



Kyrene district sees override potentially passing

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Kyrene School District's override continuation has been approved, according to the unofficial tally of Nov. 4 votes reported by Maricopa County Elections. The override funding will assist with teacher salaries, classroom instructional tools, reduced class sizes and more.

Unofficial results from more than 36,200 votes show over 59% supporting the override and voting "yes" and over 14,200 or 40% voting "no."

By renewing the existing maintenance and operations override, this would not be a new tax on property owners.

With the override, Kyrene is able to fund over 200 teacher positions and support students.

Kyrene has been operating under a locally supported M&O override for more than 20 years. That override lasts a maximum

• See **Override** on page 30



Superintendent Laura Toenjes working with Kyrene students. The district has seen the vast majority of its teachers remaining in its classrooms year over year, according to a recent report. (Kyrene Elementary School District)

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Arizona State Law requires school districts to annually discuss the performance and classifications of teachers and principals in a public meeting. This ensures transparency and accountability to the effective-

ness and performance of teachers and principals.

Of the over 800 teachers part of the Kyrene district, 749 are part of a continuing contract with the expectation that the contract will continue through the following year.

Over 60 teachers were part of a

one-year contract, with no expectation that their employment would continue to the following year. This is mainly teachers from a specialty or retired teachers who have returned to teach for a limited amount of time.

• See **Retention** on page 31

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Work to improve a storm drain on Roosevelt Street/Continental Drive in Scottsdale/Tempe beginning at Miller Road and working west to 68th Street/College Avenue is scheduled to last until December 2026. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

Roosevelt Street storm drain work begins in Scottsdale/Tempe

Construction of a new storm drain that will improve stormwater collection and prevent flooding near the Scottsdale-Tempe border has begun and is scheduled to last until December 2026.

Construction will take place along Roosevelt Street/Continental Drive beginning at Miller Road and work west to 68th Street/College Avenue. This is a joint project by Scottsdale, Tempe and the Flood Control District of Maricopa County.

Go to tinyurl.com/ynm7fbjz.

Human trafficking a problem in Arizona, expert says

Human traffickers love Arizona, Karen Cahn, with the Safe Action Project, told a crowd of about 75 people at a recent event.

Go to tinyurl.com/58b3x26s.

Correction

The cover story "Council to vote on raising water rates" in the October/November 2025 issue should have said the utilities are funded by the Enterprise Fund.

SERVICE

Sneaker Cleaning Lab brings new concept to Tempe

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

LaMont Jones wants to clean your shoes, caps and anything else that can not be put in a washing machine. But mainly, he wants to show you how.

On the court, runway, street, and everywhere in between, sneakers and athletic shoes are trending with Generation Z for all occasions. Coach, Dior, Gucci and dozens of other luxury brands have sneakers on the market, topping over \$1,000 for one pair. This, Jones says, is why customers from across the country will pay to have them cleaned and repaired, sometimes even every month.

"Clean shoes is a lifestyle," said Jones, who also has the phrase on a decal on a wall in the lab.

Jones and his team of college students Air Force veteran Kameron Pickett clean, repair and sometimes even rebuild dozens of pairs of luxury shoes every week. From first-edition Air Jordans to Dior B23 and special-edition running shoes, the three have worked through years of trial and error, practicing how to repair hundreds of types of shoes.

Jones began the operation out of his garage in 2017 where he would hand-clean hats for family and friends. Later that year he opened a small storefront in Chandler at the Tanger Outlets before moving to Tempe last year.

While taking his sons shopping for shoes at the Shoe Palace in 2022, Jones met Pickett while on the sales floor and the two started a conversation about shoes, careers, and skills. Jones then offered him a job and told him to call with his decision.

"I got home and I just knew," Pickett said. "I didn't need a night to think



LaMont Jones holds Birkenstocks that he repaired using a wine cork and other household materials. (Independent Newsmedia, Madeline Bates)

about it, I knew I wanted to work for 'Mont."

Pickett almost immediately began the role of apprentice by washing dirty towels, cleaning work areas and learning how to clean and repair different types of shoes as a trade.

"He's my right-hand man; he could run this shop without me being here if I needed it," Jones said.

Jones and Pickett keep working with hopes to one day having a contract with Arizona State University,

• See **Sneakers** on page 28

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Compiled by Richard H. Dyer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

NOW OPEN

1 Chipotle Mexican Grill opened Sept. 17 at 1005 E. Broadway Road in Tempe. It features the brand's signature Chipotlane, a drive-thru pick-up lane that allows guests to conveniently pick up digital

orders without leaving their cars. It marks the second Chipotlane in Tempe and is to be opened 10:45 a.m.-10 p.m. seven days a week. Go to chipotle.com.

2 Sunshine Breakfast Bar, an all-day brunch concept, has opened

at 788 E. Baseline Road in Tempe. It is its second Valley location. Open 7 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday-Sunday. Go to sunshinebreakfastbar.com.

3 Spaghetti Shark is now open at 8830 S. Kyrene Road Suite No. 101 in Tempe. Open 11 a.m.-8 p.m. for takeout Monday-Saturday. Go to spaghetisharktempe.com/.

4 Salt & Straw, an ice cream shop, recently opened at 690 S. Novus Place No. 175 in Tempe. It is open 11 a.m.-11 p.m. daily. Go to saltandstraw.com.

5 Pepper Lunch recently opened at 947 S. Mill Ave. in Tempe. It is open 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Sunday. Go to pepperlunchrestaurants.com.

6 ProteinHouse recently opened at 947 S. Mill Ave. No. 105 in Tempe. It is open 7 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Saturday and 7 a.m.-7 p.m. Sunday. Go to protein-house.com.

7 Willie's Taco Joint recent opened inside the Vib Hotel at 511 S. Farmer Ave. in Tempe. Go to wtjtempe.com.

8 ChickenHug — owned by four Jordanian friends who love chicken — has opened at 2070 E. Apache Blvd. Suite No. 103 in Tempe. Open 11 a.m.-10 p.m. Monday-Thursday and Sunday; and 11 a.m.-midnight Friday-Saturday Dine-in after 6 p.m. on weekdays. Go to chickenhug.com.

9 A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held at **Canyon State Electric's** new office headquarters at 1618 S. Priest Drive in Tempe. With almost 15,000 square feet of office space and a warehouse spanning over 6,000 square feet this is double the size of the previous office location. The building was purchased in January, and the interior was redesigned and built to fit Canyon State Electric's needs.



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Tempe City Council at a recent meeting voted to make a recommendation of approval to the Arizona Department of Liquor License and Control for:

10 • A series 3 in-state microbrewery liquor license — and a separate owner transfer of a series 7 beer and wine bar state liquor license — for Zonafide Beverages LLC dba **Zonafide Beverages**, 1520 W. Mineral Road Nos. 101-104 in Tempe.

11 • A series 10 beer and wine store liquor license for Star Fuel LLC dba **Star Fuel**, 480 W. Warner Road in Tempe.

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STYLE

Last Rodeo gives a space for all to put on Western wear

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Khal and Joe Shawabkeh are passionate about keeping the Wild West alive.

The brothers, who own Last Rodeo Western Wear on Mill Avenue in Tempe, specialize in any material for boots and apparel — from crocodile to ostrich and materials in between.

“It’s the culture of Arizona, there were cowboys and easterners that came here and there’s a lot of students who come from all over the world to study abroad at ASU,” Khal said.

The brothers grew up in the west coming from Texas and Arizona before landing in Tempe. They were inspired by the movie “Last Rodeo” as the namesake for the store.

What they have found is a market near ASU that not only features those who grew up in that Western culture but those who are drawn to it from around the U.S. and around the world.

Arizona State University had more than 14,000 international students enrolled in the fall semester coming from almost every continent and over 150 countries — all who bring part

• See **Rodeo** on page 14



Joe Shawabkeh walks into Last Rodeo on Mill Avenue. (Independent Newsmedia, Madeline Bates)

TECH

Golf Envy brings new technology to Tempe

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

In 2023, the Arizona Alliance for Golf found that Valley golf courses bring over \$6 billion every year for golf, social events and friendly competition. But becoming an elite golfer just got easier with an indoor simulation.

Golf Envy is a place where intense golfers can practice their game 24 hours a day with air-conditioning and the most advanced technology that golf simulation has to offer.

In the first Arizona location, owner Alec Cross is proud to bring the advanced technology to the Tempe and Chandler area as well as offer a variety of memberships, each with pricing and amenities tailored to the individual member.

“It’s not just a place to hit balls, it’s a place to belong,” said Cross in a statement.

GolfZon is an advanced golf simulation that powers Golf Envy. The simulation offers different types of terrain, a moving floor, and the real-life scenario of bunkers, long grass and surrounding cameras to

• See **Envy** on page 15



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EDUCATION



Arizona State University announces the John Schufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering. (Courtesy of Arizona State University)

ASU medical school gains accreditation

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Arizona State University has announced the John Schufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering as the first MD and MS combined program in the state. The school has now gained accreditation and will begin accepting applications for the inaugural class to begin in August 2026.

The first class of 36 students will be required to enroll in both a medical doctor degree and a master of science in engineering degree, where they will learn how to use technology to innovate new paths in healthcare.

"We believe the doctors of the future shouldn't just be using these new technologies, they should be designing, building and applying them to solve humanity's toughest health challenges," said founding dean Holly Lisanby.

The university received a gift of over \$100 million from physician and entrepreneur John Schufeldt, who authored a book on how to innovate in business and health.

"I knew from the start that this was the team that would change healthcare," he said.

Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego was also pleased to share in the announcement as Phoenix is growing in technological innovations with companies like TSMC, QTS and others calling Phoenix home.

Gallego shared that although she lost her mother to cancer, she was pleased with the doctors and innovations that extended her life and that she will be forever grateful for healthcare innovations.

"ASU Health will let us marry two areas of excellence," she said.

Dean Lisanby shared that ASU plans on standing out against other medical schools and becoming a leader in the field.

Currently, the school has received preliminary accreditation, which allows it to begin admitting and enrolling in students. Following the graduation of the first class, the school will be eligible for full accreditation and be able to receive more funding to continue teaching medicine and innovation.

The University of Arizona is the state's first MD program and has a joint campus in Phoenix with Northern Arizona University and ASU.

DISTINGUISHED

Kyrene Traditional Academy principal honored in Washington D.C.

Marianne Lescher from Kyrene Traditional Academy has been named Arizona's 2025 National Distinguished Principal or NDP by the National Association of Elementary School Principals NAESP.

The National Distinguished Principal award recognizes pre-K through eighth-grade leaders from across the country every year in Washington, D.C. The program was established in 1984 to honor public school officials to be nominated by their peers for instruction, management and leadership excellence.

"Every chapter of my career has reinforced my passion for creating schools where students love to learn and teachers love to teach," said Dr. Lescher in a statement.

Kyrene Traditional Academy is a Pre-K through eighth-grade school



A sign that reads 'Kyrene School District' on a blue wall of a balcony at the Kyrene Administrative Building. (Independent Newsmedia/Madeline Bates)

and Lescher has been the principal for over 13 years. Under her leadership, the school was the first in the Kyrene

district to win a Blue Ribbon Award in 2015.

"Dr. Lescher's leadership has made

a lasting impact on Kyrene Traditional Academy and Kyrene School District," said Kyrene Superintendent Laura Toenjes in a press release. "Her commitment to high standards and continuous improvement exemplifies what it means to lead with purpose and care."

This year's 43 NDP honorees were honored in Washington, D.C. from Oct. 23-24. Leaders are selected following a long record of high student achievement and creating a compassionate environment for all. Lescher says that this is not only her doing.

"This honor represents not just my work, but the extraordinary educators and families who have walked alongside me in building communities where excellence is the expectation and every child feels known, respected and valued," she said in a statement.





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CITY

Tempe creates new land acknowledgment recognizing Indigenous people

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The city of Tempe and Vice Mayor Doreen Garlid presented a new land acknowledgment during the city council meeting on Oct. 16. For Garlid, the message hit close to home.

Garlid is Navajo and a relative of Navajo Code talker George Kirk, a soldier pictured in one of the famous photographs from the U.S. Archives. She became emotional as she spoke about presenting the new acknowledgment video at the meeting.

"When I think about our history and the tribal communities here, they are incredibly resilient," Garlid said at the end of the meeting.

The video acknowledges the land now called Tempe once belonged to the O'odham and Piipaash people who existed in the Valley long before westward expansion in the U.S.

Garlid explained her relatives were put in boarding schools and punished for speaking Navajo and practicing Indigenous customs. But for her, she hopes to continue keeping Navajo traditions alive.

Garlid said several members of the



Doreen Garlid

community reached out to share how they felt about the change.

"I got as many calls and messages from people who are non-Natives as people who are native who said that they are so happy to see this change," she said.

Garlid was the only one who spoke about the change, and there were no other public comments from the council.

To watch the new Tempe Land Acknowledgment, created by a Native American-owned and -operated media company, Hekiu, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISIoKm0kkrs>.

ARTS



Enjoy live performances by Tempe Union High School District bands at Music Under the Stars on April 26. (Courtesy City of Tempe)

Tempe gives \$216K in grants to local artists

The city of Tempe awarded more than \$216,000 to 37 local arts nonprofits and local artists for 2025 and 2026.

More than \$31,000 also will be distributed to teachers who apply for the Arts in Schools grant. This will connect teachers with public artists to give students hands on experience and further their arts education.

"Our investment in local artists and creatives helps contribute to the vibrant cultural community that we get to enjoy here in Tempe," said Tempe Mayor Corey Woods in a statement.

Applicants went through a competitive review process from five in-

dependent community review panels that included representatives from Tempe Arts and Culture Commission, African American Advisory Committee, Mayor's Youth Advisory Committee and Tempe Tourism. Tempe residents, arts educators and other members of the community also gave input.

Creative Current Grants offer up to \$10,000 and Next Wave Grants offer up to \$2500. All applicants were required to write multiple essays about how the funding would impact their work.

Presentations and performances will be in venues across Tempe and

• See **Grants** on page 15



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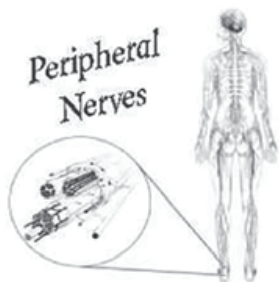
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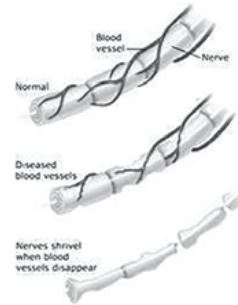
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Mesa, AZ — The most common method your doctor will recommend to treat your chronic pain and/or neuropathy is with prescription drugs that may temporarily reduce your symptoms. These drugs have names such as Gabapentin, Lyrica, Cymbalta, and Neurontin, and are primarily antidepressant or anti-seizure drugs. These drugs may cause you to feel uncomfortable and have a variety of

Chronic pain and/or peripheral neuropathy is a result of damage to the nerves often causing weakness, pain, numbness, tingling, and the most debilitating balance problems. This damage is commonly caused by a hands and feet which causes the nerves to begin to degenerate due to lack of nutrient flow.



As you can see in Figure 2, as the blood vessels that surround the nerves become diseased they shrivel up which causes the nerves to not get the nutrients to continue to survive. When these nerves begin to "die" they cause you to have balance problems, pain, numbness, tingling, burning, and many additional symptoms. The main problem is that your doctor has told you



to just live with the problem or try the drugs which you don't like taking because they make you feel uncomfortable. There is now a facility right here in Mesa that offers you hope without taking those endless drugs with serious side effects.

(See the special neuropathy severity examination at the end of this article) neuropathy three factors must be determined.

- 1) What is the underlying cause?
- 2) How much nerve damage has been sustained.

NOTE: Once you have sustained 95% nerve loss, there is likely nothing that we can do for you.

- 3) How much treatment will your condition require?

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Aspen Medical will do a chronic pain and neuropathy severity examination to determine the extent of the nerve damage as a public service to you and/or your family and friends. This neuropathy/pain severity examination will consist of a detailed sensory evaluation, extensive peripheral vascular testing, and a detailed analysis of the findings of your neuropathy.



Aspen Medical will be offering this chronic pain and neuropathy severity examination from now until December 30, 2025. Call 480-796-1136 to make an appointment to determine if your chronic pain and peripheral neuropathy can be successfully treated.

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**Boots with different sizes, colors and materials lined up against a wall in Last Rodeo on Mill Avenue.
(Independent Newsmedia/Madeline Bates)**

Rodeo

- From page 8

of their culture to Tempe. Many also want to bring a little of the South-western culture home.

Last Rodeo also has Tempe's first custom hat bar, where customers can decorate their own Y2K or Western style hat with ribbon, charms, patches and even branded designs to showcase personality and style.

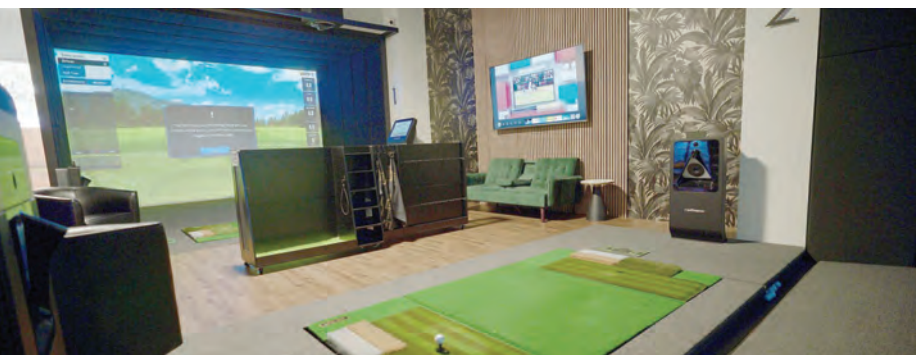
The Shawabkeh brothers hope to share their love of Western wear with

the public. As construction lingers on Mill Avenue, they want everyone to know that they are open and ready to help create custom wear for all.

"We sell emotion and feeling, not product," Joe said.

The brothers said they enjoy seeing how happy it makes customers to personalize new pieces and share their love of Western wear in different ways.

The store is open 10 a.m.-9 p.m. and located at 414 S. Mill Ave. on the first floor.



Simulation bay at Golf Envy in Tempe. (Golf Envy)

Envy

• From page 8

track movement and positions to improve accuracy.

The simulation also has cameras and sensors that can sense movements and give analytics to show improvement and changes that could impact

Golf Envy will open Nov. 1 at 7420 S. Rural Road in Tempe; however, the facility is not open to the public.

Cross said that he would like to meet with prospective members to allow a trial of the equipment and have a thorough conversation about membership. Members are allowed guests, however, and encouraged to spread the word to help for teams and leagues to foster an environment of competition and improvement.

To make an appointment for a consultation go to <https://golfenvy.com/location/south-tempe/membership/>.

Grants

• From page 12

many will be open to the public.

This year's arts grants winners are:

Creative Current Grants (nonprofit organizations)

- Black Theatre Troupe
- CAFÉ Flutes
- CaZo Dance Theatre
- Childsplay
- Desert Dance Theatre
- Desert Overture
- Downtown Tempe Foundation
- FABRIC Tempe
- Grey Box Collective Foundation
- Heartsy
- Higher Octave Healing
- Lights Camera Discover
- Movement Source Dance Company
- MusicaNova Orchestra
- Musician Enrichment Foundation
- Phoenix Gay Men's Chorus

- Phoenix Screenwriters Association
- Tempe Artist Guild
- Tempe Winds
- Tetra String Quartet
- The Bridge Initiative
- Third Space Dance Project
- Yes And Productions/The Ladies

Next Wave Grants (cultural groups, nonprofits, artist collectives)

- Asociacion De Peruanos En Arizona
- Burn City String Quartet
- Community Choir of AZ
- Driftwood Quintet
- Mac & Company
- Oh My Ears
- Process in Place
- Revisionary Arts
- Rising Youth Theatre
- Rogue Dance Productions
- Teatro Bravo
- Wasted Ink Zine Distro
- Wight Noise Dance
- Wild Steps

Do you feel that you get a good value for your tax dollars?

Share your feedback through the Budget Survey

Should street improvements, bike lanes, or improved parks be a funding priority? Let us know. The city has started its annual budget process and encourages you to provide thoughts about the community and its future.

Complete the survey at chandleraz.gov/budget before Friday, Jan. 16, 2026.

Paper copies are also available in either English, Spanish or Mandarin, and may be picked up at various City facilities, including libraries, community centers and the lobby of City Hall.



NOV. 26

FITNESS

Footnotes Walking Club first Thursdays at Kiwanis Park



Annual holiday tree lighting

Enjoy a full evening of holiday cheer featuring visits from Santa, live performances, festive décor, VIP experiences and interactive holiday activities for all ages. 7 p.m. at Tempe Marketplace, 2000 E. Rio Salado Parkway. tempemarketplace.com.

DEC. 3, 14, 20

Free photos with Santa

Bring the whole family to meet Santa and capture holiday memories with free photos. Perfect for kids of all ages.

6-8 p.m. Dec. 3, 1-3 p.m. Dec. 14 and 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Dec. 20 at Tempe Marketplace, 2000 E. Rio Salado Parkway. tempemarketplace.com.

DEC. 6

Car and motorcycle show

Family-friendly event for car and motorcycle enthusiasts of all ages. Come get a close-up look at restored classics, lowriders, motorcycles and unique city vehicles 10 a.m. to noon at the Tempe Public Library, 3500 S. Rural Road.

<https://tempepubliclibrary.libnet.info/event/14728628>

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Join Tempe Public Library every first Thursday of the month for a casual yet refreshing stroll aimed at getting to know your community, discussing your latest and favorite reads, and enjoying the Tempe scenery — all while getting your steps in.

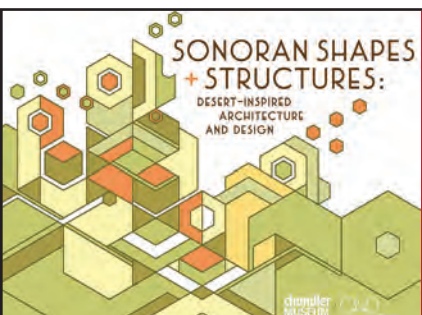
Meet at 10 a.m. Thursday, Dec. 4, at the parking lot by Kiwanis Lake, 5233 S. Ash Ave.. There will be no walking club 10-11 a.m. Jan. 1, it states at <https://tinyurl.com/w2ty-9cvm>.

Bring appropriate footwear, a water bottle and anything else you may need for a one-hour walk. There is no requirement to stay for the entire walk. Walks are weather permitting. For directions, enter “The Cloud at Kiwanis” into Google or Apple Maps.

Staff will be wearing lanyards for easy spotting.



Meet at 10 a.m. Thursday, Dec. 4, at the parking lot by Kiwanis Lake, 5233 S. Ash Ave. (Metro Creative)



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Surprise • January 27, 2026 • The Colonnade

Litchfield Park/Goodyear • Feb. 18, 2026 • Tuscany Falls Ballroom

Chandler • February 24, 2026 • Sun Lakes Country Club

Peoria • March 26, 2026 • Westbrook Village

SunCity West • April 22, 2026 • SCW Foundation

Sun City • May 4, 2026 • Sundial Rec Center

Surprise • August 18, 2026 • The Colonnade

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DEC. 20

Boyle-Williams Duo

Pianist Andrew Boyle and cellist Keith Williams combine artistry with their deep passion for classical works. Spend an evening inspired by composers including Rachmaninoff and Prokofiev. 7-9 p.m. at Tempe Center for the Arts, 700 W. Rio Salado Parkway. Tickets start at \$23 at <https://purchase.tempecenterforthearts.com/EventAvailability?EventId=35601>

DEC. 21

Christmas at Petersen House

For over 40 years this Victorian jewel at 1414 W. Southern Ave. in Tempe has been decorated for the holidays in high style, with an emphasis on its Danish heritage. Enjoy free self-guided historic house tours, light refreshments, entertainment and fun activities 11 a.m.-3 p.m.. Pop-up museum store planned. Free admission, no registration necessary.

ILLUMINATING



Tempe Rock n Roll light show is at Tempe Diablo Stadium, 2200 W. Alameda Drive. (World of Illumination)

Drive-thru light event at Tempe Diablo Stadium

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The holiday magic is back and brighter than ever. World of Illumination — a drive-thru animated light show — has opened presale for events in Tempe.

Families can reserve their spot to experience millions of lights, holiday music and one-of-a-kind displays,

an immersive drive-thru adventure stretching over a mile long.

The event is at Tempe Diablo Stadium, 2200 W. Alameda Drive.

Shows are 6-10 p.m. nightly Tuesday-Sunday through Jan. 4, 2026.

Go to www.worldofillumination.com.

HONORS

Arizona Historical League celebrates 2025 'Historymakers'

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Arizona Historical League of Tempe recently honored nine individuals as 2025 "Historymakers."

John R. Graham, Dr. Eric Reiman, Sharon Harper, Dr. Sister Adele O'Sullivan, Diana 'Dede' Yazzie Devine, F. Ronald 'Ron' Rayner, Bob Boze Bell, Dr. Duane Wooten and Dr. Oliver Harper were honored Oct. 25 at the Scott Resort in Scottsdale as individuals who have contributed to the betterment of the community.

Hosted by Carey Peña, former Channel 3 anchor and owner of Inspired Media 360,



• See **History** on page 23

The event honored past Historymakers as well as honorable members of the community. (Independent Newsmedia, Madeline Bates)

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Mention this article and receive one free dessert or appetizer when you purchase two entrees and two drinks at regular price (restaurant will provide options for appetizer or dessert)



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OPINIONS

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Your Opinion

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

Those that are judged as personal attacks or complaints about neighbors, businesses or other opinion writers will not be considered. No person may submit more than two opinions for publication during a calendar month.

Two submissions in the same issue will not be published. The content of a submission is the responsibility of the person who submitted it.

Speak Up

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

Corrections

We will promptly correct all factual errors. We offer a "right of reply" to the people about whom we write.

Readers who disagree with a news story are welcome to respond with a letter.

Council candidate outlines Mill Avenue revival plan

As a small business owner and independent candidate for Tempe City Council, I'm Joe Forte, and I'm running because our downtown can shine brighter.

Mill Avenue, the beating heart of our community, is fading. Beloved local businesses — quirky shops, cozy cafes, family gems — close within five years. Foot traffic has vanished, strangled by painful parking and few compelling draws.

The Mill Avenue Refresh was a solid start, but it's not enough. We need a pro-small-business voice on council to unlock our city's untapped potential and sustain local commerce for decades.

My plan unfolds in three phases, from quick wins to transformative growth.

Short-term wins: Free parking weekends and after 6 p.m. — smart economics. More shoppers boost city sales tax (2%) and bed tax (5%), offsetting costs. Test, track, scale.

Add weekly farmers markets,



Joe Forte (Submitted photo/D-MAK Productions)

monthly Food Truck Fridays and an open-container entertainment district to draw crowds and share dollars. Retractable bollards close Mill to cars weekends — saving police costs, creating safer, livelier streets.

Medium-term infrastructure: Build a public parking garage above renovating Hackett House, funded partly by entertainment taxes. The city's RFP for affordable housing

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.

has drawn no bids; residential above a noisy event venue — headquarters for Tempe Sister Cities — makes little sense. Parking fits perfectly, easing access while spotlighting Sister Cities' global work. Let's choose synergy over stagnation.

Long-term transformation: Construct a true convention center linked to Tempe Mission Palms. From my AV industry experience, the Omni excels at galas but fails large conventions with breakouts. A dedicated center would attract national events, fill hotels and flood local shops with out-of-town spenders.

Tempe is already a destination with untapped potential. As your small business champion, I'll make it thrive!

Joe Forte
TEMPE

SPEAK UP

Here are some comments about stories happening in your area:

ROMAN-INSPIRED RESTAURANT NEAR THE WATERFRONT IN TEMPE

"Italian food or actual Roman Empire cuisine?" — Istvan Kolnhofer via Nextdoor comment

HUMAN TRAFFICKING A PROBLEM IN ARIZONA

"Yes it is and it is largely ignored by most because then one would have to admit some wrongs and biases."

— Mazie S. via Nextdoor comment

"Mazie, people think it won't happen to them. Sadly, it is everywhere and it can happen to anyone." — Joanne Schuster via Nextdoor comment

ARIZONA GOVERNOR DECLARES STATE OF EMERGENCY AFTER TEMPE STORM

"Great job governor Hobbs. You always put the people of the state first." — Eli Channing via Nextdoor comment

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FROM THE CEO

Enjoy Thanksgiving as you navigate ‘sus’ comments during family dinner

Happy Thanksgiving to our valued readers who make it worthwhile to publish community digital and print publications.

We appreciate your enduring support during this holiday season.

If you’re like me and you have teenagers, you may often wonder how the modern language keeps shifting into shortened words, or lingo that doesn’t quite make sense.

I’m still trying to understand the phenomenon of 6-7, and why my teenagers and/or their friends try to bait me to say it. And, not so surprisingly, it made word of the year, and an NFL football commercial. Huh?

Moving on, I recently learned fire now means it’s cool, and crashed out doesn’t mean passing out on the couch. Apparently, it means he’s mad or frustrated about something.

I asked AI what the rest of the popular slang words are in 2025 that teenagers and young adults use. Here’s the AI quick hits:

Bussin’: Describes something as really good or amazing.

No cap: Means “no lie” or “for real.”

Ate that: Used to praise someone for doing a great job, especially in a performance or presentation.

Sus: Short for suspicious.

Rizz: Short for charisma, a term used to describe someone’s charm or skill in romantic situations.

Bet: Used to show agreement or confirmation.

Iykyk: An acronym for “if you know, you know.”

It’s giving: Used to describe the vibe or energy something is exuding (e.g., “It’s giving 80s”).

Drip: Refers to someone’s great



Charlene Bisson (Independent Newsmedia)

style or fashionable outfit.

Bae: An abbreviation for “before anyone else” or baby, used to refer to a romantic partner or close friend.

Cap: Means “lie” or “false” (the opposite of “no cap”).

Glow-up: A significant improvement in someone’s appearance or confidence.

Mid: Describes something that is mediocre or unimpressive.

Big yikes: An expression of embarrassment or secondhand cringe.

Touch grass: An insult telling someone to go outside and be more in touch with reality.

Delulu: Short for delusional, used to describe someone with unrealistic expectations.

I’ve heard about half of the above, but not as much as late as 6-7, which is the 2025 Word of the Year from Dictionary.com.

Best wishes during the Thanksgiving holiday.

P.S. If you’d like to share your thoughts on slang language that’s not inappropriate, please email me at cbisson@iniusa.org.

History

• From page 19

the honorees were celebrated at a reception with videos introducing them following a speech of their acceptance.

The event honored past Historymakers as well as honorable members of the community like Tempe Mayor Corey Woods, Tempe City Manager Rosa Inchausti and leaders who have improved their community through stewardship and growth.

"I think everyone needs to fail more," said Bob Boze Bell, a cartoonist, artist and comedian who is a 2025 Historymaker. "Success means falling five times and getting up the sixth."

All seven honorees thanked their family and friends for support, but Diana 'Dede' Divine began her speech by crediting those who

helped her create Native American Connections to help Native Americans in need access healthcare and community services.

"You never do it alone," she said.

Other health care workers were honored as well.

O'Sullivan is a practicing physician who founded Circle the City, a non-emergency medical center for people experiencing homelessness. After becoming a nun at the age of 18, she was placed in Phoenix to help the growing homeless population in ***. After getting a medical degree to help those on the street, in 2012, O'Sullivan started Circle the City to help individuals experiencing homelessness who do not need intensive services but are not healthy enough to be outside all day. Circle the City serves over 8000 individuals in need every year.

Sharon and Oliver Harper are partners in life, business, and

philanthropy who met while both attending Creighton University in Nebraska. Years later, they were part of the developments that brought Creighton to Phoenix.

Rieman has been a driving force in the fight against Alzheimer's and believes that within a year, physicians will be able to test for the disease to catch it as early as 30 years old to give patients a treatment plan and improve quality of life.

Wooten is a South Phoenix pediatrician who is one of the few Black doctors in the Valley and wanted to care for children who needed someone who looked like them.

"There's something about seeing yourself in health care and seeing people like you. You just know you're going to be taken care of," he said.

While many looked to improve the human experience, others innovated through land. Rayner is a

lifelong farmer and scientist who created a way to prevent cotton crops from being overrun by pests by crossbreeding seeds with natural pesticides. He forever changed how farmers place crops in Arizona.

From farm to city, land and community development have changed how Arizona operates. Real estate developer Graham was honored for his work in connecting the private and public sectors by developing land for public and nonprofit businesses alike.

The eight honorees at the event were toasted before ending the night with a reception and networking, as hundreds gathered in the ballroom.

To learn more about the Arizona Historical League and the 2025 Historymakers, visit <https://tinyurl.com/65ufpznz>.

To voice your opinion on this story, connect with us at AZOpinions@iniusa.org.

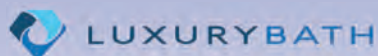
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SAFETY



From January to June of 2025, violent crime in Tempe decreased by over 20% from the same time in the previous year. (Metro Creative)

Tempe Police announce decrease in violent crime

By Madeline Bates

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

New statistics from the Arizona Department of Public Safety show that since 2021, Tempe has seen a reduction in violent crime by over 230 cases by 2024. Tempe Police Chief Ken McCoy and other city officials are proud to see this change.

“Creating an atmosphere where people feel safe – because they are safe – is vital to any community,” said Tempe Mayor Corey Woods in a statement.

At the beginning of the Nov. 6 council meeting, during the city manager announcements, Tempe city manager Rosa Inchausti presented on the changes and applauded the police force leadership.

“I would attribute this to the great leaders that we have, they are under tremendous pressure every day, and we recognize that work is what makes Tempe not only a safe city, but a caring one,” Inchausti said at the beginning of the council meeting.

From January to June of 2025, violent crime in Tempe decreased by over 20% from the same time in the previous year. This also reflects the decrease of Valley-wide crime which decreased by 8%, according to the DPS statistics.

The DPS statistics show the most common violent crimes are with hands, teeth, kicking and personal weapons. This is even ahead of gun use.

In one weekend, Tempe Police stopped over 170 vehicles which led to them being impounded and guns and other weapons were confiscated, it states in a city release.

“Your commitment to proactive policing, community partnerships, and innovative crime prevention strategies continues to make Tempe a leader in public safety,” said council member Jennifer Adams at the end of the Nov. 6 meeting.

In 2024 Tempe Police opened the Real Time Operations center that gave officers technology that helped them work faster and more efficiently with one another.

“I’m incredibly proud of the men and women of the Tempe Police Department. They go out, day in and day out and put it all on the line to keep our community safe. Their efforts have produced incredible results for us, reflective of our core values of excellence, professionalism, and compassion in everything we do,” Police Chief Ken McCoy said in a statement.

To view crime statistics in every jurisdiction, visit Arizona Crime Statistics.



Kenneth McCoy

To voice your opinion on this story, connect with us at AZOpinions@iniusa.org

CULTURE

Diwali dance, food, clothing show goes on

By Jason W. Brooks
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Tempe Mayor Corey Woods seemed happy to be at Kyrene del Norte cultural event — even though he and other leaders had to deal with far more serious matters just a few days prior with the microburst.

“The fact we can be out here for an important annual event, just days after such devastation, is a testament to the power of community,” Woods said from the Kyrene del Norte Elementary School stage Oct. 18 as part of a Diwali celebration.

The event, meant to commemorate one of the most prominent Hindu holiday seasons, included dance demonstrations by both children and adults, a clothing sale and a



Arthy Thiru, left, and Ritu Srivastava, right, present Tempe Mayor Corey Woods with Diwali-themed publications during a Diwali festival and celebration Oct. 18 at Kyrene del Norte Elementary School. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

food truck served traditional dishes.

Kriti Agarwal, owner of Kriti Dance in Chandler, helped organize

the event. She said Diwali symbolizes one of the more common spiritual commemorations: the victory

of good over evil.

Diwali or “Dipawali” means “Festival of Lights.” It’s India’s biggest annual festival and it’s a five- or six-day Hindu festival that involves prayer, feasting, fireworks, community gatherings and forgiveness, she said, celebrated by decorating homes with lamps and colorful lights, sharing special meals, exchanging gifts, and enjoying fireworks.

Woods had appeared and spoken in the days after the microburst and storms that led to damage and a disaster declaration for parts of Tempe. He not only spoke at the start of the Oct. 18 event, he was offered food and took photos with a local organizers and copies of a local Indian-culture magazine themed around Diwali.

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SRP is responsible for keeping its canal system in operating condition during normal water deliveries. Canal dry-ups allow SRP as well as other utilities and municipalities to perform construction and maintenance activities in and around the canals. (Mike Eller, SRP)

SRP announces month-long canal dry-up project

Portions of the Tempe and Western canals will be closed to the public from Nov. 20 to Dec. 20 as crews remove fish and drain the canal segment to perform maintenance work.

During the project, crews will remove silt, replace concrete lining and repair gates along a stretch of 7 to 8 miles, according to a release.

This year, crews will be using a new, state-of-the-art excavator called the Menzi Muck, which can climb in and out of canals without the need for ramps and navigate through up to 6 feet of water. These features save time and conserve resources.

Each fall and winter, SRP performs dry-ups on a rotating, 10-year schedule on portions of the canal system. Canal dry-ups allow SRP as well as other utilities and municipalities to perform construction and maintenance activities in and around the canals.

Friday, Nov. 21 through Sunday, Nov. 23, crews will use large nets to safely herd the white amur fish, load

them onto hauling tanks and move them to other portions of the canal system. The fish are used in the 131-mile canal system to control aquatic vegetation.

Thursday, Nov. 24 through Friday, Dec. 20, crews will inspect the canals, remove silt, replace concrete lining and repair gates.

Signs will be posted along the following canal banks that have increased construction traffic and will be closed to the public.

The Tempe Canal and Western Canal will be impacted.

The Tempe Canal banks will be closed from about Alma School Road and Bass Pro Drive to the area near Dobson Road to north of University Road. It will also be closed from Broadway Road, just east of the Loop 101 on the Price Freeway to the area south of Southern and west of Dobson roads.

The Western Canal banks will be closed from the Loop 101 to a quarter mile west of Rural Road; between Guadalupe and Elliot roads.



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LIQUOR LICENSE

Council denies liquor license, citing past business, competition

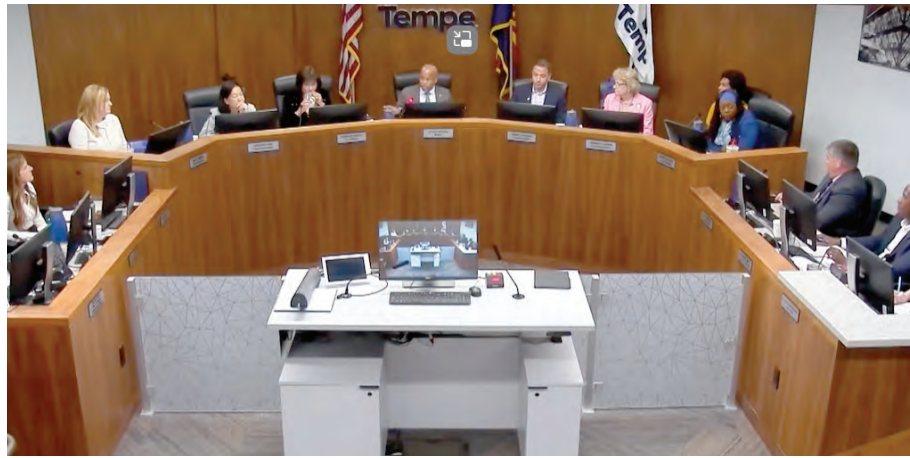
By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Tempe City Council voted to recommend a denial for a new liquor license at King's Liquors, a former Circle K at the corner of University and Ash in downtown Tempe, based on past problems at the location.

The council was persuaded after residents of the Maple Ash community said the previous business had a heavy police presence and caused frequent disturbances to the neighborhood.

The council voted 6-1 against recommending the liquor license, with Councilmember Randy Keating dissenting, as he claimed a new business should be given a fair chance to prove that it will not hold the same reputation as the previous business.

"I do think they should be given a



The Tempe City Council voted against the recommendation of a liquor license for King Liquors on Oct. 16. (Screenshot from Tempe City Council via YouTube)

chance to show that it wasn't that alcohol was being served there, it was the business," Keating said before the vote.

The Shergill family, owners of the

new King's Liquor, have lived in the Valley for more than 35 years and own several stores in Phoenix and Tempe, including T's Liquors and Conve-

nience, also on University Drive.

"I feel really let down," Kiran Shergill said following the council's vote.

Residents like Ben Hurlbut, an Arizona State University professor and Tempe resident of more than 15 years, called the area a "magnet for drunken misbehavior" and said another liquor distributor in the area is an "unnecessary and undesirable presence."

ASU claims nearly 80% of students drink between one and four drinks when they party or socialize. When Tempe sees football games, holidays, and mild weather downtown, students can frequently be seen along Mill Avenue going to bars and stopping in stores that sell beer, wine and hard liquor on any day of the week.

Councilmember Nikki Amburg

• See **Denies** on page 28

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Sneakers

• From page 4

as the campus is just over a block from The Sneaker Cleaning Lab's Mill Avenue workspace and the school where Pickett is working for a degree in urban planning.

But athletes aren't Jones's only clients. Sneakers are just as much a fashion statement for non-athletes as well.

Edgar Sarmiento, owner of Az-Threads at 4733 North Central Avenue in Phoenix, says that many of his customers are young men, around ages 16 to 24, who view each pair as a collector's item as well as a fashion statement.

"Vintage pairs are really popular because they're seen as an art piece," Sarmiento said.

He explained that with economic uncertainty, the sneaker market will usually take a hit but some customers will sell their pieces to help afford necessities.

Others keep and wear their shoes, which Jones and Pickett say help business.

"Everyone's shoes get dirty," said Pickett. "Why wouldn't you want to know how to clean them?"

That question inspired Jones to not only clean and repair shoes but also teach others how to do so. Both Pickett and Jones work daily on videoing the process of cleaning and repairing to show a step-by-step tutorial of almost any scenario.

Jones and Pickett see each new pair as a challenge.

"Me and 'Mont we're building every day, and every day I wake up excited to see what shoes are going to be on the table and what I'm going to do that day," Pickett said.

The Sneaker Cleaning Lab is at 414 S. Mill Ave. Suite 207 in Tempe. For information or to place an order visit sneakercleaninglab.com and on social media or the Patreon "Sneaker Techs."

To voice your opinion on this story, connect with us at
AzoPinions@iniusa.org.

Denies

• From page 27

spoke on why she was voting against the recommendation, citing the position of the store blocks away from downtown Mill Avenue's bar scene and that other stores sell liquor within this area.

Amburg claimed per guidelines given to her and other council members from the state, this is a good reason to recommend denial of the license. At a previous meeting, she abstained from voting on a recommendation for her own business's liquor license, Castro's on Baseline; however, it was approved by her fellow council members 6-0 with her vote being the only abstention.

Keating noted while there were plenty of businesses that sold alcohol, the Shergill business partners deserved the same chance to run their business as everyone else.

"I don't think we've ever denied a liquor license unless there was some egregious violation of the law," Keating said in response to Amburg.

Shergill said she and her family felt empowered by Keating's statement.

"I felt supported by him," she said after the vote. "He wasn't shooting us down; he actually wanted to hear what we had to say."

While the council voted to deny a recommendation, this is not the final decision for King's Liquors. The state will make a final decision on whether or not to administer a license to the business. The Shergill family says they plan on having more than just liquor at that establishment and eventually adding a Mexican restaurant to serve ready-to-eat food for the community.

Should the state deny their request, Kiran said that the business will close for good.

King's Liquor is now open at 119 W. University Drive, open from 8 a.m. to 2 a.m. every day.

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Override

• From page 1

of seven years unless it is renewed early.

Voters last approved the override continuation in 2021.

At the Oct. 28 governing board meeting, the district's Chief Financial Officer, Chris Hermann, says that money from specific funds can't cross to another fund. This is why it is the decision of the voters

to provide insight.

After his comments, board member Cedric Collins applauded him and the other financial employees for the transparency and diligence of financial reporting.

"I really appreciate the fact that Kyrene is so transparent, not a lot of districts expand that kind of courtesy and access," Collins said during the meeting.

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Kyrene district sees override potentially passing

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Kyrene School District's override continuation has been approved, according to the unofficial tally of Nov. 4 votes reported by Maricopa County Elections. The override funding will assist with teacher salaries, classroom instructional tools, reduced class sizes and more.

Unofficial results from more than 36,200 votes show over 59% supporting the override and voting "yes" and over 14,200 or 40% voting "no."

By renewing the existing maintenance and operations override, this would not be a new tax on property owners.

With the override, Kyrene is able to fund over 200 teacher positions and support students.

Kyrene has been operating under a locally supported M&O override for more than 20 years. That override lasts a maximum

• See **Override** on page 30



Superintendent Laura Toenjes working with Kyrene students. The district has seen the vast majority of its teachers remaining in its classrooms year over year, according to a recent report. (Kyrene Elementary School District)

By Madeline Bates
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Arizona State Law requires school districts to annually discuss the performance and classifications of teachers and principals in a public meeting. This ensures transparency and accountability to the effective-

ness and performance of teachers and principals.

Of the over 800 teachers part of the Kyrene district, 749 are part of a continuing contract with the expectation that the contract will continue through the following year.

Over 60 teachers were part of a

one-year contract, with no expectation that their employment would continue to the following year. This is mainly teachers from a specialty or retired teachers who have returned to teach for a limited amount of time.

• See **Retention** on page 31

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• From page 1

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Middle housing overlay passes unanimously in Tempe

By Madeline Bates

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

At the Nov. 6 Tempe City Council meeting the council passed the Middle housing overlay ordinance unanimously 7-0.

In 2024 the state Legislature passed House Bill 2721 or “The Middle Housing Bill” which requires all cities larger than 75,000 residents to build multifamily residences within 1 mile of the central business district and to allow building on residential lots over 10 acres.

Bobby Nichols, a Tempe City council candidate and member of the Democratic Socialists of America, called in to show support.

“I and others would like to buy

homes someday and it seems virtually impossible in this current market,” he said at the Nov. 6 council meeting.

No council members had comments on the item, but voted unanimously to adopt an ordinance to comply with state law.

At the meeting, council members like Vice Mayor Doreen Garlid and Jennifer Adams both commented on new developments that would create housing for Tempe.

Tempe has over 200,000 residents and has been under scrutiny with some arguing that the city is not doing enough to accommodate low-income earners.

To voice your opinion on this story, connect with us at AzOpinions@iniusa.org.

Retention

• From page 1

“This presentation is always a nice reminder that as a district, we’re also employers and responsible for making a safe and supportive work environment for our staff,” Board Vice President Triné Nelson.

Of the 749 continuing contracts, 63 resigned from the district after the 2024-2025 school year, citing family obligation, job-related stress, or a career change.

“Teacher retention is not just about keeping educators in classrooms, its about sustaining the quality, consistency and stability of our education system,” said Kyrene Assistant Superintendent Lisa Gibson.

Member Cedric Collins asked Gibson about how corrections to instruction and supervised assess-

ments work, she explained that first-year teachers have an assessment twice a year and tenured teachers have an assessment once a year.

Gibson also explained a “coaching plan” that identifies inadequacies and gives teachers 45 instructional days to correct their strategies under supervision.

Other members of the board thanked her and the district for compiling the data and documenting these changes throughout the year.

“It’s not an easy job to be a teacher, especially in the state of Arizona. Our legislature does not respect teachers or pay them what they’re worth. This is a testament to our school leaders and to all of our Kyrene educators,” said Kevin Walsh, President of the Kyrene Governing Board.

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