



**Council**  
'Acting' city manager made permanent; **4**



**Food Festival**  
Attendees indulge, endure rain; **16**

# Chandler, lawmakers discuss 2026 legislative priorities

By Jason W. Brooks  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

When the Arizona Legislature picks up again in January, Chandler leaders and local representatives will bring new ideas for bills together along with the resumption of some annual battles.

But lawmakers and local leaders hope some proposals and problem-solving will make headway.

Defining "middle housing" for the public is among the priorities the Arizona Legislature and local leaders might pursue in 2026.

An ordinance approved by the Chandler City Council by a 5-2 vote in November defines middle housing as duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes and townhomes. Councilmember Matt Orlando said he not only wants to

• See **Priorities** on page 12



Elena Hector of Chandler walks in her city's Parade of Lights on Dec. 6 as a member of Girl Scout Troop 3997's "human snow globe" entry. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

# Geared up to celebrate

City starts early on US 250th events

By Jason W. Brooks  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

**B**efore Chandler Mayor Kevin Hartke counted down the final seconds of his city's Tumbleweed Tree lighting Dec. 6, he promised big things in the weeks and even the full year ahead.

In addition to promoting some Chandler activities and events this month, Hartke said many events of the next year will have a common theme: celebrating the U.S.'s 250th birthday.

"The red, white and blue lights on our tree are just a small preview of the way Chandler plans on celebrating America in the year ahead," Hartke told the A.J.

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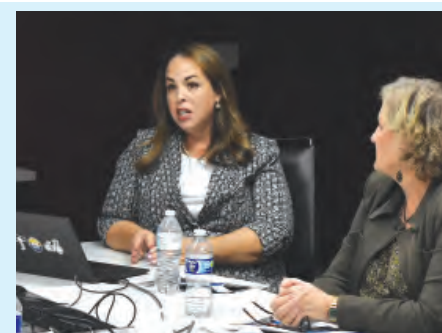
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Chandler Water Resources Manager Simone Kjolsrud, left, presents proposed conservation rebate rollbacks and other water information to the City Council on Nov. 10. Council approved the rebate rollbacks later that same week; the new rebates go into effect Jan. 1. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

## City rolls back water conservation rebates

By Jason W. Brooks  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The city of Chandler's been successful in getting residents, businesses and other water customers to take advantage of its water conservation rebate programs.

So successful, in fact, the city has decided to roll back a few of those rebates.

The Chandler City Council unanimously approved a Nov. 13 consent agenda that included some rollbacks to how much city staff can credit several water-saving actions taken by users.

The changes go into effect Jan. 1, 2026.

Simone Kjolsrud, Chandler's water resources manager, presented a robust water picture to council at a Nov. 10 work session. She talked about shortages, droughts and other conditions that could impact the Valley's overall water supply in the years ahead, but she also spent con-

• See **Water** on page 21

# Council makes 'acting' city manager permanent

By Jason W. Brooks  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Chandler's City Council seemed poised to embark on a lengthy, expensive city manager search until Nov. 21.

Three days later, council abandoned that inclination and decided its interim leader was the one to stick with — and to save taxpayers at least \$50,000.

Council approved, by a 6-1 vote, awarding a \$360,000 annual contract to John Pombier. Running through June 30, 2027, the contract gives Pombier the title of city manager, removing the "acting city manager" title he's held since he started with the city July 13.

Councilmember Angel Encinas was the lone "no" vote on the contract, explaining his vote was a protest of the process, rather than a vote against Pombier as a manager.

The vote and mayor and council's

• See **City Manager** on page 18



John Pombier speaks during an August meet-and-greet at City Hall's Vision Gallery with Assistant City Manager Tadd Willie, right. The Chandler City Council voted 6-1 to award Pombier a 19-month, \$360,000-per-year contract that will remove the "acting" label and make him the next permanent city manager. (Courtesy of Chandler Chamber of Commerce)

## UTILITIES

## Council moving ahead with utility rate hike proposal

By Jason W. Brooks  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

No major changes or newly proposed rates evolved from the Chandler City Council's most recent work session on planned utility rate increases.

Chandler is still planning a 15% across-the-board utility rate hike for water and wastewater service and 6% for solid waste to start in early March 2026 and to change its cost-of-service review from biannual to annual.

But city leaders and staff now possess important feedback.

City finance director Dawn Lang, speaking Nov. 10 at the council's third utility rates work session in the past four months, said feedback about the proposed rate increases from a pair of in-person sessions, across social media and in other electronic communications, was limited. But the city did get some useful data.

The in-person sessions were "lightly attended," by staff descrip-

tions, and there were only eight emails and five website comments made about the proposed increases. And 211 people opened the website "calculate your bill" page, presuming all or most who opened it used it to make a calculation.

But the eight emails and 43 social media comments provided some insight, Lang said.

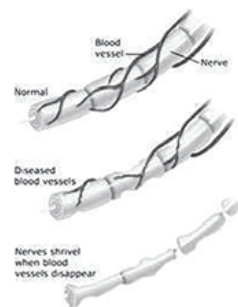
Among other statistics and summaries, the city's plan was met with:

• One comment supporting pro-

• See **Rate Hike** on page 13

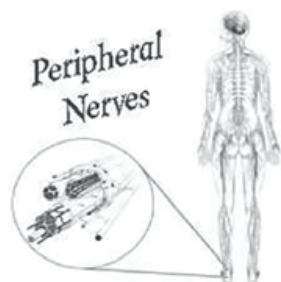
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Chronic pain and/or peripheral neuropathy is a result of damage to the nerves often causing weakness, pain, numbness, tingling, and the most debilitating balance problems. This damage is commonly caused by a hands and feet which causes the nerves to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



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# Dignity breaks ground on new hospital tower

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Dignity Health and city of Chandler officials were at Chandler Regional Medical Center on Nov. 5 as a groundbreaking ceremony marked the start of construction of a new ambulatory care tower.

This expansion — which Dignity Health stated in a news release is designed to meet the accelerating needs of the rapidly growing East Valley — is set to house several services.

The 100,000-square-foot, four-story facility will house a dedicated ambulatory surgery center, an imaging center and a Dignity Health Medical Group multispecialty practice.

Several specialized services, such as neurological, thoracic, and rehabilitation care are set to be offered in the tower, which is expected to open in fall 2026.

• See **Tower** on page 23



Several Dignity Health and city of Chandler officials were at the Nov. 5 groundbreaking of a new ambulatory care tower on the Chandler Regional Medical Center campus. From the front, in the front row of seating, are Dignity Health East Valley CEO Jeff McBee, Chandler Council member Jennifer Hawkins, Chandler Vice Mayor Christine Ellis, Dignity Health East Valley President Mario Garner, Chandler Council members Angel Encinas and O.D. Harris and Mayor Kevin Hartke. (Courtesy of Dignity Health)

## DEVELOPMENT

# Firm acquires, plans delivery of west Chandler data center

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Commercial real estate firm Lincoln Property Co. announced the purchase of a 191,000-square-foot, partially occupied data center on 14.5 acres at 2500 W. Frye Road in west Chandler.

The company plans to build out the facility's vacant shell space, delivering new "turnkey" data center inventory and making cooling system improvements that a news release stated could save millions of gallons in monthly water consumption.

No dollar figures were mentioned in the news release.

The data center property is located near the Loop 101-Loop 202 freeway interchange, within the Price Road technology corridor, the release states.



Commercial real estate firm Lincoln Property Co. has announced the purchase of a 191,000-square-foot, partially occupied data center on 14.5 acres at 2500 W. Frye Road in west Chandler. (Courtesy of FocusAZ)

• See **Data Center** on page 25



Deseray Gruben's recent appointment as chief financial officer at Kovach Enclosure Systems is one of several executive lineup changes announced at the Chandler-based firm. (Courtesy of Kovach Enclosure Systems)

## Building enclosure maker shuffles executive team

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Kovach Enclosure Systems, a maker of high-performance facade systems and architectural enclosures that's based in Chandler, has announced a series of leadership appointments and the addition of a new board member.

All leadership changes come from within Kovach's existing team, according to a news release.

Brad Wright has been appointed CEO. His leadership philosophy centers on building a healthy, profitable, and employee-owned company where people thrive and the client experience remains best-in-class, the release states.

James Hatch has been named president and chief strategy officer. In this role, Hatch will continue to lead Kovach's pursuit and preconstruction alignment efforts to ensure project profitability and strong client partnerships.

Deseray Gruben has been appointed chief financial officer. Her

• See **Kovach** on page 23

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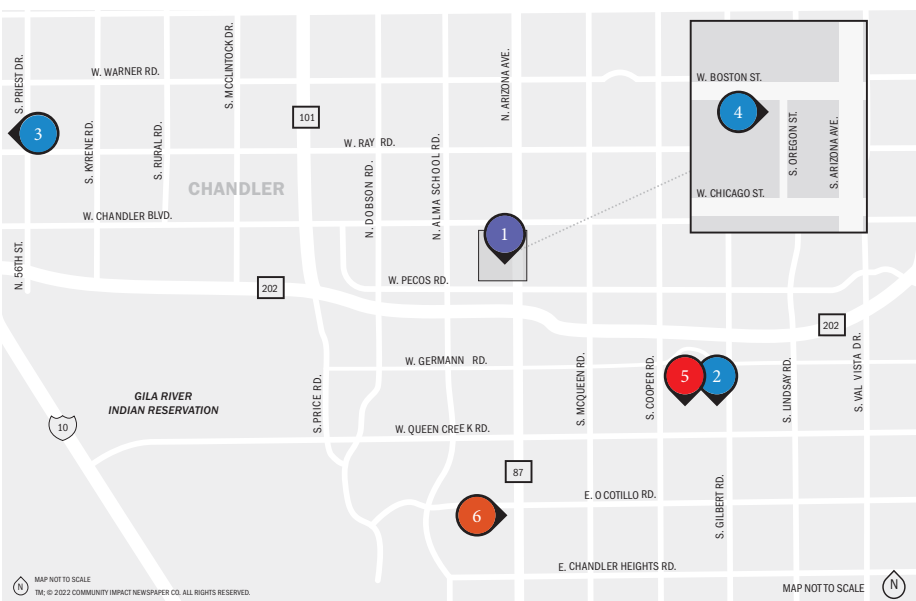


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# BUSINESS MOVES



Compiled by Jason Brooks  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

## ANNIVERSARY

**1 The Ostrich** celebrated its 10-year anniversary in October. The speakeasy cocktail bar, located in the basement of the San Marcos Hotel, beneath Crust restaurant in downtown Chandler, opened in 2015. According to theostrichbar.com, in 2014, proprietor Michael Merendino, decided that a basement with a dirt floor, then accessible only via a ladder, would be revived in the older building as a bar. Crust is located at 10 N. San Marcos Place, on the northwest corner of San Marcos Place and Commonwealth Street, as part of the San Marcos/Crowne Plaza Hotel complex.

## NOW OPEN

**2 Bodybar Pilates Chandler** opened Nov. 12 at 2490 S. Gilbert Road Suite 100, in a shopping center building formerly home to SHOWIT. Studios include Pilates reformers and apparatus; the location is open 7 days per week. For information, visit bodybarpilates.com/studios/chandler/, call 480-433-8543 or follow the location

on Instagram: @bodybarchandler

**3 Portillo's** has opened in a shopping center at 7200 W. Ray Road in far west Chandler, between Interstate 10 and Priest Drive/56th Street, in the former Sandbar Mexican Grill location. The Chicago-style chain focuses on hot dogs, Maxwell Street Polish and Italian beef, fries and desserts. Open at 10 a.m. seven days a week; closing at 10:30 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays and 11 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Call 480-637-0269 or visit portillos.com to place an order.

**4 Back Alley BBQ** opened in early November in downtown Chandler on Boston Street, west of Oregon Street, in the space recently vacated by West Alley BBQ & Smokehouse. It's the second downtown Chandler restaurant by Hospitality First Concepts, with DTC Sport Grille being the first. The chef-centered smokehouse is run by Hospitality First executive chef Shaun O'Neale and pit boss Ken Davis. Features on the menu include brisket and other smoked meats, barbecue



THE OSTRICH



BODYBAR PILATES



PORTILLOS



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sandwiches and sides. A full cocktail and draft beer bar are accompanied, at times, by live music. Learn more by calling 602-888-8227 or going online to eatbackalleybbq.com.

## COMING SOON

**5 Pure-Logic Industries** broke ground Nov. 14 on its new 29,845-square-foot headquarters and production building at 2605 E. Cessna Drive in the Chandler Airpark area, set to open in September 2026. The building will consolidate Pure-Logic's operations under one roof, providing expanded space for manufacturing, research, production, and administration for the company, which fabricates metal products for everything from blood pumps for heart and lung machines to cryogenic

bio-archive systems, military aircraft and ground combat vehicles seat safety systems, spacecraft crew module seats on NASA's Artemis program and commercial aircraft evacuation systems.

## CLOSED

**6 Duck Donuts'** last-remaining Arizona store — located in a south Chandler shopping center at Arizona Avenue and Ocotillo Road, across from Hamilton High School — recently closed. The chain is still expanding, with most new locations planned for the eastern seaboard or California. The chain specializes in dozen or half-dozen build-your-own variety boxes.

## FROM THE COVER

### Holiday Events

• From page 1

Chandler Park crowd.

"Through next December, Chandler will have activities, programs, exhibits and many more ways to celebrate this milestone."

The tree will be lit nightly through Sunday, Jan. 4, providing an opportunity for visitors and residents alike to take photos with family and friends.

Since 1957, according to a news release, Chandler has been the only Southwestern U.S. city to have a tumbleweed Christmas tree.

Using about 1,000 tumbleweeds collected from around the city, members of the city's park staff decorate a 25-foot-tall wire-framed Christmas tree. Once attached to the frame, the tumbleweeds are sprayed with 25 gallons of white paint, 20 gallons of flame retardant, and then dusted with 15 pounds of glitter.

The tree is later adorned with about 1,200 holiday lights, the release states.

Here are some other events planned for this month. Note that advance tickets or reservations are necessary for some attractions and times and dates vary for select events.

For more events and details, visit [chandleraz.gov/ChandlerForTheHolidays](http://chandleraz.gov/ChandlerForTheHolidays).



#### Holiday Magic featuring Sugarland

Through Dec. 30, take selfies in the oversize candy sleigh, climb on giant gumdrops and stroll through a candy cane-lined path around downtown Chandler, at any hour.

#### Cookies & Carols

Listen to holiday stories, sing favorite songs and decorate cookies 3:30-4:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 16, at Basha Library, 5990 S. Val Vista Drive.

#### Snow Day

Play in the snow 10:30-11:15 a.m.

Wednesday, Dec. 17, or stay cozy inside with winter-themed pre-K activities at Chandler Museum, 300 S. Chandler Village Drive.

#### Ugly Sweater Tennis Social

Break out an ugly tennis sweater and play tennis with a side of holiday spirit at 3-6 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 20, at Chandler Tennis Center, 2250 S. McQueen Road.

#### Santa's House

Santa Claus is coming to A.J. Chandler Park in downtown Chandler 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 20.



Above: Chandler Mayor Kevin Hartke, foreground, and Council member O.D. Harris wave to spectators along Arizona Avenue during the city's Parade of Lights on Dec. 6. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)  
At left: Rylee Brindle, center, wearing a red hat, looks at prizes while Ainsley Logan, right, spins a prize wheel. The two Gilbert attendees of downtown Chandler's Dec. 6 Parade of Lights events were hoping to win prizes from the Garner Orthodontics table. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

Visit with him at Santa's House, share your wish list and get a free photo.

#### All About Broadway: A New Year's Eve Celebration

Ring in the New Year at Chandler Center for the Arts, 250 N. Arizona Ave., with favorite songs from acclaimed Broadway musicals songs at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 31, performed by six vocalists and backed by Showtune Productions' 10-piece orchestra.



**S** Stephanie Padilla  
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# CUSD 'leadership profile' details superintendent it seeks

## Profile report shows survey, forum results

By Jason W. Brooks  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Chandler Unified's governing board president took a moment at a planning meeting to acknowledge completion of an exhaustive process.

"This checks off an important box," Patti Serrano said Nov. 21 at the end of a meeting devoted to an unveiling of a report.

Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates is the Chicago-based search firm guiding the mechanics of CUSD's national search for a replacement for retiring Superintendent Frank Narducci. The Nov. 21 planning meeting was where three HYA staff met with the Chandler board via videoconferencing, presenting the leadership pro-



Chandler Unified governing board members met the morning of Nov. 21 for the unveiling of its superintendent search leadership profile. From the left are Board President Patti Serrano and Board Members Ryan Heap, Claudia Mendoza and Kurt Rohrs. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason W. Brooks)

file report it has assembled.

That report is a 24-page document that's mostly Chandler survey and forum results and summaries of those

results, as conducted by HYA, and can be read here: [tinyurl.com/32mmaumy](https://tinyurl.com/32mmaumy)

HYA associates came to Arizona

earlier this month to talk with community members as part of gathering feedback for the profile.

"This is probably the most pages I've seen in a report like this," HYA lead associate John Bash said during the Nov. 21 meeting. "And I think some of our applicants were waiting for this to be produced before completing their recruiting profiles."

The profile focuses on responses from community forums and surveys this month, mixed into both HYA staff summaries and statistics from the online surveys. An example of a summary of an in-person forum question about culture, trust and communication states "Several focus groups and survey responses reference such issues as 1) a desire for greater clarity and transparency in communications regarding district decisions and

• See **Profile** on page 27

## INDIGENOUS CELEBRATION



The Taylor family performs during the Nov. 12 Chandler Unified governing board meeting as part of a recognition of Indigenous Peoples Month. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)



Antonette Shirley stands with awards and gifts between Chandler Unified governing board President Patti Serrano, CUSD Superintendent Frank Narducci and others during the Nov. 12 meeting as part of a recognition of Indigenous Peoples Month. Shirley was recognized during the celebration as the 2025 Johnson-O'Malley Association National Teacher of the Year. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

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## FROM THE COVER

## Priorities

• From page 1

see more such housing constructed, but also for the Legislature to help get Chandlerites and other Arizonans into such housing more easily.

“More multifamily housing needs to be owned by the occupants,” Orlando said. “So we probably need more of those condos, townhomes, those sorts of things. And we need more ways for folks to get into that ownership.”

Orlando said he wants the Legislature to examine what he thinks might be “onerous warranty requirements,” even if those were put in place initially to protect buyers, as well as lowering other barriers for both first-time and returning-from-renting homebuyers.

“For first-time homebuyers, a lot boils down to affordability, especially in down payments or other up-front costs,” Orlando said. “Maybe there are tax breaks that could be implemented. I’m not sure of all the solution would entail. I need to be briefed on what’s possible here.”

One person who could end up briefing Orlando on middle housing or other topics could be one of his competitors in the 2026 Chandler mayor’s race, Jeff Weninger. The Legislative District 13 state representative met with the full council last December, ahead of the 2025 session, along with



Chandler Councilmember Matt Orlando, left, speaks as state Rep. Jeff Weninger, center, and Sen. J.D. Mesnard listen during a December 2024 meeting on state legislative topics. Orlando and Weninger each have ideas on a few other things the legislature could somewhat easily address. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason W. Brooks)

state Sen. J.D. Mesnard.

Weninger said he’s not planning to lead or sponsor any bills that target middle housing.

“I’ll see what comes up,” Weninger said. “Housing could become a sort of parcel-by-parcel thing.”

Water is another area of concern for the city, as officials have taken multiple steps and invested as much as any Valley city in securing future supplies, Orlando said. But as some supplies become more scarce, it’s important state leaders find a united front and have the same mission and goals in mind.

Orlando said that’s important with

any discussions regarding Colorado River water and other interstate, federal and international negotiations.

“We can’t look disjointed, or some of the other Colorado River players will run over us,” Orlando said. “We’ve got to stay on the same page, all the time. And we need a long-term strategy that involves not only moving and storage and how to get water from A to B, but also, we need to be looking at renewable water sources, like desalination, on a large scale.”

Orlando said water policy is one area in which state lawmakers really need to “take off their partisan hats

and work with the cities.”

Weninger said he isn’t one of the legislators who specialize in water and typically hasn’t led legislation on that front. But he did point out that because technology advances, Arizonans shouldn’t get stuck thinking of certain facilities or activities as always using specific amounts of water, as conservation tends to improve.

Data centers have become a water issue, Weninger acknowledged, though he wants to get the word out about how much less water data centers use with air-cooling replacing water-cooling, among other advances.

Weninger said he opposes an AI data center plan the Chandler City Council was set to vote on in December for the same reason he wants more structure statewide on data centers: location is important.

“I’m not opposed to data centers as a concept, and am not looking for a prohibition on them,” Weninger said. “But I would like to have places for them to go. We need to look at state trust land for opportunities, along with places not prime for other construction, i.e. land next to noisy places, prisons or the Palo Verde nuclear power plant.”

Weninger said all six Chandler City Council members, along with Mayor Kevin Hartke, have his contact information any time they want to discuss any active or potential legislation.



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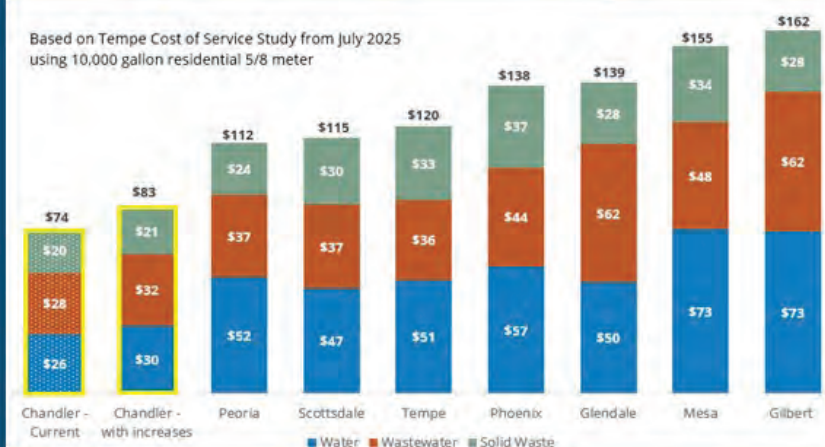
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## Residential Utility Cost Comparison

Based on Tempe Cost of Service Study from July 2025  
using 10,000 gallon residential 5/8 meter



Some feedback from the public on proposed Chandler water, wastewater and solid waste increases set to go into effect in March 2026 involved not wanting the city to increase rates as dramatically as other Valley municipalities. (Courtesy of city of Chandler)

### Rate Hike

• From page 4

posed changes

- One comment in support for across-the-board allocation
- One request for more data-based allocation to customer classes
- Twelve comments generally not in favor of rate increases
- Six comments to the effect of increases as not welcome news, but understandable
- Five comments expressing some concern with the cost split between residents and businesses

Councilmember Matt Orlando asked Lang if he was correctly remembering an 18% increase figure, at some point. Lang clarified that looking down the road, if staff were to follow its previously directed pattern of reviewing cost of service every 24 months, an 18% increase would be a projected option.

“That’s the point at which council started talking about reviewing rates and costs every year,” Lang said.

At both July and August work sessions, three types of rate increase

plans were introduced, with the across-the-board plan that Mayor Kevin Hartke and council verbally directed staff to move forward with.

Council isn’t set to formally adopt the ordinance creating the new rate structure until its Jan. 8 and Jan. 22 meetings.

The 15% increase impacts heavy industrial water users the least. It would still be a significant increase for that class of users, who are looking at a monthly city water-wastewater bill increase of more than \$300,000.

The “blended cost-of-service” option would raise the monthly bill for Intel and other Chandler industrial customers by almost \$500,000, with two other plans that are across-the-board/blended cost-of-service combinations landing in between those two totals.

The 15% across-the-board proposal would raise the average multi-family housing complex (150 units or more) bill by about \$470. That increase would be \$666 per month under one of the blended plans, but only \$387 under another.

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# OPINION

## Take the Civility Pledge

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

## Your Opinion

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

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

## Speak Up

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

## Corrections

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

## Taxes are why Gallego must go

By **Wayne Manier**  
SUN LAKES

Taxes are too high now and are going up every year, due to increased property values.

Gallego has to go.

## Chandler is putting innovation to work for our residents

By **Kevin Hartke**  
MAYOR OF CHANDLER

Chandler has earned a reputation by becoming a sought-after home to entrepreneurs and to leading multi-national companies.

Fostering a successful environment for innovation has generated billions of dollars for our community, created quality jobs, and supported the development of reliable, more climate-resilient infrastructure.

Our commitment to innovation also extends beyond attracting businesses. For Chandler's city government, we have an obligation to put technology to work for the public good.

If new tools can help us advance cost-effective and creative solutions that better serve our residents, we have a duty to employ them responsibly.

Artificial intelligence (AI) stands to do just that, and I am proud to say that Chandler is already finding meaningful uses for AI while maintaining thoughtful land use planning and resource management.

Our Chandler Police Department, in partnership with Arizona State University's Cloud Innovation Center, explored ways to utilize AI in handling traffic-related complaints,



Kevin Hartke

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.*

including speeding, reckless driving, road rage, and other incidents. With the help of ASU students, we launched a new chatbot to streamline the traffic complaint process, ensuring that every complaint is addressed and mapped for local law enforcement response.

AI is also helping us serve our residents more equitably. This year, Chandler was recognized in the 2025 Smart Cities North America Awards for the implementation of our Real-Time Instant Language Assistant (ILA) pilot.

In partnership with TranslateLive, a company that provides AI-powered real-time translation services, we successfully conducted over 560 face-to-face conversations, spanning 2,200 minutes, across 10 city departments and 20 divisions in just six months.

Breaking down language barriers made our city services more accessible to communities that far too often go underserved.

That focus on useful, resident-first solutions is also paving a new path for our transportation network. In early September, Chandler became the first municipality in Arizona to incorporate Waymo's network of autonomous vehicles directly into our public transit system.

If the past few years of progress have shown us anything, it's that responsibly integrating tech like AI can be transformative — whether it improves road safety or makes our services more accessible.

## SPEAK UP

Here are some recent online comments about Chandler Independent items:

### "CHANDLER-AREA VETS ORGANIZATION RAISES MORE THAN \$17K":

"I've always wanted to start a rescue for retired working dogs, it would be very rewarding for myself and the pups."

— **David Eckert** via story comment

### "CHANDLER ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR CIVIC PROGRAM":

"The Freedom of Information Act gives those that are interested access already. This is an attempt at grooming. Whose idea was this? Smoke screen. If you go in and ask for this information about government, you might find a lot of resistance."

— **Todd Gaidzik** via story comment

### "FIRM ACQUIRES, PLANS DELIVERY OF WEST CHANDLER DATA CENTER":

"What's with all of these data centers in AZ? What are we not being told about the overall plans? Who occupies these facilities and collects data?"

— **I.O.** via story comment

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# Chandler food festival attendees indulge, endure rain

By Jason W. Brooks  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Even though a debut Chandler event happened to be held on one of the few stormy Saturdays of the year, it still drew in thousands of attendees.

Frybread Festival 2025 brought visitors from multiple states to the Rawhide Event Center on Nov. 22. The live entertainment on the outdoor Sonoran Lawn stage had to be staggered as storms rolled across the Gila River Indian Community, though most attendees stayed for the all-afternoon event.

Vendor trucks had long lines, at times, for their frybread and other favorites popular at Indigenous events across the Southwest U.S. A carnival was set up on the lawn as well.

The headliners and emcees were actors and entertainers Funny Bone and Lil Mike. They were cheered every time they took the microphones — even if it was simply to pass along event information.

Funny Bone and Lil Mike might be best known for their roles as Mekko and Mose, the wisecracking bicyclists and gossipers on the Hulu series Reservation Dogs.

Stateline, a dance hall country group from the Navajo Nation; local Gila River alternative rock band One Way Sky and Gertie N The T.O. Boyz, from the Tohono O'odham Nation, were part of the all-Indigenous bill of live bands on the lawn stage.

Under the adjacent Rawhide Events Center roof, dozens of performers performed traditional dancers on stage, with artisans and other vendors set up around the building.



A carnival and fun for all ages were available Nov. 22 during the Frybread Festival at the Rawhide Event Center at Wild Horse Pass in Chandler. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)



Rapper and actor brothers Funny Bone, left, and Lil Mike were the headliners and emcees for the Nov. 22 Frybread Festival at the Rawhide Event Center at Wild Horse Pass in Chandler. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)



There were long lines for the signature food item Nov. 22 during the Frybread Festival at the Rawhide Event Center at Wild Horse Pass in Chandler. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)



The local Gila River alternative rock band One Way Sky was among the music performers on the Sonoran Lawn on Nov. 22 during the Frybread Festival at Wild Horse Pass in Chandler. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)



The signature dish was available with red chile sauce or other spicy fixings Nov. 22 during the Frybread Festival at the Rawhide Event Center at Wild Horse Pass in Chandler. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)



Miss Gila River 2025-26, Gabrielle Garcia, was among the local Indigenous ambassadors at the Nov. 22 Frybread Festival at the Rawhide Event Center at Wild Horse Pass in Chandler. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)



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## City Manager

• From page 4

explanations for their votes were the lone items handled at the 25-minute Nov. 24 special meeting, held in Council chambers after a lengthy afternoon executive session about a pending court case.

Pombier was initially to be offered — according to a contract attached to a meeting agenda published late on the afternoon of Nov. 21 — an annual salary of \$375,000, which is exactly what his predecessor, Josh Wright, was set to make in the final year of his most-recent contract, had he not decided in May to take an administrative position at the University of Arizona.

Encinas said during the special meeting he wanted to stay true to what he said was a promise to a constituents to have a transparent, nationwide search.

“I have been very clear about honoring my commitment to the city’s tradition, our established processes and the history that guides how we select city managers in the past,” Encinas said. “I said here in June that I would proceed with a nationwide recruitment process for Chandler’s future leadership — one that would be competitive, and that our residents, employees and community partners would be part of.”

Pombier’s appointment as acting city manager in June was met with

concern about transparency from at least one council member, Jennifer Hawkins, including why his appointment was initially discussed in an executive session. No other candidates for acting or permanent city manager were mentioned on any meeting documents.

Hawkins explained Nov. 24 why she voted yes on Pombier’s contract. She had been the lone dissenter in a 6-1 decision in late June to appoint Pombier as acting city manager.

“I had initial concerns that led to my vote,” Hawkins said. “But I shared with John that I would support him, because when he succeeds, Chandler succeeds. Over the past three and a half months, with input from residents, employees and business owners, one message has been consistent: John Pombier has earned the confidence and trust of the community.”

Hawkins also said it wouldn’t be fiscally responsible to spend at least \$39,500 with a firm named Mosaic, which recently submitted a bid for that amount to the city as its base charge for a national search for a city manager.

Councilmembers Matt Orlando and Jane Poston both said they were voting on a candidate, not a process. Both expressed regrets about ending up announcing a huge Monday decision at about 3 p.m. on the prior Friday, saying that sort of short-notice seems avoidable.

Mayor Kevin Hartke said even

with council having a well-liked, talented, capable Pombier to hire, there still should be examination of its executive hiring processes going forward.

“I told the acting city manager several times that I don’t like how we got here, but I’m glad we got here,” Hartke said.

The mayor also pointed out there was never a movement among council members for Pombier to not be the next permanent city manager.

The only council member who defended the process was O.D. Harris.

“It was a good process per our charter,” Harris said. “John has been under evaluation over the past four months and how he works with our staff. So it’s a smart decision, both in terms of our own integrity and the interest of the taxpayers.”

Chandler Chamber of Commerce Director Terri Kimble spoke during a Nov. 10 work session about a city manager search, offering several positive comments about how well Pombier has done as acting city manager. Two residents did the same at the Nov. 24 meeting.

In addition to reducing the annual salary from \$375,000 to \$360,000, the other late change to Pombier’s contract is a \$10,000 signing bonus, along with giving him six months to move within city limits, consistent with the city charter.

Pombier’s contract calls for him, in the event council wants to dismiss him, to choose between two packages, one with nine-months’ salary

in a lump sum, or one with up to 12 months’ ongoing salary and benefits, to end if retirement or a new full-time job and health care benefits start.

Pombier joined the city team after having worked for Amazon for a time as a “senior manager community engagement consultant.”

He’s mainly known to Chandler leaders as a 19-year employee of the city of Mesa, the last 11 as an assistant city manager, overseeing everything from courts, fire and police to environmental management and sustainability, fleet services, innovation and technology, human resources and public information.

Pombier, who has a law degree from Arizona State University, also worked as Mesa’s city prosecutor for eight years.

Voters ended up approving everything on Chandler ballots Nov. 4, including a \$475 million bond and a charter amendment that allows a city manager appointee and the council to negotiate together on a severance provision in a contract.

Pombier’s \$360,000 annual salary ranks fourth among Valley city managers, based on most recent annual data, behind the managers of Phoenix, Glendale, Scottsdale and Tempe. Mesa City Manager Christopher J. Brady made \$350,000 in the most recent year reported.

Pombier’s salary also would have made him the 11th-highest paid municipal employee in the Valley.



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## THINGS TO DO



The 30th annual Art Quilts exhibition, called "Art Quilts: Palette Cleanser," will be on display at Vision Gallery in downtown Chandler through Friday, Jan. 10, 2026. (Courtesy of city of Chandler)

# Chandler's 30th annual quilt exhibit on display through Jan. 10

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The 30th annual Art Quilts exhibition showcases creations that celebrate the minimalist aesthetic, according to a news release.

"Art Quilts: Palette Cleanser" is on display at Vision Gallery, and will remain so through Friday, Jan. 10, 2026.

Susan Allred, exhibition juror, stated in the news release that these art pieces are where one can feel how simplicity grows out of deep practice.

"The artists in 'Palette Cleanser' use intentional forms and colors that invite you to slow down and take a breath," Allred stated. "Each person finds their own way to clarity, using restraint to make works that express who they are

and what matters to them."

Fiber artists from across the country and abroad were invited to submit to Chandler's annual exhibition of contemporary art quilts, showcasing their textile art.

"Art Quilts: Palette Cleanser" opened on Nov. 8 with a reception.

The Vision Gallery is at 10 E. Chicago Street, across the City Hall courtyard from the Council chambers. Hours are Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., closed Sundays and Mondays. Free admission.

Find information on the exhibitions and programming online at [visiongallery.org](http://visiongallery.org) or by calling 480-782-2695.

## Water

• From page 4

considerable time on Chandler water use itself.

“We’re one of the few communities that can say, even with population growth, we’re using roughly the same amount of gallons of water as we were 10 years ago,” Kjolsrud said about Chandler. “Some of that is technology and appliance efficiency. A lot of it is that our education about conserving is making a difference.”

Kjolsrud said on average, Chandler residential users are using 20% less water than 10 years ago — and fewer lawns at single-family homes seem to be part of that decrease.

“We’ve seen about the same amount of grass removal at homes in the past two years that we did in the previous two, even though participation has gone up,” Kjolsrud said. “So it’s more people, just with smaller projects.”

Kjolsrud’s presentation showed several increases in participation when the city raised its incentives in October 2023. Since then, for example, commercial/HOA participation alone has increased 260%, with about 371,000 square

feet of grass removed and about \$770,000 in rebates issued during the past two years.

Kjolsrud said it’s important for residents, businesses and homeowners associations that want to take advantage of a rebate program to contact their water provider first to get it cleared.

Chandler Water Resources can be contacted at 480-782-3580 or [conserve@chandleraz.gov](mailto:conserve@chandleraz.gov).

The city stated, in a news release that policies are being amended “to promote continued participation and ensure funding availability.”

The Jan. 1, 2026 updates include:

- Extend the single-family grass removal rebate, reduce the per square foot rebate amount from \$2.00 to \$1.50 and reduce the maximum rebate from \$3,000 to \$2,000

- Extend the large landscape grass removal rebate and reduce the maximum rebate from \$75,000 to \$20,000

- Extend the water-efficient technology rebate, amend the policy to include installation costs, and modify Chandler’s grant agreement with the Water Infrastructure Finance Authority of Arizona to reduce the funding amount to \$600,000

## BUSINESS

# Chandler property with new floor store sold for \$7M

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Real estate brokerage firm Marcus & Millichap has announced the sale of a net-leased Floor & Decor property in Chandler for \$7 million, according to a news release.

Located at 1901 E. Northrop Blvd., the newly constructed, 65,056-square-foot Floor & Decor opened in August and is secured by a 20-year absolute triple-net ground lease.

The property is situated on 6.33 acres, adjacent to Chandler Municipal Airport.

“We’re seeing increased demand from buyers for quality net-lease assets,” stated Nick Christifulli, associate director of investments. “With alternative investment returns diminishing and recent rate cuts, we anticipate 2026 to be a strong year in the net-lease investment space.”

The seller was a Delaware LLC and the buyer’s an Arizona LLC, the release states.

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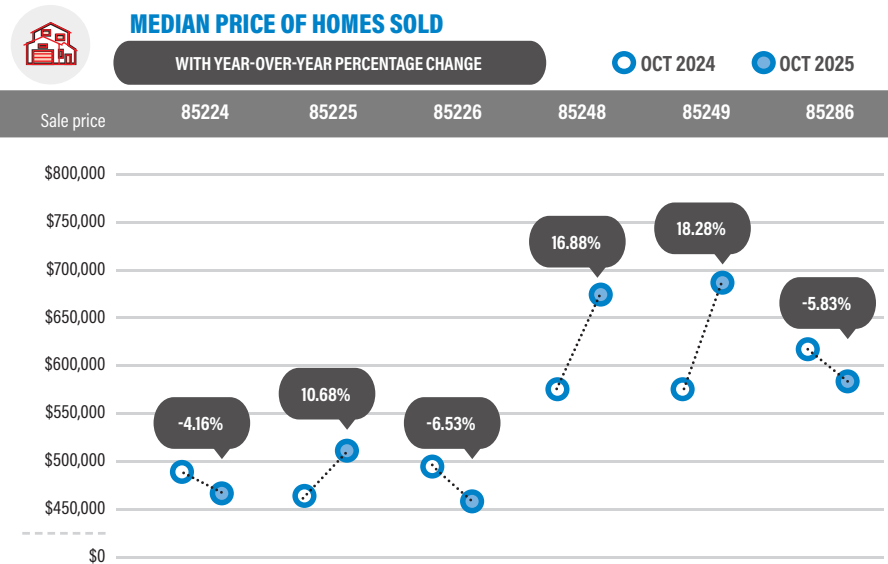
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**NUMBER OF HOMES ON THE MARKET**

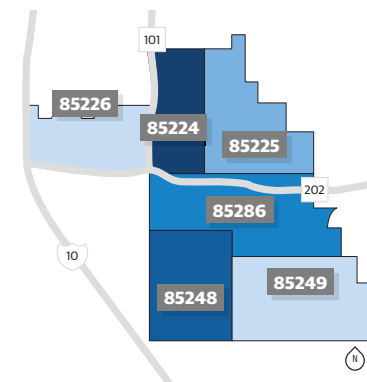
|       | OCT 2024 | OCT 2025 |
|-------|----------|----------|
| 85224 | 52       | 75       |
| 85225 | 126      | 158      |
| 85226 | 54       | 57       |
| 85248 | 67       | 104      |
| 85249 | 150      | 189      |
| 85286 | 99       | 136      |

**AVERAGE DAYS ON THE MARKET**

|       | OCT 2024 | OCT 2025 |
|-------|----------|----------|
| 85224 | 60       | 51       |
| 85225 | 38       | 72       |
| 85226 | 53       | 50       |
| 85248 | 83       | 103      |
| 85249 | 63       | 53       |
| 85286 | 49       | 68       |

**NUMBER OF HOMES UNDER CONTRACT**

|       | OCT 2024 | OCT 2025 |
|-------|----------|----------|
| 85224 | 34       | 35       |
| 85225 | 59       | 67       |
| 85226 | 29       | 34       |
| 85248 | 24       | 23       |
| 85249 | 56       | 77       |
| 85286 | 35       | 32       |



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## Tower

• From page 6

“This new building represents a profound commitment to the health and well-being of the East Valley,” said Brian Galle, vice president of operations for Dignity Health East Valley, in the news release. “As our community continues to expand at an incredible pace, it is our responsibility to ensure our neighbors have access to high-quality medical care and this facility will bring many of those services under one roof.”

Present for the groundbreaking were several health care and local officials, including Dignity Health East Valley CEO Jeff McBee and President Mario Garner, Chandler Mayor Kevin Hartke, Vice Mayor Christine Ellis and Council members Jennifer Hawkins, Angel Encinas and O.D. Harris.



This 3-D model shows how a new ambulatory care tower on the Chandler Regional Medical Center campus will change the look. (Courtesy of Dignity Health)

## Kovach

• From page 6

leadership is counted on for financial strategy, forecasting, and helping ensure the long-term sustainability of Kovach's employee stock ownership plan.

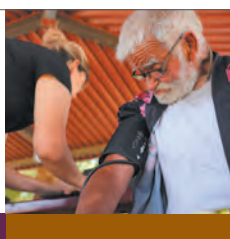
Jansen Miller assumes the role of chief construction officer, overseeing all project execution and delivery. The team elevates quality, training and collaboration among employee-owners across all project teams.

Allen “Kelly” Sands, chairman of the Kovach board, announced the board's addition of Jack Kucera, who brings decades of executive leadership, entrepreneurial success, and philanthropic commitment, the release states, especially with a company called Climatec.

Kucera recently completed his sixth year as board chair of the Air Force Academy Foundation, helping raise nearly \$300 million in support of Academy programs.



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## OPINION

### Opinions

• From page 14

### Hope that holds when the world feels unsteady

By Rev. Dr. Derrick Elliott

PASTOR, SUN LAKES,

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As the Advent season begins, many communities across the nation and the world are lighting candles of hope, peace, joy, and love.



Rev Derrick Elliott

We need this reminder even as headlines fill with uncertainty.

We've watched as stories about government shutdowns, economic strain, and growing divisions have taken their toll on everyday life.

Whether those struggles are ongoing or have passed by the time you read this, the effects remain: people are weary, trust feels fragile, and many are wondering what the future holds.

And yet, Advent arrives again, whispering a truth that refuses to fade, the light is coming. The word Advent means "arrival."

The season of Advent is a time of waiting and preparation for the coming of Christ. A time for both as a remembrance of his birth and as a renewal of hope for the future.

In a culture that prizes instant answers, Advent teaches us to slow down and listen. The waiting becomes holy when we remember that God's promises do not depend on the pace of our world or the performance of our institutions.

The first candle of Advent we light is the candle of Hope. Hope can feel harder to hold these days. But

Christian hope doesn't rest on ideal circumstances.

Hope is rooted in the belief that God is still at work. God is at work even when the systems around us falter.

That kind of hope has carried generations through wars, depressions, and pandemics. It can take us now.

The next candle we light is the candle of peace. Peace should remind us that peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of grace.

In our moments of fear or frustration, peace begins in small acts: a calm word, a willingness to listen, or a simple refusal to add more noise to the chaos.

The last two candles in the Advent season are joy and love. The joy we seek is found not in perfection but in perseverance.

The joy is around the kitchen tables, in shared laughter, and in communities that keep showing up for one another.

Love is the final candle before we light the Christ candles. The love candle calls us to care for our neighbors, reach out to the lonely, and stand beside those who are struggling.

Advent should remind us that even when the world trembles with uncertainty, God's presence is steady. The candles we light each week are not decoration but declaration: that light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

*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.*

## Data Center

• From page 6

The Frye Road property offers 28 megawatts of confirmed utility power, served by an existing and dedicated on-site Salt River Project substation, the release states.

It features four data center halls, one of which is fully leased to a Fortune 500 enterprise user, the release stated. Lincoln plans to fit out the remaining three halls, adding 16 megawatts of capacity and positioning the building for immediate lease-up.

An initial 4.2 megawatts is targeted for delivery early in the first quarter of 2026.

Lincoln will also transition the project from an evaporative cooled to air cooled mechanical system, the release states, creating the potential for as much as 3 million gallons of water savings per month for the city of Chandler's system.

The site is planned for additional de-

velopment, which was approved by the city of Chandler as part of a development agreement initiated by the property's previous owner.

"Arizona's unprecedented, immediate demand from hyperscale, enterprise and neocloud users has pushed local data center vacancy to record lows," Lincoln Property Co. Executive Vice President and national data center group leader Ryan Sullivan. "This facility will add critical turnkey capacity with immediately available utility power. It's a rare combination that we look forward to delivering as part of our ongoing value-add data center strategy."

Lincoln will serve as the building's property manager. Leasing will be handled by Lincoln's data center leasing team.

Lincoln has a history at the Frye Road property, the release states, serving as its owner after acquiring the building in 2018 as part of a larger data center portfolio.

It sold the asset in 2019 to the cur-

rent seller.

Lincoln Senior Executive Vice President David Krumwiede said when his company sold the asset, it was to an entity that was equally committed to preserving and enhancing its value.

"Now, it is our turn to set yet another performance bar for tenants and the Chandler market, at a time when the need for responsible data center space couldn't be higher," Krumwiede said.

According to CBRE, metro Phoenix ranks as the nation's fourth-largest data center market, with steady demand and absorption pushing vacancy rates below 2%, the release states.

The Frye Road facility adds to that new data center inventory, bringing Lincoln's metro Phoenix footprint to 23.2 million square feet of owned and managed space across Class A office and industrial projects such as Park303, Luke Field, Goodyear AirPark, Union and the Grand at Papago Park Center.

## AWARDS



## CITY STAFF AWARDS

City of Chandler staff were recognized for excellence in financial reporting for the 43rd consecutive year. From the left are Chandler Council member O.D. Harris, Joanne Chang, Sara Storey, Accounting Senior Manager Julie Goucher, Julie San Miguel, Financial Services Director Kristi Smith and Mayor Kevin Hartke. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason W. Brooks)w

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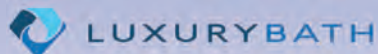
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# TRANSPORTATION

Compiled by  
**Jason W. Brooks**  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

**1 Price Road**, from Loop 202 to south of Queen Creek Road, will be the site of major restrictions through about Dec. 21 southbound and about Jan. 2, northbound. Crews are completing the sewer bypass removal and paving Price Road. The estimated project time is 30 days. The project follows the estimated 469-day sewer bypass and relining that has affected both southbound and northbound Price Road traffic.

**2 Queen Creek Road**, from Price Road to Old Price Road, will be the site of minor westbound restrictions through Friday, Dec. 19. The estimated 395-day project is for installation of concrete “K-Rail” barriers along Queen Creek Road.

**3 Germann Road**, from Alma School Road to Beverly Place, will be the site of eastbound right-lane and sidewalk closures among minor restrictions through Thursday, Dec. 18. The estimated 11-day project does not have a stated purpose on the city’s GIS interactive map.

**4 Alma School Road**, between Commonwealth and Erie streets, will be the site of major northbound restrictions through Thursday, Dec. 18. The estimated 11-day project is for utility work.

**5 Ray Road**, from Mission Park Boulevard to McClintock Drive, will be the site of major weekend restrictions westbound through Tuesday, Dec. 30. The estimated 42-day project is for power lines and poles.



**6 McQueen Road**, northbound and southbound near Loop 202 and Willis Road, will be the site of major restrictions through Thursday, Dec.

18. The estimated 116-day project is to install concrete and “bullnose” on the sidewalk ramps, plus stripping.



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## FUNDRAISING



## FAST FUNDRAISING

Jewish War Veterans Copper State Post 619 raised more than \$17,000 in donations at 10 Fry's grocery stores in the East Valley over Veterans Day weekend. This is the first poppy campaign where shoppers who don't carry cash were able to donate to help homeless, hospitalized and at-risk veterans by using a digital payment network; the Post took in \$500 via Zelle. From the left are JWV veteran Gabe Forsberg, JWV volunteer Dawn Quinn and Zelle donor and Chandler-area resident Bri Armijo. (Courtesy of Nancy Stutman)

## Profile

• From page 10

2) greater listening, collaboration and follow-through from district leaders.”

An example of one of the multiple-selection questions in the online survey, “What should the next superintendent’s top three overall priorities be?” The responses included 56.8% choosing recruiting and retaining high-quality staff; 55.4% choosing academic achievement/closing learning gaps (student-outcome governance) and 37.6% choosing school safety and facilities.

Next up in the process was an update from HYA on the search as part of the Wednesday, Dec. 10, regular CUSD board meeting. The online application deadline is Jan. 2, followed by screening, interviewing of semifinalists and then the finalists, leading up to a consideration of a

contract at the Feb. 11 meeting.

Late on the afternoon of Nov. 21, the district released a statement about the profile, and how it will help guide interview questions and other parts of the search and selection process. Serrano pointed out the importance of the profile.

“As we begin accepting applications, this leadership profile serves as our compass,” Serrano stated within the district statement. “It helps ensure that candidates are not only strong administrators, but leaders whose values and vision align with those of our community. We are seeking a collaborative superintendent who can build on our strengths, address our challenges, and partner with our community to move our district forward.”

The district’s web page about its superintendent search can be found at [tinyurl.com/4vwfsuxs](http://tinyurl.com/4vwfsuxs)

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# Pride draws hundreds to downtown Chandler

By Jason W. Brooks  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Grand Canyon Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence were among the many represented groups and organizations at Chandler Pride this year.

The event, held on the somewhat rainy afternoon and evening of Nov. 15, drew in everyone from celebrators to local LGBTQIA-friendly businesses, churches and advocacy organizations to elected officials and candidates.

LLL Reptile had a manager on-site showing snakes, lizards and other creatures. Cheer Arizona performed again this year, encouraging everyone to be or become allies, as did some local musicians.

Elected officials, such as state Rep. Stacey Travers and Sen. Mitzi Epstein, were there, along with Chandler City Council members Angel Encinas, Jane Poston and Matt Orlando. Some spoke briefly.

Orlando and Congressional District 4 candidate Elizabeth Lee were among those getting petition signatures and talking issues with participants.

The Grand Canyon Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, whose stated description is an "order of 21st-century queer and trans nuns dedicated to the promulgation of universal joy and the expiation of stigmatic guilt," had at least a pair of representatives in atten-



Derrick Van Hying of LLL Reptile, above, shows a lizard to attendees at Chandler Pride on Nov. 15 at Dr. A.J. Chandler Park downtown. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason W. Brooks)

dance.

Chandler Pride has been held in November for at least the past few years, as the traditional pride month of June is among the hottest, most dangerous times to be outdoors or holding special events in Arizona.

Phoenix Pride, probably the largest annual such set of events in Arizona, is held in October.



Cheer Arizona performed again this year at Chandler Pride, held Nov. 15 at Dr. A.J. Chandler Park downtown. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason W. Brooks)



Above, Chandler City Council member Angel Encinas greets a participant at Chandler Pride on Nov. 15 at Dr. A.J. Chandler Park downtown. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason W. Brooks)



Chandler City Councilmember Jane Poston speaks while standing on a seating structure at Chandler Pride on Nov. 15 at Dr. A.J. Chandler Park downtown. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason W. Brooks)

At left, State Sen. Mitzi Epstein speaks during Chandler Pride on Nov. 15 at Dr. A.J. Chandler Park downtown. (Independent Newsmedia/Jason W. Brooks)

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# Insurance support firm expands into Chandler

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Claim Assist Solutions, a provider of insurance claim support services, has announced plans to open a 58,000-square-foot office at One Chandler Corporate Center, located in west Chandler.

The new office will be the company's first in Arizona, helping to meet the growing demand for its services in the Phoenix area while providing support for clients across the country, according to a news release from the city.

"Our decision to expand into Chandler is driven by both client demand and the area's strong talent pool," Ramon Lopez, president of San Antonio-based Claim Assist Solutions, stated in the news release. "This is a significant investment for us, and we see great long-term growth



**Claim Assist Solutions, a provider of insurance claim support services, has announced plans to open a 58,000 square-foot office at One Chandler Corporate Center, located in west Chandler. (Courtesy of city of Chandler)**

opportunities in Chandler."

"Chandler continues to attract companies from a variety of industries that create diverse, quality job opportunities for our residents," Mayor Kevin Hartke stated.

Micah Miranda, Chandler's economic

development director, stated his department's job isn't necessarily done when the city lands a new employer like Claim Assist Solutions.

"Our team looks forward to supporting their ramp-up and helping them integrate into the local business

community," Miranda stated.

The release states Claim Assist Solutions wanted to begin by hiring about 40 employees to launch the office starting in mid-November, with plans for as many as 400 positions over the next two to three years.

New insurance adjusters will be hired in cohorts and go through company training together.

For hiring information, go online to [claimassistsolutions.com/join-the-team/](http://claimassistsolutions.com/join-the-team/)

The company's website states it specializes in streamlining the claims process for carriers, adjusters, and policyholders. It's aided by Claim Assist Technologies, a proprietary claims management software platform that provides rapid claims processing through enhanced visibility and real-time communication.



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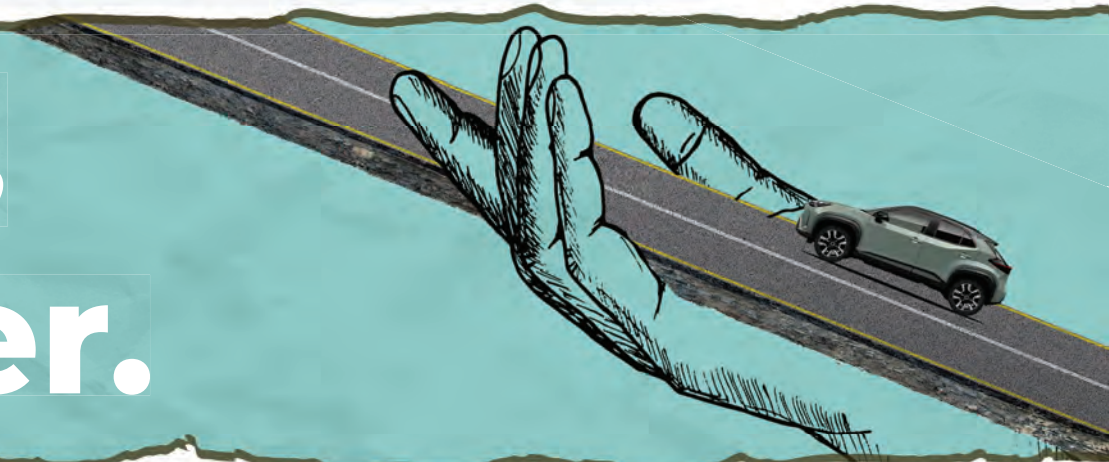
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# Thank You, Chandler.



Thank you to all Chandler residents who participated in the Nov. 4 Special Election. Your engagement helps guide how we invest in the projects and amenities for **Parks & Recreation, Streets & Traffic and Fire and Police Services**. These areas are vital to keep our city safe, connected and thriving.

# Gracias, Chandler.



Muchas gracias a todos aquellos residentes de Chandler que participaron en la Elección Especial del 4 de noviembre. Su participación ayuda a guiar cómo invertimos en proyectos y servicios para **Parques y Recreación, Calles y Tráfico, y los Servicios de Bomberos y de Policía**. Estas áreas son vitales para mantener nuestra ciudad segura, conectada y próspera.

# Chandler celebrates 'A' grade of district, 31 schools

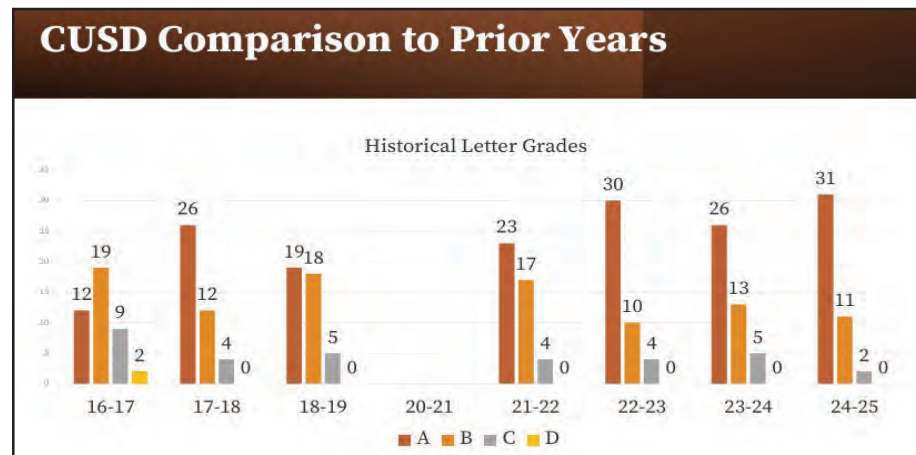
By Jason W. Brooks  
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

After Chandler Unified leaders had a chance to process, reflect upon, and, in a few cases, appeal some of this year's state school letter grades, district administrators put together a presentation that focused on the successes.

Chandler leaders, in a Nov. 12 CUSD governing board study session presentation, made a point of emphasizing the district of about 44 schools maintains a district letter grade of A.

School and district letter grades for the 2024-25 school year were released recently by the Arizona Department of Education.

And perhaps almost as noteworthy, one of its most embattled schools on some fronts, Hartford Sylvia Encinas Elementary, moved from a C grade to an A for the most recently completed school year. Hartford, a 1957-built



Chandler Unified had one of its best years in 2024-25 in terms of the metrics the Arizona Department of Education uses to determine school, district and area letter grades. (Courtesy of Chandler USD)

school that serves one of the most socio-economically challenged populations within CUSD, is due to be "remimagined" and rebuilt as one of the cornerstones of the district's \$271.5 million bond voters approved in the Nov. 4 special election.

Assistant Superintendent Jennifer

Fletcher told the board that having 42 of 44 CUSD schools with an A or a B, or 95%, is the best the district has performed since the Department of Education began assigning letter grades after the 2016-17 year.

"We had three schools for which we appealed their letter grades (An-

dersen and Bologna elementaries and Bogle Junior High)," Fletcher said. "Those three were within hundredths of a point of being 'A' schools. But even if those become a B, we'll still have enough points to remain an 'A' district."

Fletcher explained the criteria, which differs for various grade-level or types of schools. Proficiency, growth and the progress of English-language learners are factors at every level, while career readiness, for example, is only used in evaluating high schools.

Other improvements include six CUSD schools improving from grade B to A, only two receiving C grades, zero CUSD sites receiving a D grade and three of its six high schools scoring among the top 10% in the state.

Arizona College Prep High School led the state in points among high schools with 89.97.

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Chandler resident and nurse Nick Arreola holds a statuette given to him as a community award Nov. 10, with his girlfriend, Kassandra Martinez, and Chandler Mayor Kevin Hartke at his sides, surrounded by the City Council, along with some of Arreola's family and the Quezada family. The Quezadas' home was on fire on an October night when Arreola, passing by, stopped and alerted all five members in time to get out safely. (Jason W. Brooks/Independent Newsmedia)

## Nurse honored for heroic help with house fire

By Jason W. Brooks

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Nick Arreola says he doesn't feel like a hero.

Chandler Mayor Kevin Hartke begs to differ.

Hartke presented Arreola with a community hero award Nov. 10 during the city council meeting.

Arreola, a Chandler resident who's a nurse, was on his way home from a late-night shift in October when he passed a Chandler house that he saw was on fire. He stopped and banged on the door of the house, alerting the family inside about the fire.

All five Quezada family occupants escaped the house.

Arreola spoke during the council meeting, saying he did what he believed most people would do, and that he was in the right place at the right time.

"It's kind of weird being called a hero," Arreola said. "I don't really

feel like a hero. I feel like I did what everyone would do, but some people have said to me 'I wouldn't do that.'"

Arreola thanked his parents for raising him to be the kind of person who takes action. He said he was impressed and how fast Chandler fire, EMS and police were on-scene, and that firefighters and the quick response "pretty much saved the entire building."

Members of Arreola's family and the Quezada family took photos with the mayor and council.

Hartke thanked Councilmember Angel Encinas for bringing the incident to the attention of staff and council.

He said Arreola is the kind of resident who he prefers to think of as a role model.

"Because of Nick, a family is alive today," Hartke said. "We are reminded of the profound power and importance of looking out for one another."



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**INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA**

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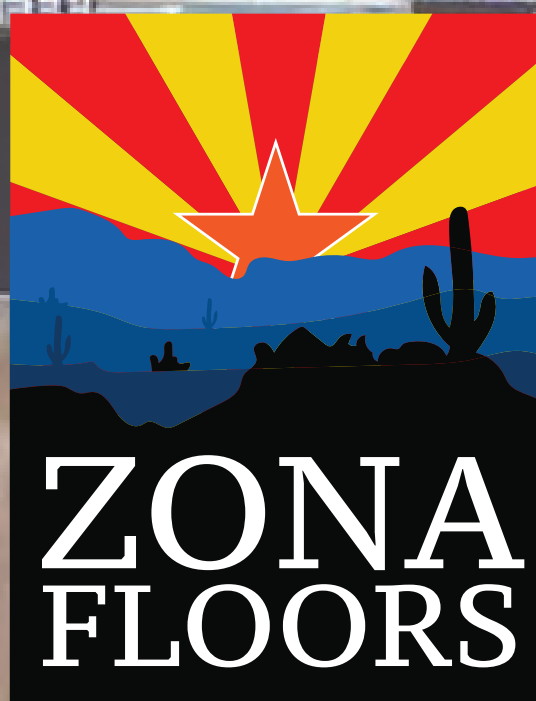
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