, I sometimes feel like I'm taking my life into my own hands trying to get left on to Northern eastbound," commissioner Tom Cole said.

FROM THE COVER

DVUSD

• From page 1

biggest in Arizona with 42 schools and 31,000-plus students – is no stranger to the concept, or to its divisive nature among residents.

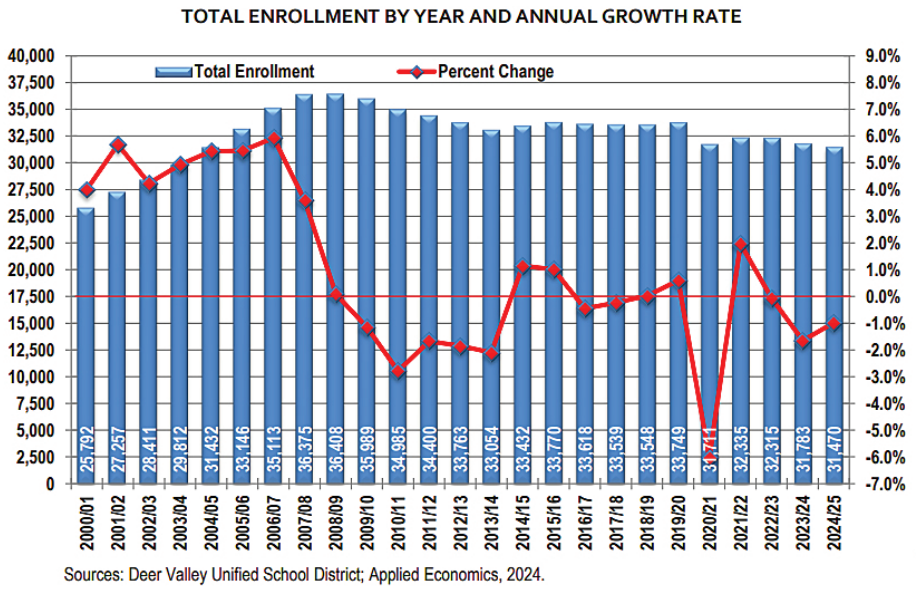
Four years ago the district faced the issue with regards to campuses on the north end of Peoria and Phoenix near Happy Valley Road that were each facing student overcrowding issues.

"It's a hard thing to make boundary changes," then-governing board member Ann Ordway said. "One neighborhood is going to be unhappy, another neighborhood is going to be happy. It's just not an easy thing to do boundaries."

The effort to re-boundary at the time stalled, something Superintendent Dr. Curtis Finch likened then to "kicking the can down the road."

The issue returns with the start of the new 2025-26 school year on July 31.

This past May the district took initial steps to begin a review of school attendance boundaries again. DVUSD formed a school attendance boundary committee with the ultimate goal to recommend suggested changes for the 2026-27 school year.



Sources: Deer Valley Unified School District; Applied Economics, 2024.

DVUSD boundary graphic.

The committee includes a parent from each high school region, a representative from each of the district's recognized employee groups, various district staff, a representative from parent organizations, a business partner, and a representative from the district's interfaith council.

Starting in August, the group is tasked with drafting scenarios, presenting those scenarios at public hearings, and creating finalized proposals through December.

A board vote is expected in early 2026.

ENROLLMENT NUMBERS

Student numbers throughout the district present a complicated picture.

On the one hand, DVUSD is anticipating a drop of 900 students this year from a year ago. Furthermore, some district schools are operating at over

• See **District** on page 13

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BUSINESS MOVES





JAMES AVERY ARTISAN JEWELRY

NOW OPEN

Courtesy Glendale Chamber of Commerce

1 **James Avery Artisan Jewelry**, a family-owned jewelry retailer that designs and crafts 90% of its jewelry in Texas, has expanded into Arizona with the opening of two new stores at Arrowhead Towne Center and Chandler Fashion Center in Chandler. The retailer's annual charm event allows customers to receive a complimentary charm holder (up to a $79 value) with the purchase of two charms. The event runs through Aug. 4. The store at 7700 W Arrowhead Towne Center, Suite 1049, from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday.

2 **HTeaO**, a leading national iced tea franchise debuted in Arizona with the opening of its first location in Glendale on July 19. The store will be on the outskirts of Westgate Entertainment District at 9161 W Glendale Ave. A second HTeaO location will open in Glendale in October.

3 This summer **Best Discount Furniture and Mattress** opened in the former Glendale location of Bed, Bath & Beyond at 7340 W. Bell Road. The store is open from noon to 6 p.m. every day. For information, call 602-620-3470.

4 On July 11, the Glendale Chamber of Commerce led a ribbon cutting for **The Scribbled Hollow**, Glendale's newest independent bookstore and mystical emporium, at 5719 W. Glendale Ave.

5 **Doobie's Smoke & Vape Shop** opened this spring at 15224 N. 59th Ave.

PURCHASE

6 **GO Industrial,** a developer, owner and operator of institutional quality industrial and e-commerce real estate in the Southwest U.S., bought a freestanding 75,000-square-foot Class A industrial building in Glendale, as announced July 1. This vacant building is situated on 6.41 acres at 10950 W. Northview Ave., includes a ±1.23 acre paved and secured yard. Cushman & Wakefield advised the sale for an undisclosed amount.

OPENING SOON

7 California-based **Vallarta Supermarkets** will soon open a 60,000-square foot grocery store at 5836 W. Camelback Road.

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EDUCATION

Deer Valley, Peoria districts trying to avoid 'reduction in support'

By Steve Stockmar and Philip Haldiman
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Arizona is officially in the legal battle for more than $132 million the Trump administration is withholding for students, including those within Deer Valley Unified School District.

On July 14 Attorney General Kris Mayes joined a coalition of 23 states suing the administration over its "unconstitutional, unlawful, and arbitrary decision" to freeze $132,302,753 for Arizona students and approximately $6.8 billion nationwide in funding administered by the U.S. Department of Education.

The move to withhold the money comes close to the start of the new school year. Deer Valley Unified's first day of classes is Thursday, July 31.

"It's unlawful for President Trump to hold up this education funding and wreak havoc on Arizona's students and families — and it's having an immediate and devastating impact," Mayes stated in a Monday press release.

The administration is withholding the education funding for K-12 schools and adult education Congress approved before he was in office. The education money was due to the states by July 1, as required by law.

Deer Valley Unified's Deputy Superintendent of Fiscal and Business Services Heather Mock told the Independent the district has received and budgeted for preliminary federal grant awards at 80% of the fiscal year 2025 allocations but has no indication from the Arizona Department of Education



Peoria Unified School District could lose about $2 million in funding the Trump Administration has frozen. (Courtesy Peoria Unified School District)

of when the grant money will be finalized.

The Arizona Department of Education this spring applied for federal funding under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act for the period of July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026, but has not provided final approval for most federal grant applications including IDEA and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Deer Valley Unified's largest federal grants, the district noted.

The Arizona Department of Ed also posted statements that U.S. Department of Education has not provided any grant award notifications meaning Arizona cannot guarantee even the preliminary awards will be honored, Mock further stated.

• See **Support** on page **9**

EDUCATION

Support

• From page 8

Federal money is used to provide additional staffing for academic and behavior interventionists as well as instructional coaches in low socioeconomic status schools, Deer Valley Unified noted.

It also provides academic, programmatic, and student supports for high-needs populations including but not limited to special education.

"Any reductions to federal grant funds would result in a reduction in force for those positions, and a reduction in support for our students," Mock wrote in an email.

Sen. Mark Kelly, D-Ariz., and Rep. Greg Stanton, D-Ariz., are demanding President Trump immediately release the funding for Arizona schools.

The education funds were due to the states by July 1, as required by law.

For the Peoria Unified School District, which begins classes July 31, the withheld funds represent about $2 million that has already been budgeted and allocated for the upcoming school year.

PUSD spokeswoman Danielle Airey said those funds are budgeted directly to support learning and teaching within the district.

"We continue to monitor what is taking place at the federal level and remain hopeful that these dollars are released in a timely manner to allow us to maximize the impact for student success," she said.

The freeze also affects The Boys and Girls Club of Arizona, losing $1.3 million of their operating budget, potentially forcing BGCAZ to reduce programs, close summer camps early, and even shut down facilities, the letter states.

SCHOOL NOTES

SCHOLARS

Glendale residents earn degrees, dean's list spots

The following college students from Glendale recently earned academic honors:

• Karis Joe and Jayllyn Trafford both earned spots on the spring 2025 semester dean's list at Belmont University in Nashville.

• Leonille Maniraguha was named to the spring 2025 dean's list at the University of Jamestown.

• Riley Suzanne Lanning graduated summa cum laude with high distinction for a degree in history & philosophy and psychology on May 17 from Hastings College in Nebraska.

• Aubrey Leyba earned a spot on the honor roll at McPherson College, a four-year private college located in central Kansas,

• Samantha Garcia graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor of arts in criminal justice from Graceland University in Lamoni, Iowa. Garcia also ended a spot on the president's list, for students with a perfect 4.0 grade point average.

• Patrick Weyrauch is in the class of 2027 at Central College in Pella, Iowa. He recently earned a spot on the spring 2025 dean's list.

• Jonathon Barron was named to the spring 2025 President's List at Muskingum University in New Concord, Ohio, for a GPA of 3.90 or above.



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Mountain Ridge Mountain Lions

22800 N. 67th Ave., Glendale

2024 record: 4-6
Playoffs: Did not qualify
Region: 6A Desert Valley
Coach: Andy Johnson (Second year)

Mountain Lions embrace rare regular offseason

By Richard Smith
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Mountain Ridge players were more than content with a paint by numbers offseason.

It was a first for every student athlete in the program. The last two years, returning Mountain Lions players did not know who their head coach would be until after spring ball and the school year ended,

Now senior quarterback Lukas Baughman entered the summer on the same page with receivers more often and is confident with the deeper reaches of the playbook. Senior center Wyatt Tollefson can introduce more o-line calls and double calls to the front wall.

"It's such a big, drastic difference. We haven't had it our whole high school career and it's something really cool to be a part of," senior linebacker J.T. Shaffer said.

While the previous two teams faced brutal non-region games to start the season and closed against a much easier region, the return of coach Andy Johnson and virtually all of his assistants should set up this team for a better start.

Mountain Ridge began 2023 with six losses and was 1-5 at the same point last year.

"It's been nice to have a consistent plan for them. This group has really bought in and they've been working hard on a consistent basis. I think they've been excited to have that structure," Johnson said.

Following an opening victory over Tollefson, the Mountain Lions lost five straight blowouts to 6A playoff teams.



Mountain Ridge sophomore running back Easton McClanahan looks to make a cut during a Sept. 27, 2024 home game against Queen Creek. McClanahan is the team's leading returning rusher. (Courtesy Mountain Ridge Football Boosters Facebook)

Then they beat fellow rebuilding Desert Valley Region teams Valley Vista and Shadow Ridge, then doubled up on 5A playoff team Goldwater 42-21.

"It all clicked around week six when we finally got something and everybody understood what they're doing. That's when it started getting fun and we won a lot of games down the stretch," Baughman said.

In a way, those were the games Mountain Ridge was supposed to win.

Senior offensive tackle Jacob O'Dell said the team gained more momentum from the season ending 28-25 loss to rival O'Connor. The Mountain Lions fell behind a 6A playoff team 28-6 and fought back, unlike the beginning of the season losses.

"I think we took some really big steps at the end and we're trying to keep it together and make it into the season. We'll be a completely different Ridge team than you've seen in the past," Tollefson said.

Assistant coaches Travis Hawthorne and Gary Ornelas lead the team in the weight room in the offseason. Ornelas is one of several new assistants who was on Jason Mohns' staff with Johnson at Scottsdale Saguaro.

Ornelas will coach on the junior varsity as well as helping lead lifting. Offensive coordinator Nyles Outley developed a rapport with Johnson at Saguaro and coached at Brophy Prep last season. Senior defensive analyst Gary Hernandez coached on the Sabercats' 2021 Open Division champions.

Eric Guilford is a former NFL receiver and a Peoria High graduate. Linebackers coach Bobby Green was the Mountain Ridge head coach from 2006-2016.

This team will need all the continuity and coaching acumen it can get, thanks to another rough schedule.

Mountain Ridge scrimmaged against Cactus most of this decade, and now will open its season hosting

• See **Mountain Lions** on page **11**

MOUNTAIN RIDGE MOUNTAIN LIONS

OFFENSE: Spread

DEFENSE: Multiple

KEY RETURNEES: Lukas Baughman, Sr. QB; Ethan Fernandez, Sr., WR; Wyatt Tollefson, Sr., C/DT; Jacob O'Dell, Sr., OT; Brody Hinks, Sr., DE; J.T. Shaffer, Sr., LB.

NEWCOMER TO WATCH: Ethan Palbykin Jr., DT.

SPORTS

Mountain Lions

• From page 10

the 5A runners up. Then the Mountain Lions travel to Phoenix Pinnacle then host Phoenix Mountain Pointe.

"There's nowhere to hide on this schedule. We're going to have to be ready to compete from week one," Johnson said.

Baughman will need to improve. Like his teammates, he improved his play in the final four games.

Senior receiver Ethan Fernandez and senior tight end Ethan Holley are the top returning receivers. Elite senior hurdler Sanel Eminovic provides a deep threat.

Yet the quarterback is most excited about junior running back Easton McClanahan, second on the team in carries and yards last year.

"This year he came out full speed. He got a lot bigger and a lot stronger. He'll be the starting running back this year. He's a powerhouse," Baughman said.

The Mountain Lions' offensive line, led by Tollefson and O'Dell, is the bedrock of this team.

Junior guard Bryson Olney and senior tackle Landon Williams looked improved in the big man competitions.

"We will ride on our offensive and defensive lines this year. That's like the soul of our team right now," Johnson said.

Both lines also are fairly deep.

O'Dell and Tollefson, who also will see heavy snaps at defensive tackle, pointed to each other's growth since last season.

"He's been dominating his reps and getting call outs at NAU and ASU camps. He's going to dominate this season and we're going to be one of the best offensive lines in the state," O'Dell said.

Top pass rusher Brody Hinks, a senior defensive end, is back, along with senior Parker Juhas. Tollefson is impressed with junior defensive tackle Ethan Palbykin.

Shaffer is the unquestioned defensive leader. Fernandez said junior middle linebacker Nick Motz is now ready for the role.

While Shadow Ridge and Valley Vista are still on the schedule, Open Division champion Liberty and 6A champ Centennial replaced those schools in the Desert Valley.

That level of competition will bring out the best in the Mountain Lions, Shaffer said.

"Those schools have been primarily at the top of the Open and 6A in there. Throw O'Connor and Boulder Creek in there and it's great competition we're able to go against. We want to show we're in the same category as those teams," Johnson said.

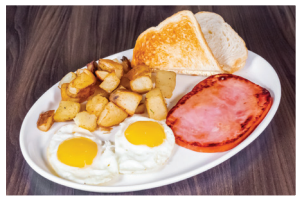
Mountain Ridge wants to return to the 6A playoffs for the first time since 2022 and win at least one game, like the 2021 team did.

"We're going to be the class that turns it," O'Dell said. "We're not that same lay down team, We're going to hit them in the mouth and keep punching until the end. That's the kind of team we have now."

2025 SCHEDULE

Home games in caps

Aug. 29 CACTUS
Sept. 5 at Pinnacle
Sept. 12 MOUNTAIN POINTE
Sept. 18 DESERT VISTA
Sept. 26 at Valley Vista
Oct. 3 LIBERTY
Oct. 17 BOULDER CREEK
Oct. 24 at Centennial
Oct. 31 at Shadow Ridge
Nov. 7 at O'Connor

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COMMUNITY NEWS

VAI

• From page 2

The resort will oversee the lot through a partnership with Nashville-based Parking Management Co. The vendor would be responsible for operations and management, as well as removing illegally parked cars.

Glendale would receive more than $18.2 million over the course of the 25-year agreement.

The city estimates $4.4 million in operations and maintenance savings, and $725,000 in estimated sales tax revenue — for a total of $2.36 million in financial benefits over the 25-year agreement.

"To date, no economic development or parking revenue has been generated from the black lot," Glendale Budget and Finance Director Levi Gibson said.

Tolmachoff said having an agreement with a fixed reimbursement rather than the revenue sharing proposal originally required in the city's request for proposal limits Glendale's revenue possibilities.

The Black Lot is the closest spot to the resort.

"We've been banking on the fact that VAI Resort is going to be incredibly successful, and that cars are going to park in this parking lot and generate revenue. But let's just say the lot's half full three times a week. If the lot's half full three days a week, that would generate — at a $30 a day space — $9.5 million a year," Tolmachoff said.

She said the city-required business insurance was not required for VAI. Business automobile insurance is not required, nor are several other insurance coverage.

Four groups submitted proposals.

Phoenix resident Morningstar Bloom, representing Worker Power Institute the sponsors of Propositions 401 and Proposition 402, spoke at the voting meeting June 24. Her group made a public records request to see all four proposals.

"What a records request revealed is that the VAI Resort's bid on request for proposals is not necessarily the most lucrative for the city," Bloom said. "Why is VAI getting an exemption on having to cover the maintenance cost when the RFP states that the contract shall be responsible for all maintenance and repairs for the parking lot and parking management equipment. Looking at the other bids, Premium Parking Services LLC proposes a tiered 60-90% revenue split with the city. In their projected financials they estimate a possible $897,608 revenue to the city."

Premium Parking manages parking at the nearby Westgate Entertainment District and Tanger Outlets.

Glendale already paid VAI considerably more per space for the resort's upcoming multi-level garage, Tolmachoff said.

The city waived permit fees for the resort and clearly wants it to succeed, but she said this agreement is a bridge too far.

"This is akin to somebody owning a home and hiring a property manager, and the property manager saying, 'I'm going to give you $100 a month and I'm going to keep the rest of the money," Tolmachoff said. "I want VAI to be as successful as anybody else. But I don't believe it's the taxpayer's responsibility to provide a revenue stream for them."

The agreement takes effect Feb. 1, 2026, and lasts 25 years, with two optional 10-year renewals at the city's discretion. Glendale has the right to terminate the notice if it gives VAI a 24-month notice.

Resident Rory Goree asked during the voting meeting if Glendale leadership had not learned anything with the lawsuits and referendums. Residents just voted on Propositions 401 and 402 regarding VAI Resort agreement, and Goree said this is another sweetheart deal for the resort.

"For all those reasons and more I'll put it succinctly, I think this would be akin to our agreement for Camelback Ranch as being a ripoff of our own taxpayers if we enter into this," Turner said. "I think there is a heck of a lot more money to be made on that parking out there than what dribble comes down to our taxpayers."

Baldenegro said the VAI proposal is low risk.

Malnar pointed out there is no revenue guarantee with the other three other proposals.

"I don't see it the way everybody else does. I do see a huge potential. I wish I was so positive as other council members knowing that VAI Resort is going to turn us into billionaires overnight. I hope it's true. But I don't know anybody that can predict the future," Weiers said.

Putting past VAI Resort controversies aside, Conchas said this is a bad deal.

He said at these terms the initial lease should be five years.

Phelps has done a great job of maintaining a relationship with VAI, Conchas said. But the city manager has announced plans to step down in 2026, likely before the resort opens.

"If the resort isn't going to open until the end of next year and we're right now in the middle of a city manager process, why can't we pump the brakes on this, table it, and let our new city manager negotiate the terms of this agreement," Conchas said.

Please send your comments to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines. Richard Smith can be reached at rsmith@iniusa.org. His handle on X is @RSmithYWV

GLENDALE INDEPENDENT
Celebrating & Connecting Our Communities

Arizona Leadership

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FROM THE COVER

District

• From page 5

100% capacity while other schools are below 50% usage.

According to a demographic and enrollment analysis from Applied Economics, an economic consulting firm in Phoenix, which issued its findings in a 64-page report in October 2024, total K-8 enrollment throughout the district has decreased by 2.6% over the last three years, yet high school enrollment has grown by 3.8%.

As for why enrollment is down, there are a number of factors.

Competition comes in the form of 32 charter schools operating either in the district or within one mile of the district's boundaries, plus five private schools in the district and another two within one mile of the boundaries. All told, charters and private schools serve nearly 15,000 combined students, per the Applied Economics report.

The numbers also show that the district's enrollment has not returned fully from the COVID years.

The initial return of students in 2021-22 has not continued, according to the report. Total enrollment remains well below pre-pandemic levels, down almost 2,300 students (6.8%) compared to the 2019-20 total enrollment.

And the area within district boundaries, quite simply, is aging. Both the 0-5 and 5-13 age groups have experienced yearly population declines of 0.4% and 0.2%, respectively. In the past four years, the strongest growth (1.7%) has been in the 75+ age group.

Yet by 2034-35, with massive population growth on the horizon, total district student enrollment is projected to rise to more than 33,000 students.

POPULATION GROWTH

Those enrollment trends figure to change through explosive residential development under way throughout the Deer Valley Unified School District footprint, specifically up north.

Consider Verdin, a new community coming online in North Phoenix within the DVUSD boundaries. Some 1,250 units on almost 500 acres are expected with the first closings on homes in early 2026, stated Brad Schoenberg, Phoenix Division president at Taylor Morrison.

Verdin will be served by Desert Mountain School (K-8) and Boulder Creek High School in Anthem. Even more impactful will be the upcoming Biscuit Flats/North Park community.

Adjacent to the $40 billion Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. fabrication campus in North Phoenix, the area will bring as many as 20,000 potential new units to the parcels south of Carefree Highway, west of Interstate 17, and north of State Route 303.

That area, too, will be served by Deer Valley Unified School District.

"Significant growth over time is expected in the Stetson Hills, Sonoran

• See Growth on page 23

DVUSD SCHOOL ATTENDANCE BOUNDARY COMMITTEE

May 2025: Committee formation, data analysis, first committee meetings

August-December 2025: Draft scenarios, present scenarios at public hearings, create finalized proposals

January-March 2026: Board vote, family notification, transition planning

August 2026: Implementation of new boundaries begins with the school year

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LIBRARY

Council will focus on Velma Teague's future in fall

By Richard Smith
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

While a future direction for Velma Teague Library is coming to focus, recent discussions in Glendale council and library advisory board meetings made one thing clear.

No one is willing to make that decision, in public, right now.

The City Council discussed the advisory board's recommendations for mock ups on two options June 24. Council members reached a consensus to add a third — and most popular — option to mock up and scheduled a September council workshop focused only on the future of the downtown library.

"It sounds to me like they don't have enough information and want more, and we don't have enough information and want more. I'm thinking that maybe we need to postpone this and move it to a different meeting," Council Member Diana Guzman said.

The major council debate was about whether to include a rendering of Velma Teague if it was moved to the currently vacant city-owned Promenade on Palmaire building two streets north of Murphy Park.

Based on public sentiment as well as their own, Vice Mayor Lauren Tolmachoff and council members Lupe Conchas and Bart Turner wanted to remove this option to squelch the possibility of moving the library out of the park. Mayor Jerry Weiers, Guzman and council member Ray Malnar said they wanted to explore this low cost option.

"I don't think we should give up on Option 4. We still have to figure out how to pay for it and if we find out we don't have the money, that may be one of the only options we have. I don't want to quit that idea even though it doesn't seem like the popular one right now," Weiers said.



Patrons keep busy at the Velma Teague Library in downtown Glendale. Further discussions of the library's location within downtown will take place in the fall. (Independent Newsmedia/Steve Stockmar)

Council member Leandro Baldenegro originally supported moving the library to the Palmaire building, before reversing course in January. That lead to Turner's council item of special interest, which the library board discussed in March and returned to the council Tuesday.

Baldenegro reiterated that he does not support moving the library out of the park, but did throw the Palmaire location a lifeline during the workshop.

"I'll give my vote to consensus on any of the options you six want to deal

• See **Teague** on page 17

Teague

• From page 16

with as long as No. 3 is in there I'm telling you right now, that's the only thing I'm going to vote for," Baldenegro said.

He is referring to option No. 3, demolishing the current library building and constructing a new Velma Teague Library elsewhere in Murphy Park — probably on the northeast corner.

The library board did not recommend a mock up of this option, but as of now it is favored by the majority of the council.

"I'm not going to change my mind about moving it to the Promenade. I don't want it there. I want it in the park," Baldenegro said. "One of the things that I've been hearing, and they're very quick to tell me though their numbers may be a little off, is that you can spend $150 million on the City Hall but you won't spend any money on the library ... I understand the sentiment."

Tolmachoff also said public opinion is firmly in favor of keeping the library somewhere in Murphy Park.

Turner said he still favored putting together an ad hoc committee since the library board did not make a clear decision. The rest of the council did not want to form another committee.

Relocating the library to one end of the park would open back up the park for a greener more inviting space. Turner said investing in a new building along would provide another downtown point of pride along with the new City Hall opening in 2026.

The current library was built in 1971 and has not been adequately maintained in recent years. It would require at least $5 million in improvements to continue functioning if the council decided to not make any changes to it.

"For any of you that don't recall the Glen Lakes Golf Course fiasco, this is that all over again. Except we're the ones now at the table, instead of the councils previous to us. We have an asset that's important to the community. We haven't been maintaining it or keeping it relevant. This is the challenge we're faced with," Turner said.

Moving to the already constructed and wired Promenade on Palmaire (Option 4) would cost approximately $7.8 million.

A complete renovation of the existing building (Option 1) would cost $17.653 million. A brand new Velma Teague Library at another spot in Murphy Park (Option 3) would be slightly more expensive at $17.896 million.

Turner called that option a chance to do at least something visionary while still respecting the past.

"I think Velma Teague herself would want us to build the best possible library for downtown Glendale and for the people who live here now. I think that's what we ought to be committing ourselves to," Turner said.

Malnar said he has changed his mind on the library's future several times. He wants to incorporate a broader community response before the next workshop.

Tolmachoff asked if the city is considering a temporary facility or mobile library to fill the void while the old building is out of commission.

"From what I'm looking at, redoing the library where it is will probably not be where we're at, so I'm guessing we're doing either option 3 or 4 so we'll need some sort of an interim solution rather than waste $2.5 million on a building that's going to be torn down," Tolmachoff said.

Glendale will examine taking the mobile library to schools or community sites.

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THINGS TO DO

ENTERTAINMENT

Al Green to make rare Arizona appearance at jazz festival



Arizona Jazz Festival returns to Glendale in November

By Steve Stockmar
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Tickets are on sale for the rescheduled Arizona Jazz Fest with a rare chance to see the legendary Al Green live in Arizona.

The annual event, going strong for more than a decade, had been slated for March. Organizers posted to social media that "circumstances beyond our control" necessitated the new dates, which will now be Friday through Sunday, Nov. 7-9, at the West Valley Event Complex, less than a couple miles from Westgate, in Glendale.

Left, Al Green performs at the Fox Theatre on May 3, 2019, in Atlanta. The 11-time Grammy winner will perform at Arizona Jazz Fest in Glendale on Sunday, Nov. 9. (Photo by Robb Cohen/Invision/AP)

Green has been nominated for 21 Grammys and has won 11. He's also a member of the Rock and Roll, Gospel Music Association, and the Songwriters halls of fame. He'll be among the festival's Sunday headliners, along with Babyface, who has produced 26 No. 1 R&B hits and has won 13 Grammys himself.

Green's spot will mark a rare live appearance in Arizona.

IF YOU GO

What: Arizona Jazz Fest

When: Friday-Sunday, Nov. 7-9

Where: West Valley Event Complex, 10020 N. Ball Park Blvd., Glendale

More Information: azjazzfest.com

The "Let's Stay Together" singer, according to setlist.fm and concertarchives.org, has performed in the Grand Canyon State only four times in the past 36 years: 2008 and 2005 at Desert Diamond Casino in Tucson; 2004 at the Dodge Theatre

• See **Jazz** on page **19**

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THINGS TO DO

Jazz

• From page 18

in Phoenix (with local favorite Hans Olson as opening act); and in 1989 at Celebrity Theatre in Phoenix during the same January week he and Annie Lennox' single "Put A Little Love In Your Heart" reached the Billboard Top 10.

This past February Green issued a new album, "Layin' All My Troubles Down," featuring live recordings from 1974.

Arizona Jazz Fest 2025 Lineup

Friday, Nov. 7 – Main Stage

Charlie Wilson, Anthony Hamilton featuring The Ton3s, Dru Hill, Eric Benét

Friday, Nov. 7 – Jazz Stage

Mike Phillips, Jeff Bradshaw, Marion Meadows, JJ Sansaverino

Saturday, Nov. 8 – Main Stage

An All-Star Tribute To Frankie Beverly featuring JUBU formerly of MAZE & special guests: 112, After 7, Calvin Richardson, Dave Hollister, LeVelle, Raheem DeVaughn, Stephanie Mills, Kem

Saturday, Nov. 8 – Jazz Stage

Eric Darius, CeCe Peniston, Marcus Anderson

Sunday, Nov. 9 – Main Stage

Al Green, Babyface, Robin Thicke, Stokley

Sunday, Nov. 9 – Jazz Stage

Ruben Studdard, J. Brown, J. White, Paul Taylor, Rebecca Jade

Tickets: azjazzfest.com.

AL GREEN ARIZONA CONCERT APPEARANCES

2025: Glendale, Nov. 9

2008: Tucson

2005: Tucson

2004: Phoenix

1989: Phoenix

Sources: setlist.fm and concertarchives.org

AUG. 1-2

Stand Up Comedy

David C. Smalley stops in Westgate for four shows of his stand up comedy in two night. Through comedic relief and southern charm, David brings up typically controversial topics such as race, culture, and family life in a humorous and thought-provoking way. His podcast and online videos have been a success – he says what people are thinking and does it with edgy humor.

Amassing 1.7 million followers on TikTok, David has proven his ability to connect with large audiences. His energetic and entertaining videos often include accompaniment by his daughter.

Johnathan Gregory and Zac Allen will open for Smalley.

Stir Crazy Comedy Club
6751 N. Sunset Blvd. Suite E-206
7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m.

AUG. 14

Contemporary Funk

The Stanley Serrano Trio returns to Westside. Stanley's musical journey began at a remarkably young age, finding his passion in Los Angeles. Before his 8th birthday, he and his younger brother already made a mark on the local Christian Latino community with two recorded albums. Serrano became a self-taught multi-instrumentalist. This skill set earned him a reputation as a sought-after sideman. After a fulfilling 16-year tenure as a sideman, Stanley found himself drawn back to his roots, rekindling his passion for singing. Since 2013, he has navigated the Phoenix scene, captivating audiences of all backgrounds and ages with his covers and charismatic performances.

Westside Blues, Jazz & More
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OPINION

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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.

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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.

LETTERS TO THE NEWSROOM

Please send your comments to AzOpinions@iniusa.org.

We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.

Former fighter pilot weighs in on jet noise complaints

I have heard some people complain about the noise of the F-35. Let me provide a brief history and my point of view.

Luke Air Force Base is fighter country, and the roar of the jets is "The Sound of Freedom!"

Luke AFB became a fighter training base in 1940 and is named for Frank Luke Jr., an Arizona native, a fighter pilot and the first aviator to be awarded the Medal of Honor.

One suggestion to convert Luke AFB to a cargo base is despicable. Luke AFB is home to our fighter pilots and those coming from our allies around the world. It is also a driver of our economy.

I visited Luke AFB in July 1965 to get a briefing on a new fighter, the F-4, as I was heading to Southeast Asia. I eventually flew 35 combat missions in the F-4.

I was assigned to Luke AFB in 1983 as hospital commander and attached to the 550 TFS for flying time in the F-15.

The people who are complaining about the F-35 should do two things: Read your home purchase agreement and see that it tells you that Luke AFB is your neighbor. Second, consider selling your home and moving to a quiet location. Antarctica is quiet

Leonard Kirschner
LITCHFIELD PARK



Leonard Kirschner suited up and displayed the American flag at his home in Litchfield Park on Memorial Day 2025. (Submitted)

Editor's note: Leonard Kirschner MD, MPH is a retired U.S. Air Force colonel, former AHCCCS director and past president of AARP Arizona. He lives in Litchfield Park.

From drugs to degrees: How losing custody of my child helped me find myself

For much of my life, it felt like one hardship after another — childhood trauma, the loss of my brother, abuse, life in a group home and divorced parents. My biological father wasn't involved, and my mother was diagnosed with cancer after we moved to Arizona. I grew up feeling angry, unheard and labeled as "disruptive."



Melissa Zimmerman

At 18, I began using drugs to escape my pain. The pattern of addiction continued on and off into my 30s. When I became pregnant, I tried to reduce my use, but it wasn't enough. I developed serious health issues during pregnancy, and due to my past substance use, my newborn son was placed in foster care. Soon after, I was reunited

✦ See **Letters** on page **21**

OPINION

Letters

• From page 20

through completing required tests and services, but my ongoing struggles and unhealthy relationships led to further complications. Just before his third birthday, my son was removed again.

Determined to break the cycle, I entered inpatient treatment and committed fully to my recovery. I completed every service, sought additional support, and worked hard to rebuild my life. There were setbacks, but I refused to give up. After three years of effort, I reunified with my son in 2015 — a moment that changed everything.

Losing my child was one of the hardest things I've ever faced, but the Arizona Department of Child Safety never gave up on me. I was fortunate to work with the same case manager and supervisor throughout my journey — someone who believed in me and truly wanted to see my family succeed. Even when tough decisions had to be made and things looked bleak, my case manager stayed by my side. When I was finally reunited with my son, he was healthy, joyful and thriving. Throughout all the hardships and frustrations, I knew at that moment I would never let him go again.

Since then, I've become the first in my family to graduate from both high school and college. My circumstances lit a fire under me that no one could put out. I've earned two master's degrees — in criminal justice and social work — and became a licensed master social worker. My experiences, good and bad, lead me to want to make a change to the system that I was a part of for so long.

Today, I work at Terros Health, the same agency where I began my recovery. I now sit on statewide and national advisory boards, using my voice to advocate for parents and help improve how systems, including AZDCS, interact with families. I focus on building understanding, eliminating bias, and promoting a family-centered approach.

My story isn't unique. Every day, parents are doing the hard work to get their children back. What they need most is support, belief and the opportunity to prove they can change. I am living proof that reunification is possible — and that families can go on to thrive with the right resources and encouragement. Throughout June — National Reunification Month — I reflect on the people who accompanied me on my journey, during the perils and the triumphs that I experienced.

This journey hasn't been easy, but it's shaped me. And now, I get to be an ally for others who need one, standing in the gap for them, just like someone did for me.

Melissa Zimmerman
TERROS HEALTH

Editor's note: Melissa Zimmerman, MSW, MCJ, LMSW is a clinician at Terros Health, which has locations in Glendale, Mesa, Phoenix, Tempe and Tucson.

Funding cuts, rising temps are hurting Arizonans right now

For the past 25 years, it has been my privilege to lead a team that provides a variety of home improvement programs for Arizonans of all ages. I've seen firsthand how a properly weatherized home or a paid utility bill can mean the difference between life and death during our brutal summers.


Katie Martin

In a state where summer temperatures regularly soar into the triple digits, rising utility bills and non-working or failing cooling systems can be fatal. But this year the problem isn't just the price of keeping cool — it's the erasure of the programs that help our most under-resourced neighbors survive the heat.

On April 1, 2025, nearly the entire staff administering the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program was laid off. LIHEAP and the organizations it supports assist 6.2 million low-income households each year, including seniors, families with children and people with disabilities. It helps fund the work we do at AllThrive 365: weatherizing homes, providing utility assistance, delivering meals and more.

One of the most vital programs supported by LIHEAP is the Weatherization Assistance Program. Since its inception in 1977, WAP has been a cornerstone of energy equity and housing stability, backed by decades of strong bipartisan support. With that support from both sides of the aisle, WAP has transformed the lives

✦ See Martin on page 24



Civility Checklist

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

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA
Celebrating & Connecting Our Communities

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

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

☐ **Be truthful.** Base your opinions/arguments on facts. Value honesty. Make only accurate statements when making your point and avoid exaggeration and stereotypes. When appropriate, cite your sources of information that others may question.

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

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

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

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

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





FROM THE COVER

MAG

• From page 1

ber of unsheltered people will continue to drop.

"Through our new partnership with the Veterans Community Project, a new Veterans Village comprised of 50 cottages is being developed as transitional housing for veterans in need to further tackle the homeless challenge. Our ultimate goal will always be zero homelessness in our city," Mayor Jerry Weiers stated in a news release.

Living unsheltered could include sleeping in parks, cars, and other places not meant for habitation. Count results are a "snapshot" and will be used to help the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development support homeless assistance programs and allocate resources.

Glendale's homeless count peaked at 406 in 2022, the first year the survey could monitor the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on housing. The count then nose dived to 170 in 2023 before creeping up to 211 in 2024.

"Glendale recognizes that the one-year reduction in the Point-in-Time Count is an encouraging sign that we are making a difference among people experiencing homelessness. This progress is promising and reflects the tremendous efforts put forth by our service providers, as well as local and regional efforts to meet the needs of our most vulnerable population," said Elise Smith, human services coordinator in Glendale's Community Services Department.

MAG does not collect city-level data for the sheltered count, people with at least a temporary place to live.

The group maintains an aggregate count by region. In the West Valley, 242 people experienced sheltered homelessness, either residing in an emergency shelter or some form of temporary housing.

MORE ABOUT THE COUNT

The annual Point in Time homelessness count is required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and happens in each metropolitan region in the United States during the last 10 days in January. Maricopa Association of Governments coordinates the Maricopa Regional count, which provides a one-day snapshot of homelessness in Maricopa County. The count uses volunteer teams, including city, county, and state representatives; community and faith-based organizations; businesses; and private residents.

Source: MAG

"We are committed to the regional efforts coordinated by MAG, including Pathways Home, which aligns resources across the Valley to increase safe housing options and support partnerships to address homelessness. Our local efforts include street outreach, case management, housing assistance and the creation of new affordable housing," Smith stated.

The southern part area of Glendale also has several affordable housing multi-family developments like Centerline on Glendale, a $120 million community financed in part by Arizona state tax credits for nine buildings and 368 units.

Centerline opened early this year, joining other affordable communities like Bethany Glen and Bethany Crossing. Both of those developments opened earlier this decade.

"My top priority — and that of our City Council — is to improve the lives of the people we serve every single day," Weiers stated. "We remain commit-

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FROM THE COVER

Homelessness

• From page 22

ted to finding effective, compassionate solutions to reduce homelessness in our community. Our community services team continues to develop innovative strategies that make a real difference in the lives of our residents."

MAG officials said between 2024 and 2025, federal funding expired for more than 1,000 shelter beds across the region, which was instrumental in reducing unsheltered homelessness during that time.

It is the lowest number of unsheltered homeless people in Glendale under this counting method since 2017.

"I was pleased to see Glendale's homeless point-in-time count has gone down this year," Weiers stated. "These improved numbers are the direct result of the dedicated, coordinated work of our Community Services Department, the Glendale Police Department, and the Glendale Works program."

While the downtown area may be where unsheltered homelessness is the most visible, Smith said individuals can experience homelessness anywhere in the city, whether it is sheltered or unsheltered.


Jerry Weiers

Places where unhoused individuals take refuge can change depending on available resources, their needs and even the weather. To best respond to these needs, Glendale's street outreach teams connect with people experiencing homelessness wherever they may be.

"Successful outreach requires building rapport with clients over time to establish enough trust to begin the journey to end their homelessness. By remaining responsive to these shifts, we are literally meeting people where they are at, in order to provide the most effective level of care possible," Smith said.

Growth

• From page 13

Foothills, Union Park, and Desert Mountain attendance areas – driven by new developments as a result of the opening of the Taiwan Semiconductor plant," the Applied Economics report noted.

Among the boundary committee's initial observations is that those four campuses listed in the report "are expected to be over capacity." Combined with other district schools projected to be under capacity, boundary change proposals are expected.

Applied Economics data shows that in the past year nearly 2,500 new housing units were added to district boundary inventory at a pace projected to remain at or above that level until 2034-35, by which time the district area's population will have increased by more than 334,000 people.

New residential development in the Biscuit Flats/North Park community is expected to begin in 2027 or 2028.

Other developments within the DVUSD boundaries include Alora-vita (expected to build out in 2026); Norterra/Union Park (last subdivision should be finished this year, though substantial multifamily potential is expected to be added); Adobe Dam (construction on 300 new lots expected to begin in early 2026 and completed by 2028); Copperleaf North (1,000-plus estimated total lots should begin construction in 2028); and Smartopia (work on 850 estimated lots expected to start about 2027).

Comments welcome at AzOpinions@iniusa.org. Reach Steve Stockmar at sstockmar@iniusa.org.





OPINION

Martin

• From page 21

of more than 7 million households nationwide — and over 26,000 in Arizona alone.

For many low-income families, seniors and individuals with disabilities, weatherization is the difference between hardship and health, between surviving the summer and thriving at home. It's not just about lowering utility bills — it's about preserving health, restoring dignity and in many cases, saving lives.

The uncertainty surrounding the future of these federal programs is already sending ripple effects across the country. In Maricopa County, where last year's extreme summer heat claimed 602 lives — a slight but meaningful decrease from 645 in 2023 — we were just beginning to see signs of progress.

Programs like the Weatherization Assistance Program were playing a critical role in that shift, helping vulnerable residents stay safer in their homes. But now, with no clear path to restored funding or operational capacity, that progress is at risk. So far this summer, local emergency departments have already reported over 1,000 heat-related illness visits — and we haven't even reached the hottest part of the season. The stakes couldn't be higher.

As a direct consequence of these possible funding cuts, AllThrive 365 was forced to halt intake of new clients for our Weatherization Assistance Program as of April 22. Our waitlist number has grown significantly since this hold was issued, and we are currently facing a backlog of over 500 individuals and families with an urgent need for safer, healthier and homes with a lower financial energy burden.

For decades, this program has allowed Arizonans to age in place with dignity, reduced hospitalizations from chronic conditions like asthma and COPD, and drastically lowered monthly utility bills. Without it, tens of thousands are now at risk — not just of discomfort, but of serious health consequences.

This is more than a housing issue — it's a public health emergency. Heat-related deaths have reached alarming levels among the most under-resourced members of our community. And with no secured LIHEAP funding for the coming year, we fear those numbers will rise. Roughly 20,000 AllThrive 365 participants rely on federally funded programs. Now, they're left in limbo, unsure where to turn for help. Meanwhile, the cost of cooling continues to rise. The National Energy Assistance Directors Association estimates that the average family could pay $784 to cool their home this summer. For many Arizonans already struggling to make ends meet, that's simply out of reach.

The combination of record-breaking heat and shrinking federal dollars is a dangerous one. AllThrive 365 is urging Congress, state and local leaders to act and prioritize funding for LIHEAP and the Department of Energy's weatherization programs. We can't afford to put more lives at risk due to a lack of funding.

I've dedicated my career to helping people live with dignity and safety. But now, I'm watching as decades of progress unravel. We need Congress, state and local leaders to act — urgently. Restore LIHEAP. Fund weatherization. We can't let another summer become a death sentence.

Katie Martin
ALLTHRIVE 365

Editor's note: Katie Martin is home improvements program administrator for AllThrive 365, Phoenix-based nonprofit that supports adults as they age.

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