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Birding with Ranger Eric: Maricopa County parks offer glimpses into desert wildlife

White-winged doves are common birds to see in Estrella Mountain Regional Park and across the valley. (Mary Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)

By Mary Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Before the sun rises high enough to warm the desert floor, a group of bird-watchers sets out along a trail at Estrella Mountain Regional Park, binoculars in hand. At the front is Ranger Eric Hough, guiding them not just through the terrain, but through the rhythms of nature.

Hough, an interpretive ranger with Maricopa County Parks and Recreation, has led birding walks for the county for the past eight years. His programs are part education, part ob-

servation and all rooted in a lifelong passion for wildlife.

"I grew up in Mesa and started birding as a kid. My mom got into it right before I was born, so it's a generational thing for us. I was basically raised with a pair of binoculars around my neck," Hough said.

Before joining the parks department, Hough worked as a bird biologist. His resume includes bird surveys and tortoise monitoring across the Southwest as well as plant assessments in the Midwest. That scientific training continues to shape the way he leads

his programs.

"These hikes aren't just about identifying birds," he said. "They're about understanding habitat, behavior, migration, and the broader ecology of the Sonoran Desert."

Birding, also known as birdwatching, is the practice of observing and identifying birds in their natural habitat. It can be casual or meticulous. For many, it's also a doorway into broader environmental understanding.

According to the National Audu-

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Dr. Murali Murty and Ironwood Cancer & Research Centers advise sun protection all year, especially in summer months. (Submitted photo/Metro Creative Connection)

Goodyear oncologist urges sun safety as UV risks peak

By Mary Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

As Arizona enters the height of summer, local medical professionals are stressing the importance of sun protection and early detection to prevent skin cancer.

Dr. Murali Murty, a board-certified radiation oncologist at Ironwood Cancer & Research Centers in Goodyear, said UV radiation is a year-round concern in Arizona but becomes especially dangerous in the summer months.

"Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in humans," Murty

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COMMUNITY NEWS

IN BRIEF



The city of Goodyear's Fleet Services Division is named one of the Top 50 Leading Fleets in the country. (Submitted photo/ Jordan Byrd)

Goodyear Fleet Services recognized nationally

For the fifth consecutive year, the city of Goodyear's Fleet Services Division has been named one of the Top 50 Leading Fleets in the country by "Government Fleet" magazine in partnership with the American Public Works Association and the National Association of Fleet Administrators.

The annual recognition highlights public fleet organizations across the United States for their performance in areas such as leadership, efficiency, strategic planning and adaptability.

"Our Fleet division continues to set the standard in fleet management through their commitment to excellence, innovation and efficiency," said City Manager Wynette Reed. "We are proud of their hard work as it helps us deliver the very best services to our residents."

Goodyear's Fleet Services Division manages and maintains

• See **Fleet** on page 8

Grijalva, Butierez win CD7 special primary

By Mary Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Maricopa County Elections has released the results from the special primary election in Arizona's 7th Congressional District showing Democrat Adelita Grijalva and Republican Daniel Francis Butierez Sr. as their parties' nominees for the Sept. 23 general election.

Grijalva won the Democratic primary with 52.95% of the party's vote. Butierez led the Republican

• See **CD7** on page 6



Adelita Grijalva and Daniel Francis Butierez Sr. move forward into the general election for 7th Congressional District seat. (Submitted photos/ Adelita Grijalva and Nate Kelly, Arizona Media Association)

Phoenix historian traces city's roots during Goodyear lecture

By Mary Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The story of Phoenix began not in steel and sprawl but in ditches and dreams, according to Steve Schumacher, the official historian for the Phoenix Mayor's Office, who spoke Thursday morning at Goodyear City Hall about the city's earliest days.

The lecture, "Phoenix Beneath the Surface," was hosted by the P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center as part of its ongoing effort to promote regional history and cultural awareness across the Southwest Valley.

Schumacher, a West Phoenix native and the first person appointed to his role, underscored the importance of preserving local history, not

• See **Roots** on page 8



The P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center partners with the City of Phoenix to teach local history. (Submitted photo/ Steve Schumacher)



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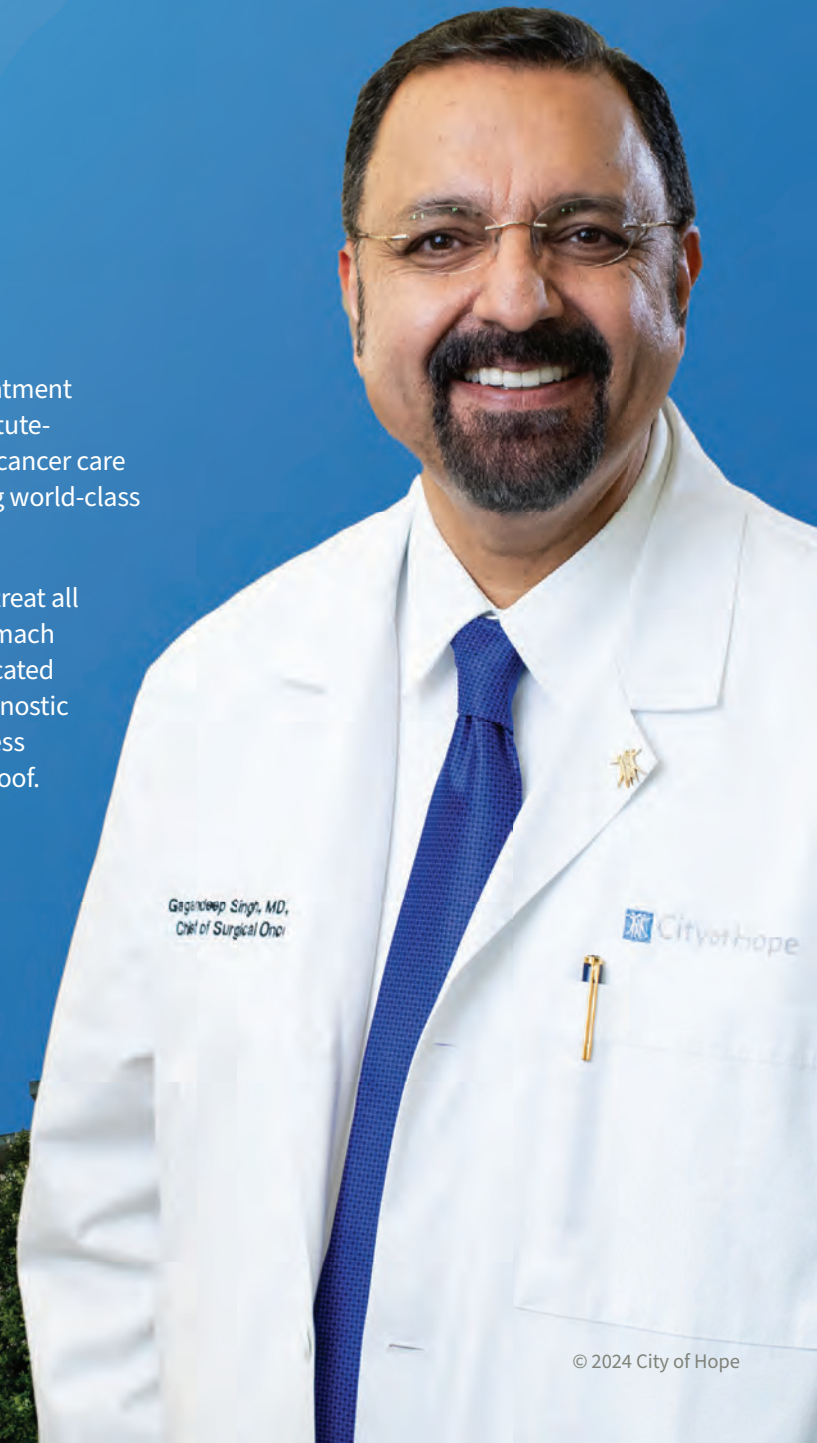
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CD7

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field with 46.29%.

The special election was called following the March 13 death of longtime U.S. Rep. Raúl Grijalva, a prominent progressive who represented the district that runs from Tucson to Yuma to the southwest Valley or more than 20 years.

"This is a victory not for me, but for our community and the progressive movement my dad started in Southern Arizona more than 50 years ago," said Grijalva, the late congressman's daughter and chair of the Pima County Board of Supervisors. "We kept our heads down, did the work, and delivered a message rooted... in fighting for something: for our democracy, for the dignity of working people, and for the values that truly define Southern Arizona — justice, equity, and opportunity for all."

On the campaign trail, Grijalva emphasized affordable housing, public-private partnerships, climate resiliency, and stronger social services.

In primary debates, she drew on her record with Pima County and the Tucson Unified School District board to frame her candidacy as rooted in service and coalition-building.

"Trump is the clear and present danger, and our survival of our democracy is at stake," she said during one debate, highlighting her support for Medicaid-funded student services, opposition to Oak Flat mining, and calls for sanctuary protections and immigration oversight.

Grijalva defended her community-based service and said the Democratic Party needed a balance of experience and new ideas.

Butierez, a small business owner and former inmate who has public-

ly discussed his wrongful conviction and recovery from addiction, focused his campaign on themes of personal redemption, border enforcement and conservative economic policy.

"Giving them an opportunity to work... gives them an opportunity to leave that life behind," he said about addressing homelessness through work programs and use of vacant prisons.

Butierez also called for the completion of the border wall, stricter immigration enforcement, and supported Trump-era proposals on DACA and Medicaid reform.

"I'm absolutely amazed that we got this president there that's actually doing it," said Butierez. "Everybody always talks about doing this, and nobody ever does it. He's doing it. Let's let him do it."

Butierez expressed skepticism of foreign aid, supported using tariffs as leverage, and tied budget reform to congressional term limits. On water, he proposed recycling wastewater for mining and agriculture and pledged to defend Arizona's water rights.

The 7th Congressional District spans southern Arizona, including parts of Goodyear, Avondale, Litchfield Park, Yuma, Nogales and Tucson. About 59,000 Maricopa County residents are registered to vote in the district, and eight Vote Centers were open on Election Day.

The general election is scheduled for Sept. 23. A televised general election debate is planned for 6 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 26, hosted by the Arizona Media Association, Citizens Clean Elections Commission, RIESTER and Arizona Public Media.

Additional election details are available at elections.maricopa.gov. Check Independent Newsmedia in print and online yourvalley.net for continuing elections coverage.

DATA

County heat dashboard wins public health award with local support

By Mary Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Maricopa County's innovative Heat-Related Illness and Death Dashboard has received a 2025 Model Practice Award from the National Association of County and City Health Officials, marking a national recognition of the county's efforts to combat the dangers of extreme heat through data and collaboration.

The dashboard tracks heat-related illness and death trends across the region, with weekly updates during the summer months and detailed annual surveillance reports. Health officials say the tool plays a critical role in understanding the impacts of rising temperatures and in informing local response efforts.

"This national recognition highlights the power of data, collaboration, and

public health innovation in addressing extreme heat," the Maricopa County Department of Public Health said in a statement.

The award is the latest in a series of national honors for the county's heat response work. NACCHO previously recognized Maricopa County with Model Practice Awards in 2023 for its comprehensive evaluation of cooling centers and in 2024 for Synapse, a platform for community health partnership. Each of the projects collects and shares data to better inform public health strategies and protect residents from heat-related illness and death.

As of July 31, there have been 22 confirmed heat-related deaths in Maricopa County, according to official death certificate data. Another 314 deaths remain under investigation as potentially heat-related.



Maricopa County's Heat Death Dashboard wins a national public health award. (Mary Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)

Extreme heat remains the leading cause of weather-related death in the United States. In Arizona, where summer temperatures frequently exceed 110°F, public health officials say continued action is essential.

"Heat deaths are preventable," said Dr. Nick Staab, chief medical officer for Maricopa County Department of Public Health. "Last year's decline in heat-related deaths shows that coordi-

nated, community-based efforts work. But the danger of extreme heat remains very real, particularly for people without stable housing, older adults, and people who use substances."

In response, Maricopa County leads a regional heat relief effort in partnership with the Maricopa Association of Governments, cities, and community organizations. Now in its 19th season, the Heat Relief Network operates more than 200 cooling centers, hydration stations, and donation sites from May through September.

Libraries in Goodyear and Litchfield Park are among the participating locations. The Georgia T. Lord Library at 1900 N. Civic Square and the Litchfield Park Library at 101 W. Wigwam Blvd. provide air-conditioned spaces for anyone seeking relief from the heat, free of charge.

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Roots

• From page 4

just in Phoenix, but throughout the Valley.

"We all share the same desert, the same water, the same past," Schumacher said. "I think the entire Valley is one entity, really. And it's important that all of us: whether it's Goodyear, Avondale, Litchfield Park or Phoenix, pay attention to our history."

That sense of shared heritage was key to the Heritage Center's mission in hosting the event. The non-profit, based in Litchfield Park, is dedicated to preserving and sharing the history of the southwest Valley, especially the legacy of Paul Weeks Litchfield and the development of the region through agriculture, aviation, and community building.

Schumacher's lecture focused on Phoenix's early formation from 1867 to 1871, a period that saw the transition from empty desert to formal settlement. But long before Jack Swilling and other pioneers arrived, Schumacher said, the region had been home to a thriving civilization.

"The Huhugam people were here for more than 1,000 years," he said, referencing the Indigenous canal-building culture whose presence shaped the Salt River Valley from around A.D. 400 to 1450. "At their peak, there may have been 50,000 people living across the Valley."

The Huhugam canal systems, some still visible across the Valley, enabled large-scale desert farming. After the Huhugam vanished, the land remained largely uninhabited until Swilling, a former Confederate soldier and miner from Wickensburg, rode through the area and saw potential in the ancient ditches.

"Swilling was an entrepreneur



Steve Schumacher introduces the P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center to Phoenix's pioneer days. (Mary Goldmeier/Independent Newsmedia)

and a capitalist," Schumacher said. "He thought, 'If I can dig canals like the Huhugam did, divert water from the Salt River, and grow crops, we can sell those to the miners and the cavalry.' That's how it started."

Swilling's first attempt to irrigate the land was near present-day Tempe, just north of Tempe Butte, but the project failed due to limestone bedrock. The group moved downstream and found more workable land in what is now downtown Phoenix.

"They learned very quickly that this part of the Sonoran Desert, if you put water on it, things grow," Schumacher said. "It was an Eden out there."

Early settlers planted fruit trees, dug irrigation ditches, and established one of the region's first flour mills. Schumacher detailed how Swilling's associate William Hellings spent \$75,000 transporting used mill equipment from San Francisco to the Valley, a massive investment in the promise of growth. But the selection of a permanent townsite wasn't immedi-

ate. Schumacher walked attendees through the three failed proposals before Phoenix's eventual location, bounded by Van Buren Street, Seventh Avenue, Seventh Street and Harrison, was chosen in 1870.

The name "Phoenix" itself was suggested by British pioneer Darrell Duppa, who saw a symbolic connection between the city's rise and the mythological bird that is reborn from ashes.

"What we're creating here is like the Phoenix bird," Schumacher said, quoting Duppa. "Our Phoenix is rising from the Huhugam ruins."

To wrap up his lecture, Schumacher emphasized that history isn't just about facts and dates, it's about memory, meaning, and honoring those who came before.

"Years from now, we'll all be memories," he said. "Do you want people to remember you in a positive way? Of course you do. So let's do the same for our pioneers. Let's show them the respect we'd want shown to us."

He also advocated for more formal historical recognition across the region.

"I'd love to see every city in the Valley identify someone as a point of contact for local history," Schumacher said.

The P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center, which hosted the event, is working to do just that in the southwest Valley. The center is at the historic La Loma Homestead in Litchfield Park and aims to connect residents to the agricultural, industrial, and cultural stories that helped shape the region. This event was one of several public lectures organized to bring that history to life for residents today.

For information about the P.W. Litchfield Heritage Center, visit pwlheritagecenter.org To learn more about Phoenix history and Steve Schumacher's work, visit phoenix.gov/mayor.

Fleet

• From page 4

more than 500 vehicles, including fire engines, police cruisers, dump trucks and street sweepers. The division supports various city departments by maintaining vehicles to meet operational needs.

"Every second counts in an emergency, and it's vital that our city vehicles are in tip-top shape to ensure that our firefighters and police officers can respond quickly and safely," said Goodyear Public Works Director Summet Mohan. "We recognize the critical importance of regular preventative maintenance for city vehicles and the need for experienced, dedicated mechanics who can swiftly repair a police cruiser and return it to service for our community."

The division also partners with an automotive parts retailer to keep parts onsite for quicker access during repairs.

Visit goodyearaz.gov for more information.

Construction worker killed in Goodyear trench collapse

A construction worker who died after becoming trapped in a trench on a job site in Goodyear has been identified as 44-year-old Ronald Andrew Baquero Jr., according to the Goodyear Police Department.

The incident occurred around 1:10 p.m. on Monday, July 28, near 183rd Avenue and Lower Buckeye Road. Emergency responders from the Goodyear Police and Fire departments were dispatched to the scene after reports of a worker trapped during an active construction operation.

Officers secured the area while fire crews and other emergency personnel conducted rescue operations, which extended into the early morning hours of Tuesday, July 29. Despite those efforts, Baquero was pronounced dead.

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BUSINESS



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

Trader Joe's opens soon, GSQ project gains momentum

By Mary Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Trader Joe's is expected to open later this year in Goodyear's GSQ development, bringing one of the city's most-requested retailers to a growing downtown district that also includes restaurants, civic spaces and office buildings.

Located near McDowell Road and Bullard Avenue, the 13,500-square-foot store is part of the next wave of development at GSQ, a more than 150-acre public-private project that city leaders say is transforming a long-held vision into reality.

"For decades, the development of a vibrant downtown district in Goodyear was a long-held community aspiration," said Mayor Joe Pizzillo. "Today, that vision is coming to life through GSQ, a dynamic and growing downtown that blends civic spaces, commerce, entertainment and community connection."

Several new businesses have already opened in the district, including Shake Shack, Over Easy and The Yard Milkshake Bar.

In recent weeks, officials announced that Firebirds Wood Fired Grill and Black Rock Coffee Bar will join the lineup in 2026.

Residents are also waiting for the Banner Health medical outpatient center under construction at GSQ. The facility is scheduled to open in fall 2025, expanding local access to healthcare services.

An AC Hotel by Marriott is also planned for the district, with city officials anticipating an opening by the end of 2026.

The addition of Trader Joe's comes after years of requests from residents in annual retail surveys.

"When I moved to Goodyear in 2013, I quickly noticed that there wasn't a Trader Joe's for miles," said Councilmember Benita Beckles. "Like many residents, I visited the grocer's website and requested a store in Goodyear several times. Now, I am thrilled that they'll be opening one in Goodyear's downtown."

Chris Warren, store captain for the

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Opens

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future Goodyear location, said the store is a good fit for the surrounding area.

"We're excited to bring our unique products and hire more local, friendly crew to serve as Goodyear's neighborhood grocery store," Warren said.

The GSQ project, led in partnership with Globe Corporation, includes Goodyear City Hall, the Georgia T. Lord Library, a two-acre public park, a Class A office building, and dozens of dining and retail options either completed or in progress.

It is one of several major West Valley civic centers under development as cities look to attract business, improve walkability and offer more amenities to residents.

Meanwhile, construction is underway nearby on Buc-ee's, the 74,000-square-foot Texas-based travel center set to open in summer 2026. Located at the southeast corner of I-10

and Bullard Avenue, it will be the company's first location in Arizona.

Mayor Pizzillo said Buc-ee's is expected to bring roughly 200 full-time jobs and generate tax revenue from out-of-town visitors that can support city services.

"That means they're not cannibalizing our businesses, they're just adding to our revenue that helps pay for police, fire, roads and streets," he said.

Both the Trader Joe's and Buc-ee's developments reflect broader changes in Goodyear's retail and civic planning strategies that began after the Great Recession, when the city shifted from plans for a traditional regional mall to a walkable, mixed-use district.

As the Trader Joe's opening nears, city officials say more announcements are on the way.

"Goodyear couldn't be more thrilled that Trader Joe's has chosen to come to our great city," said Pizzillo.

More information about GSQ and upcoming openings is available at goodyearaz.gov.

IN BRIEF

Goodyear hospital recognized for stroke care by American Heart Association

Abrazo West Campus in Goodyear has received the American Heart Association's 2025 Get With The Guidelines Stroke Gold Plus award for meeting stroke care standards based on national treatment guidelines.

The award recognizes hospitals that follow protocols aimed at improving recovery and reducing complications among stroke patients. The recognition is part of the American Heart Association's nationwide quality improvement program for in-hospital stroke treatment.

"Abrazo West is committed to improving patient care," said Hans Driessnack, CEO of Abrazo West



Abrazo West Campus is recognized for stroke care by the American Heart Association. (Mary Goldmeier/Independent Newsmedia)

Campus. "By adhering to the latest treatment guidelines, we are putting proven knowledge to work daily, which studies show can help patients recover faster. The end goal is to ensure more people in the West Valley have access to advanced health care and experience longer, healthier lives."

Abrazo West also received additional distinctions, including the Target: StrokeSM Honor Roll Elite and Advanced Therapy awards.

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BUSINESS MOVES



1 The Refresh Room

The Refresh Room celebrated its grand opening, bringing personalized skincare and wellness services to the Goodyear community.

2455 Pebble Creek Pkwy, Goodyear, AZ

2 Abrazo West Campus OR

Abrazo West Campus unveiled its new hybrid operating room, enhancing surgical care for complex cases such as trauma and vascular procedures.

13677 W. McDowell Rd., Goodyear, AZ

3 Formation Park 10

Officials held a ribbon cutting for Phase 1 of Formation Park 10, a new flex industrial development designed for light manufacturing and growing businesses.

NEC Celebrate Life Way & Bullard Ave, Goodyear, AZ

4 Livewell Animal Urgent Care

Livewell Animal Urgent Care will host a grand opening celebration on August 23 to in-

troduce its new urgent veterinary care facility.

1400 N. Litchfield Rd., Suite F1, Goodyear, AZ 85395

5 Loretta Zumbro Elementary School

Liberty Elementary School District opened its newest K-6 campus, Loretta Zumbro Elementary, for the 2025-26 school year.

2600 S. 183rd Ave., Goodyear, AZ 85338

6 Goodyear High School

Agua Fria Union High School District welcomed its inaugural freshman class at the newly constructed Goodyear High School.

17300 W. Van Buren St., Goodyear, AZ 85338

7 Goodyear Telecom Center

The Goodyear Police Department has modernized its Telecommunications Division, which connects emergency calls to first responders.

11 N. 145th Ave., Goodyear, AZ 85338



Abrazo West Campus welcomes a new hybrid operating room. (Submitted photo/Linda Nofer)



The Goodyear Telecommunications department updates their facilities and technology. (Submitted photo/City of Goodyear)

 LITCHFIELD PARK/GOODYEAR
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Your Local Team



Richard Smith
Reporter
rsmith@iniusa.org



Steve Chernek
News Page Designer
schernek@iniusa.org



Mary Goldmeier
Reporter
MGoldmeier@iniusa.org



Chris Williams
Graphic Designer
cwilliams@iniusa.org



Ann Kampmeyer
Multimedia Advertising Consultant
akampmeyer@iniusa.org

Arizona Leadership

Circulation Manager: Terri Rodgers.....trodgers@iniusa.org
Digital Sales Manager: Austin Moose.....amoose@iniusa.org
Editor-in-Chief: Patrick O'Grady.....pogradey@iniusa.org
Business Operations Manager: Kathleen Kotzbauer.....kkotzbauer@iniusa.org
V.P. of Sales & Marketing: Barbara Wandling.....bwandling@iniusa.org
President & CEO: Charlene Bisson.....cbisson@iniusa.org

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THINGS TO DO

IN BRIEF



Ballet Arizona announces the return of its Ballet Under the Stars program and a show in Goodyear. (Submitted photo/Amber Godbehre)

Free ballet comes to Goodyear in September

Ballet Arizona's "Ballet Under the Stars," returns this fall with a free outdoor performance in Goodyear on Friday, Sept. 26, at Estrella Lakeside Amphitheater.

The annual series runs Sept. 18–27 and brings professional ballet to parks across the Valley. All performances begin at 7 p.m. and are open to the public at no cost.

This year's program includes selections from "The Sleeping Beauty," the contemporary piece "Take Me With You," set to music by Radiohead, and two works by Artistic Director Daniela Cardim.

"This program offers Arizonans a unique chance to experience the enchantment of ballet under the night sky, surrounded by family and friends," Cardim said.

The Goodyear event features a full professional stage, costumes, lighting, and local food trucks. Attendees are encouraged to bring blankets, lawn chairs, and picnic meals.

• See **Ballet** on page 17

Public art on traffic cabinets debuts around Goodyear

By Mary Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Ten newly completed artworks are now on display across Goodyear as part of the city's traffic cabinet art program, which turns utility boxes into visual landmarks.

The latest installations, completed in 2025, feature designs from Arizona-based artists and reflect themes of community, environment, culture, and local history. Each piece is either hand-painted or applied as a vinyl wrap on traffic signal cabinets located at intersections throughout the city.

"One of my favorite projects is the traffic cabinet public art project," said Layne Ruiz, Goodyear's arts and culture coordinator. "It's so fun to work with our West Valley artists on this project. It creates a sense of community, it beautifies our city."

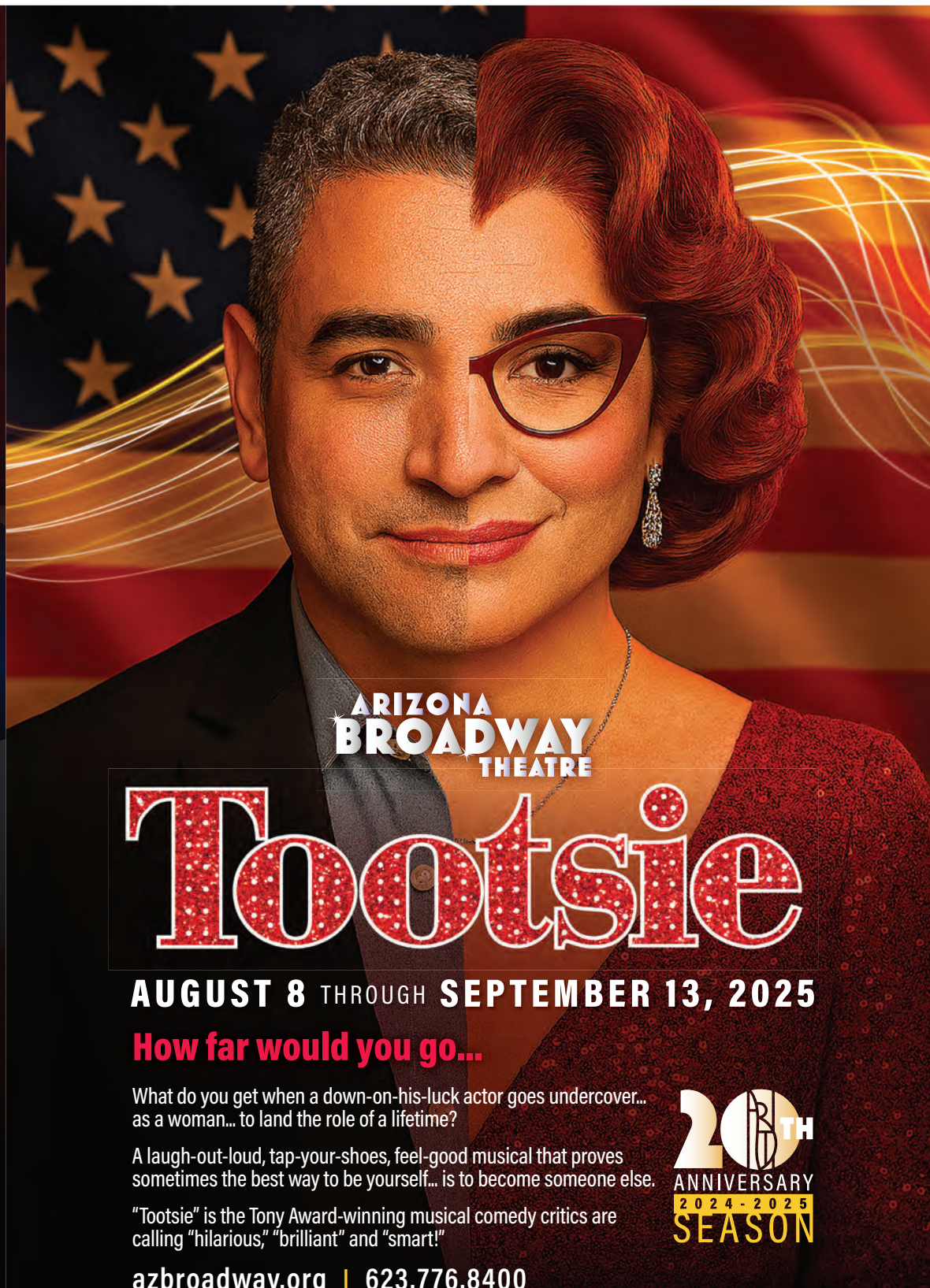
The new artworks include:

- ♦ "Celebrating Goodyear" by Robert Panzer at Camelback Road and 146th Avenue
- ♦ "Tied Together" by Adrian Ramirez at Wigwam Boulevard and Indian School Road
- ♦ "Nature is Ourselves" by Ashley Macias at McDowell Road and Palm Valley Cornerstone
- ♦ "It's a Good Day to Have a Good-year" by Ize at Litchfield Road and W Test Drive
- ♦ "Rise and Shine" by Jessi Kerr at Clubhouse Drive and McDowell Road
- ♦ "Wings of the Wild: The Roadrunner's Flight" by Egypt Hagan at Estrella Parkway and Centerra Drive



Ten artworks are on display across Goodyear as part of its traffic cabinet art program. (Submitted photo/City of Goodyear)

• See **Public** on page 16



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Public

- From page 14
- “Blossoming” by Jerome Fleming, Kulorbandit, at Goodyear Boulevard and Sherman Street
- “Nopal Window” by Rebekah Unsworth Sarival Road and Harrison Street
- “The Spirit of Goodyear” by Cynthia Bluford-Mejia at Commerce Drive and Cotton Lane
- “Starlit Sprint” by Kelsey Philips at Estrella Parkway and Wolfpack Way

The traffic cabinet program began in 2018 as part of Goodyear’s annual Public Art Plan. Since its launch, more than 50 cabinets have been transformed by local artists. The initiative is managed by the city’s Arts and Culture Division and overseen by the Goodyear Arts and Culture Commission.

Each artwork is designed to cover three sides and the top of a cabinet, which measures roughly 78 inches tall, 44 inches wide, and 28 inches deep. The city encourages artists to draw on local themes such as education, family, innovation, history, and the environment to ensure each piece reflects its surrounding neighborhood.

Ramirez stated his piece, “Tied Together,” is designed to blend traditional and local motifs, uses a modern interpretation of the “papel picado,” style to symbolize unity and cultural expression.

At the center, a purple tiger pays homage to a nearby high school’s mascot, representing strength, youth, and community pride. An orange sun tops the cabinet emulating Arizona’s desert heat while green floral panels featuring jasmine flowers subtly reference a neighboring Thai restaurant.

“Inspired by community input, this work is a blend of culture, connection, and local storytelling,” Ramirez wrote in his artist statement.

Goodyear officials say the completed pieces not only brighten the streetscape but foster a deeper connection between

AUG. 19

Empowering Caregivers: Respite and Resources Across Arizona

Learn about statewide resources and respite services available for family caregivers supporting aging or chronically ill loved ones.

Georgia T. Lord Library, 1900 N. Civic Square, Goodyear, AZ 85395
6-7 p.m.

SEPT. 5

Master Gardener Presents: Microgreens

Join Master Gardener Terri Kelly for a timely presentation on microgreens and seasonal gardening tips.

Georgia T. Lord Library, Community Room, 1900 N. Civic Square, Goodyear, AZ 85395
6-7 p.m.,

AUG. 23

Dive-In Movie

Watch “Shark Tale” while you swim at the final Dive-In Movie night of the season, pool floats are encouraged.

100 S. Old Litchfield Rd, Litchfield Park, AZ 85340
7-9 p.m.

TUESDAYS

Open Mic Comedy Night

Enjoy free laughs every Tuesday as local comedians take the mic to test out new material at Goodyear’s Valley Craft bar. Valley Craft, 15671 W. Roosevelt St., Suite 102, Goodyear, AZ 85338
7-9 p.m., every Tuesday

residents, artists, and place.

More information about the city’s public art efforts can be found at goodyearaz.gov.

Ballet

• From page 14

“Ballet Under the Stars” also includes student performances through Ballet Arizona’s Class Act program, which offers tuition-free dance instruction and choreography experience to Valley elementary students.

Additional performances will take place in Fountain Hills, Chandler, Peoria, Glendale, and Phoenix. For details, visit balletaz.org.

Estrella Cup returns to Goodyear trails

Registration is now open for the 2025 Estrella Cup, a mountain bike race that challenges riders to tackle steep climbs, flowing descents and rugged desert terrain in the Estrella Mountains.

The annual competition will take place at 17567 W. Elliot Road in Goodyear, offering a mix of endur-

ance and short-course options for riders of various skill levels and bike types. All courses utilize trails built and maintained by local mountain biking enthusiasts, known for their technical turns and sweeping views.

Race day begins at 7 a.m. with the 47-mile Endurance Course, including a single-speed division. The 20-mile Short Course starts at 9 a.m. with divisions for standard, single-speed and e-bike riders. A Junior Short Course for participants 12 and under begins at 10 a.m. and covers 10 miles. Each category is capped between 50 and 75 riders, with an overall event limit of 200 participants.

Registration fees range from \$45 to \$65, depending on the course, with an early registration discount available through Wednesday, Oct. 1. Online registration closes at 9:45 a.m. on Dec. 6.

To register or view full event details, visit bikereg.com/estrella-cup.



Estrella Cup returns to Goodyear trails for a December race. (Submitted photo/Metro Creative Connection)

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SPORTS

SEASON PREVIEW



Millennium sophomore running back D'Mari Bryant tries to power through the tackle of two Cactus defensive inemen during a Nov. 8 game in Glendale. Bryant and all five offensive linemen return as starters for the 2025 season. (Courtesy Ed Russell Photography)

Strength in numbers propels Millennium's rebound bid

By Richard Smith
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Millennium football does not return any household names, but the Tigers will have strength in numbers and unity of purpose.

A senior-led offensive line and large junior class are determined to atone for a 3-7 season that snapped a three-year streak of 5A playoff berths.

Coach Lamar Early said senior leaders like offensive guard Zach Phillipps and quarterback Rayden Reibel stepped up, knowing they

needed to become better leaders than last year.

"I think everyone came back with a better mindset than last year. I think you're seeing a lot more effort than last year," junior running back D'Mari Bryant said.

It starts with the only position group not dominated by juniors, the offensive line. Phillipps is one of three returning senior starters on the interior line, along with center Kaden Yellen and guard Daniel Cruz.

• See **Tigers** on page 19

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Millennium Tigers

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2024 record: 3-7
Playoffs: Did not qualify
Region: 5A Desert West
Coach: Lamar Early (9th year)

Tigers

• From page 18

Even better, junior tackles Lauifi Tosi and Kevin Munane also are second-year starters. The unit has developed a chemistry while pushing themselves.

"After last year and not having the success we were accustomed to, our linemen took one week off, and then they were in the weight room. That's kind of the rule. If we don't make the playoffs, there's something we didn't get some. They set the tone for what it's going to take this year," Early said.

Phillips said the line is — and needs to be — the closest-knit position group on the team.

Both tackles are continuing to grow and have stronger frames than they did as sophomores. Munane is now 6-3 and nearly the same weight as the 6-4, 275-pound Tosi, Phillipps said.

"We want to foster a better culture at Millennium," he said.

Bryant split carries last year with graduated back Isaiah Salinas, though graduated quarterback Donovan DeLong was the team's leading rusher by a comfortable margin.

Expect Bryant to at least double

MILLENNIUM TIGERS

OFFENSE: Spread

DEFENSE: 4-3

KEY RETURNES: D'Mari Bryant, Jr., RB; Kadin Johnson, Jr., WR/DB; Kaden Yellen, Sr., C; Zach Phillipps, Sr., OG; Lauifi Tosi, Jr., OT; Dalton Brooks, Jr., LB.

NEWCOMERS TO WATCH: Isaiah Rodriguez, Sr., WB; Kris Gleason, Sr., CB.

his 62 carries from last year. Senior Carter Mowbray will have a bigger role as the No. 2 back.

Bryant's chemistry with the returning lineman shined in the 40-37 season-ending loss at Cactus, as he gained 101 yards on 22 carries.

"It's been a lot better. I hang out with the line all the time, outside of practices and school. And all the running backs are close," Bryant said.

Ninth-year Tigers coach Early also likes how the defensive line looks. Juniors AD De Leon (defensive tackle), Ethan Granados (defensive tackle) and Angelo Ortiz (defensive end) continue to improve.

Early said the receiving corps

• See MHS on page 20

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 LITCHFIELD PARK/GOODYEAR
INDEPENDENT

MHS

• From page 19

should be a strength, even though senior Trey Peck transferred to Cave Creek Cactus Shadows. It marks the third straight year that the Tigers lose a major playmaker that they expected back.

This time, however, Peck transferred before spring practice. So the Tigers had time to adjust, unlike 2023 when running back Zues Pindernation stopped playing in August, and 2024, when running back Tayejion Player transferred to Cactus weeks before the season started.

"We'll shock some people with the speed and the strength of our boys," Early said.

Senior cornerback Kris Gleason had a big offseason, and stands out in a mostly new secondary.

Junior Kadin Johnson is the most advanced receiver in the program after starting in 2024, and may start at cornerback as well.

The sleeper is 6-5 senior receiver Isaiah Rodriguez.

"We're excited to see these guys. They're ready to go. They were all over the place earlier waiting to put their jerseys on," Early said before the opening practice Aug. 4.

Junior middle linebacker Dallas Brooks filled a leadership void in the heart of the defense.

Juniors Elijah Stephens and Jeremiah Campos should flank Brooks.

"I've grown into it with more repetition. It's ingrained in my mind. I'd say we're all pretty comfortable with the defense," Brooks said.

The system is familiar, as defensive coordinator Devin Dorisseau returns. Former Agua Fria High head coach Ricky Higuera is back on Early's staff and will coach the defensive line.

Former NFL lineman Mao Tosi is the new offensive line coach.

Reibel leads the five-player quar-

2025 SCHEDULE

Home games in caps
Aug. 29 BETTY FAIRFAX
Sept. 5 at Cactus
Sept. 12 at Agua Fria
Sept. 19 APOLLO
Sept. 26 at Shadow Ridge
Oct. 3 VERRADO
Oct. 9 at Tolleson
Oct. 17 KELLIS
Oct. 24 CANYON VIEW
Oct. 31 at Desert Edge

terback battle as the school year starts. Senior Jordan Mooney transferred in from Buckeye and sophomore Cason Lanzaotto arrived from Desert Edge.

Sean Lanzaotto also moved in from the Scorpions, as the new offensive coordinator.

Millennium closes its year on Haloween at defending 5A champion Desert Edge. The Desert West Region gains Kellis and Tolleson, and loses Cactus and Sunrise Mountain, but the Tigers opted to take on the Cobras again on Sept. 5 after three straight narrow losses in the series.

"Instead of thinking of it as a team we like to think of it as a brotherhood. We stay close like a family and are always pushing each other," Brooks said.

Fairfax visits Aug. 29 as Millennium unveils its new look stadium entrance with purple entrance arches. Multiple players said camp in Show Low felt different than last year.

"It was the best camp I've ever had and coaches had some similar feelings," Phillipps said. "As seniors, we told our story of how we love football. Camp is where you grow a bond as a team and get to know each other."

EDUCATION

IN BRIEF

EMCC offers community education to West Valley residents

Estrella Mountain Community College is rolling out non-credit classes this fall, offering West Valley residents short-term opportunities to build skills, explore interests, and prepare for the workforce.

The courses are part of EMCC's Community Education program, which includes personal enrichment, English language instruction, workforce training, and youth classes.

Upcoming classes include:

- Public Speaking Workshops

• See **Classes** on page 22

Litchfield schools prepare for statewide limits on student cell phone use

By Mary Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Litchfield Elementary School District is preparing to update its student conduct policies in response to new state legislation that will restrict student cell phone use during the school day.

During a recent governing board meeting, Dr. Bridget Duzy, deputy superintendent of academic success, presented a first reading of revisions required under House Bill 2484, which was signed into law by Gov. Katie Hobbs earlier this year. The legislation, championed by Arizona Superinten-

• See **Cell** on page 22



Litchfield Elementary School District prepares to adjust policy to align with new HB2484. (Submitted photo/Metro Creative Connection)



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Cell

• From page 21

dent of Public Instruction Tom Horne, will take effect on Sept. 26.

The law requires school districts to limit access to wireless communication devices, including social media platforms, throughout the school day, including during lunch and class transitions. Districts must still allow use for emergencies, medical needs, or educational purposes outlined in a student's Individualized Education Program or 504 plan. Policies must also ensure students can communicate with parents or guardians when needed.

The district already prohibits student cell phone use during class, with devices required to be off and kept in backpacks. The primary change under the new law, Duzy explained, is that teachers will no

longer be allowed to incorporate phones into classroom instruction unless a specific student's learning plan calls for it.

"This won't be a big change for Litchfield, since our current practice already aligns," Duzy said. "We're just clarifying that any educational use of devices must be formally documented."

To address compliance, the Arizona School Risk Retention Trust is recommending updates to Policy 3-403, Policy 5-305, and related procedures and forms. The district is reviewing these as part of the policy revision process.

The bill, HB 2484, originated as part of a renewed push by Superintendent Horne to limit classroom distractions. Horne previously supported a broader bill in 2024 which was vetoed by Hobbs.

Horne has called phone use "the heroin of our time," arguing that constant screen time undermines student focus and face-to-face learning.

Classes

• From page 21

on Sept. 9-10, Oct. 7-8, and Nov. 4-5. The \$15 two-day sessions focus on elevator and persuasive speaking and are held from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. in Estrella Hall.

• Financial Literacy, a four-part course beginning Sept. 2, will cover budgeting, credit, savings strategies, and mortgage rates. The class meets twice weekly and costs \$25.

• Mixxedfit, a dance-based fitness program that combines move-

ment and bodyweight exercises, runs Tuesdays from Aug. 26 through Oct. 14. The \$65 class meets in the Student Union's exercise room and includes a mandatory waiver for participants.

Additional programming includes English for Speakers of Other Languages, job-focused workforce training, and the Kids and Teen College series, which provides enrichment courses for children ages 5 to 16.

More information and class registration details are available on campus at 3000 N Dysart Road in Avondale or at estrellamountain.edu.

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MEETINGS

Attorney General clears Liberty board of alleged violations

By Mary Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A state investigation into how the Liberty Elementary School District Governing Board conducts its meetings has concluded with no violations of Arizona's Open Meeting Law.

At a recent board meeting, outside counsel Mark Hanson of The Ledbetter Law Firm presented the findings of the Arizona Attorney General's Office, which spent more than five months reviewing 18 allegations raised in late 2023 and early 2024. The resulting 10-page report, released June 20, found the board acted within the law in all instances.

The Open Meeting Law is designed to ensure transparency in public decision-making by requiring that most governmental meetings be publicly noticed and accessible. For school dis-



Liberty Elementary School District's Governing Board is cleared of allegations of violating Open Meeting Law. (Submitted photo/Liberty Elementary School District)

tricts, compliance with this law is a key part of maintaining public trust and accountability, particularly when issues around governance and transparency are raised.

The complaints reviewed by the Attorney General's Office spanned from early 2023 to late 2024 and covered a wide range of concerns, including executive session practices, board member

communications, school tours, social media use, and agenda wording.

Among the allegations were claims that the board improperly discussed a former superintendent's resignation in closed session. The Attorney General concluded that those discussions were properly noticed and limited to legal and contractual matters, with no votes or action taken behind closed doors.

Other complaints accused board members of conducting district business in private, such as touring a school without proper notice, emailing about legal matters, or posting opinions on social media. Investigators found no violations in those cases either, noting that no quorum was present during the tour and that board members are allowed to express personal opinions publicly, so long as they are not coordinating outside official meetings.

Some complaints focused on how the board handled hiring decisions and legal representation. For example, a board member's outreach to a law firm prior to board approval drew criticism. But the Attorney General's Office ruled that individual board members are allowed to speak with potential contractors, provided formal decisions are made publicly.

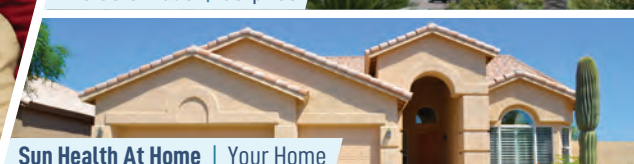
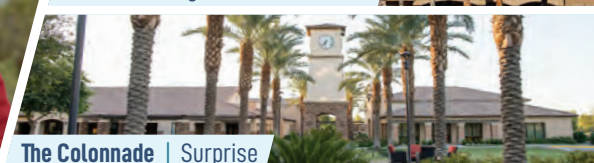


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NEIGHBORS



Litchfield Park celebrates Coast Guard's 235th anniversary with a flag-raising community event. (Mary Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)

Litchfield Park celebrates Coast Guard's anniversary

By Mary Goldmeer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

City officials, residents and first responders gathered on the front lawn of Litchfield Park City Hall early Friday morning to mark the 235th anniversary of the United States Coast Guard with a flag-raising community celebration.

Though Arizona lies far from the nation's coasts, it falls under the jurisdiction of the Coast Guard's 11th District, which covers California, Nevada, Utah and Arizona. Local leaders used the occasion to honor both the active-duty and retired Coast Guard personnel living in the West Valley, while reflecting on the branch's history and service.

"We observe today not only the founding of the Coast Guard, but the personal sacrifices its members contin-

ue to make in service to our country," said Litchfield Park Mayor Thomas Schoaf, who read a proclamation designating Aug. 4 as United States Coast Guard Day in the city.

Children rode by on bikes on their way to school as the ceremony began, while local leaders, first responders and Gold Star Mothers looked on.

The Coast Guard, established in 1790 as a fleet of revenue cutters enforcing tariff laws and evolved into a military and humanitarian force. Today, it plays roles in border security, environmental protection, maritime law enforcement and national defense.

"This is a service that stands ready every day, across oceans, coasts, and even here in the desert, to protect and

• See **Celebrates** on page 25



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Celebrates

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serve,” Schoaf said.

Following the flag raising, Coast Guard representatives from the 11th District participated in the ceremony alongside local dignitaries.

In a national message issued on Aug. 4, Acting Commandant Adm. Kevin Lunday and Master Chief Petty Officer Phillip Waldron called the 235th anniversary a defining moment in the service’s legacy.

“For 235 years, the American people have depended on the Coast Guard to ensure our nation’s economic prosperity and national security,” they wrote. “Your courage, professionalism, and dedication ensure we will meet tomorrow’s challenges.”

The city of Litchfield Park hosts flag-raising events throughout the year to honor each branch of the military.

Visit litchfieldpark.gov for more information on future ceremonies and civic events.

Litchfield Park teen wins a spot in 2025 Curry Cup

Ashley Shaw, a 16-year-old amateur golfer from Litchfield Park, won the girls’ division at the Palm Springs stop of the UNDERRATED Golf Tour, securing a place in the 2025 Curry Cup this September in New Jersey.

Shaw shot six under par through two rounds to secure the win for the girls division.

Shaw was the inaugural Curry Cup champion and has twice represented the United States in UNDERRATED Golf’s European tournaments. She also made her LPGA Tour debut in May 2024 at the Cognizant Founders Cup in New Jersey.

The UNDERRATED Golf Tour, founded by NBA player Stephen Curry, is now in its fourth season. It aims to increase access to the sport

for student-athletes from underrepresented communities. According to the organization, more than 30 participants have received college golf scholarships, and one alumnus has turned professional.



Ashley Shaw

“With the continued support of KPMG, we are creating lasting opportunities that extend well beyond the golf course,” Curry said in a March 2025 statement announcing the tour schedule. “We’re excited to bring the Curry Cup to the Liberty National Golf Club this fall.”

The 2025 Curry Cup will take place Sept. 10–12 at Liberty National Golf Club in Jersey City, N.J., featuring top players from each U.S. tour stop as well as international participants.

More information is available at stayunderrated.com.

IN BRIEF

Goodyear team earns national spotlight at diving championships

The YMCA Westside Silverfins Dive Team earned second place overall for boys at the 2025 AAU Diving National Championships, a premier youth competition held July 20–27 in Riverside, California.

More than 600 divers representing 90 teams from across the country competed at the Riverside Aquatic Complex. The Silverfins, based at the Southwest Valley YMCA in Goodyear, stood out with multiple top finishes, including several national champion titles.

“This is more than a team—it’s a family, and I’m proud of what they’ve achieved together,” said head coach Bill Hunter.

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Skin

• From page 1

said in an interview for Ironwood Cancer Insights. “The top three types we see are basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma.”

While basal and squamous cell carcinomas are generally more treatable when detected early, melanoma poses a greater risk. It develops from melanocytes, the pigment-producing cells in the skin, and is more likely to spread to other parts of the body. According to Murty, melanomas often appear darker or multicolored compared to other skin cancers, which can make early recognition even more critical.

According to the Arizona Department of Health Services, an average of 2,962 cases of new invasive melanoma cases are diagnosed in the state each year. Melanoma is the fourth most common cancer diagnosis in Arizona.

“Here in Arizona, we’re no strang-

ers to intense sun exposure, especially during the summer months when temperatures climb to over 100 degrees,” stated Cassidy Pedraza, a certified genetic counselor with Ironwood Cancer & Research Centers. “With over 300 sunny days a year, it’s no surprise that skin cancer can be a common health concern.”

Pedraza stated that while many cases of skin cancer are caused by environmental factors such as UV exposure, some people may have inherited genetic risks. “While many cancers are not hereditary, about 5–10% can be linked to a genetic syndrome. These are conditions passed through families that can increase your risk of developing certain types of cancer, sometimes at an earlier age.”

Murty emphasized that anyone can develop skin cancer, but people with lighter skin tones, red or blond hair, or a history of sunburns face higher risks. He encourages residents to take practical precautions: use broad-spectrum

sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher, wear wide-brimmed hats and long-sleeved clothing with UPF protection, and avoid direct sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

“Just because it’s cloudy doesn’t mean the UV index is lower... It is deceptive,” Murty said. He urged minimizing unprotected skin exposure even on overcast days.

Routine skin checks can lead to early diagnosis and better outcomes. Murty recommends monthly self-exams and watching for the “ABCDE” warning signs of melanoma:

- Asymmetry
- Border irregularity
- Color variation
- Diameter greater than six millimeters
- Evolving shape or size

“If you have a personal or family history of melanoma, hereditary risk factors, or any other condition that increases your risk of skin cancer, it’s time to consider scheduling a total body skin

exam with a dermatologist,” stated Mandy Kass, a certified genetic counselor at Ironwood Cancer & Research Centers. “These thorough exams cover your skin surface from head to toe, including areas you wouldn’t necessarily think of like your mouth, eyes, and nails. By monitoring any spots or changes throughout the years, dermatologists can try to detect skin cancer early... Anyone can get skin cancer, but some people may have an elevated risk.”

Murty, who treats a range of cancers at Ironwood’s Goodyear facility, said surgical removal and radiation therapy are typical treatment options, though care plans vary depending on the cancer’s location and severity.

Opened in June 2024, Ironwood Cancer & Research Centers in Goodyear offers medical and radiation oncology, advanced imaging, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, and access to clinical trials. Visit ironwoodcrc.com for more information or to request a screening consultation.

Announcement

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Birding

- From page 1

bon Society, birding is one of the fastest-growing outdoor activities in the United States, offering both mental and physical health benefits.

"On any given day, we have locals and tourists alike coming to see some of the ...bird species observed here, learn about native plants in our wild-life garden... or just get away from the city by hiking the trails," said Katie Weeks, director of community education for Audubon Southwest.

Birding encourages mindfulness, slows people down, and fosters awareness of habitat and climate change.

"Each year, we engage thousands of people and connect them with the outdoors and natural world, helping them to appreciate their role and responsibility within it," said Weeks.

Birding in the Sonoran Desert

The desert landscape of Estrella Mountain Regional Park is one of the most biodiverse birding spots in the developing West Valley.

"(The park) allows us to see both year-round residents like Gila woodpeckers and white-winged doves, and migratory birds during the spring and fall," Hough said.

Visitors on a typical morning hike might spot colorful vermilion flycatchers perched on mesquites, hear the high-pitched trills of Abert's towhees in the underbrush, or catch a glimpse of a Harris's hawk circling overhead.

The hikes are open to all ages and skill levels and participants are encouraged to bring their own binoculars.

"You don't need any special experience," said Hough. "The key is to slow down and pay attention."

From fieldwork to public service

Hough's transition from scientific fieldwork to parks and recreation was driven by a desire to connect people to nature.



Eric Hough leads a bird walk in Goodyear's Estrella Mountain Regional Park. (Mary Goldmeer/Independent Newsmedia)

"Anything that can spark interest in people to care about (the) environment is worthwhile," Hough said.

"Sometimes people get that spark moment, where they see maybe a vermilion flycatcher, and their mind is blown by the colors of it. Getting people to engage with different perspectives about an animal is what it's all about for me."

Hough also encourages supporting community science platforms like eBird, an online bird-tracking tool from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Participants in his hikes often log sightings through the app, contributing to one of the largest biodiversity databases in the world.

Birding as a gateway to nature

The birding events at Estrella Mountain Regional Park are part of a broader mission by Maricopa County Parks to encourage residents to explore local ecosystems and build lasting relationships with the environment.

"Birding is a great entry point into the natural world," Hough said. "It opens your eyes not just to birds, but to everything: the plants, the weather, the landscape."

The next session of bird walks at Estrella Mountain Regional Park will be posted at maricopacountyparks.net. The park is located at 14805 W. Vineyard Ave. in Goodyear.

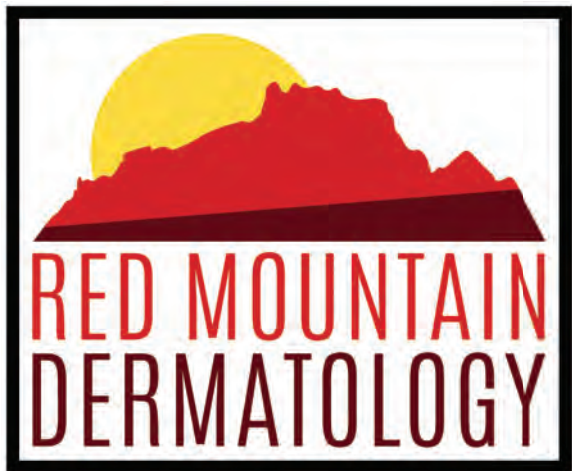
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DO**

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- Degree from Midwestern University-Arizona College of Osteopathic Medicine
- 3 year residency in Family Medicine, Chief Resident
- 3 year residency in dermatology, Chief Resident