



Community

10th Annual Trolls
Teddy Bear Run
held; 2



APACHE JUNCTION/GOLD CANYON INDEPENDENT



Senior Expo

Event Jan. 7 at
Central Arizona
College; Inside

January 2026

Volume 68 Issue 1

Your Nonpartisan Community Newspaper • YourValley.net

Volunteers needed to remove buffelgrass from Silly Mountain

By Richard H. Dyer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Volunteers working on Silly Mountain in Apache Junction are removing buffelgrass section by section to stop the spread of the invasive plant that can fuel wildfires and choke out natural vegetation.

From 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. the first Saturday of the month from October to March, youths and adults meet at the base of the mountain at U.S. Highway 60 and Silly Mountain Road; gather up pickaxes, gloves and trash bags provided by the city of Apache Junction; and head up the mountain on rocky trails to a designated section.

On Saturday, Dec. 6, about a dozen community members carefully navigated steep terrain to dig up buffelgrass and place it into trash bags so the seeds would not fall and take root.

• See **Buffelgrass** on page 4

From left at the Dec. 6 buffelgrass removal at Silly Mountain Park are Jan Favorite, Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Coordinator Elliott Anuta, Micah Hudson and Amber Hudson. (Independent Newsmedia, Richard H. Dyer)

Water lines to be installed under US 60 Goldfield, Idaho work planned in early 2026

By Richard H. Dyer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Construction on a \$1.4 million project to install two water lines under U.S. Highway 60 at Goldfield Road and Idaho Road in Apache Junction is to start in February or March.

The Apache Junction Water District board, comprised of Apache Junction City Council members, on Dec. 16 discussed the project and an \$88,800 engineering agreement with Colliers Engineering & Design Inc. for engineering services for the water main extensions.

A 12-inch water line was installed from the U-Haul development just up to the U.S. Highway 60 Superstition Freeway, Water District Director Mike Loggins said.

“And then north of there we have a

• See **Water** on page 14

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Officers found explosives when they responded to a call about a person in crisis at Axiom Care, 105 N. Ocotillo Road, Apache Junction, police said. (AJPD)

Police seize dynamite during crisis response

Police officers found dynamite in a vehicle during an investigation Dec. 10 at a drug and alcohol addiction treatment center in Apache Junction.

Officers found the explosives when they responded to a call about a person in crisis at Axiom Care, 105 N. Ocotillo Road, police said.

They connected the person, who told them there was dynamite in their vehicle, with appropriate mental health services, police said.

Officers requested assistance from the Mesa Police Department Explosive Ordnance Disposal Unit to assess and handle the materials, which were safely seized, police said.

Go to <https://tinyurl.com/mr2h8kx5>

US60 project in Globe breaks for winter

The Arizona Department of Transportation advises drivers that active work on the pavement rehabilitation project on U.S. Highway 60, between Santee Street and U.S. Highway 70 (mileposts 250-252) in Globe will go on break through the winter months.

Go to <https://tinyurl.com/4j92sys2>

10th Annual Trolls Teddy Bear Run held

Superstition Harley-Davidson celebrates a decade of giving

By Brina Brown
SUPERSTITION HARLEY-DAVIDSON
MARKETING MANAGER

The final numbers are in, and the 10th Annual Trolls Teddy Bear Run proved once again that the motorcycle community shows up when it matters most.

This year, 150 riders came together with one mission on Dec. 6: make the holidays brighter for Arizona kids who need it most. Thanks to their generosity, we collected an incredible 679 teddy bears and toys, all of which are being distributed to advocacy centers across the state to bring comfort and joy to children during difficult times.

What started years ago with Troll and Shelly Ward alongside the Mesa Family Advocacy Center has grown into a powerful annual tradition rooted in community, compassion and good old-fashioned boots-on-the-ground support. Ten years in, the heart behind this ride is stronger than ever.

This impactful event would not be possible without the continued support of our sponsors, Superstition Harley-Davidson and Law Tigers, whose commitment to giving back helps keep this tradition rolling year after year. Their support plays a huge role in turning miles ridden into real-world impact for Arizona families.

This year, we were honored to have representatives on-site to receive toys for the kiddos from the following organizations: Mesa Family Advocacy Center, Defenders of Children,

• See **Giving** on page 15



Greg "Troll" Hughes with the teddy bears and toys at the 10th Annual Trolls Teddy Bear Run. (Brina Brown)



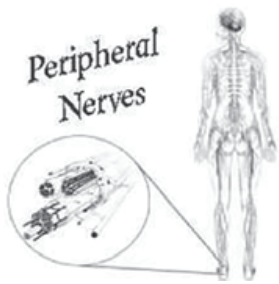
From right are Greg "Troll" Hughes and Shelly Ward at the 10th Annual Trolls Teddy Bear Run in Apache Junction. (Brina Brown)

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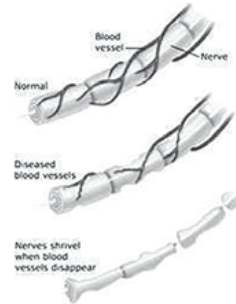
PERIPHERAL NEUROPATHY AND CHRONIC PAIN WARNING!

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.
- 3) How much treatment will your condition require?

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

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The amount of treatment needed to allow the nerves to fully recover varies from person to person and can only be determined after a detailed neurological and vascular evaluation. As long as you have not sustained at least 95% nerve damage there is hope!

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 January 31, 2026. 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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FROM THE COVER

Buffelgrass

• From page 1

In desert areas where fire is not a common ecological process, invasive species including buffelgrass have invaded natural areas, threatened native species and provide the fuel that allows fires to spread through desert areas, according to the Arizona wildlife conservation strategy section of the Arizona Game and Fish Department's website.

Volunteers have been pulling the buffelgrass off the mountain for about three years, said Elliott Anuta, Apache Junction natural resources and outdoor recreation coordinator.

"We are about halfway up the mountain now with just manual pulls. Manual pulls can be a really effective way of treating buffelgrass as long as we ensure we are getting the entire root system. It does less damage



Volunteers at the Dec. 6 buffelgrass removal at Silly Mountain Park are, standing from left, Jan Favorite, Micah Hudson, Ruby Bigelow, Michael Castle, Nickolaus Laneaster-Eistle, Ivan Laneaster-Eistle, Geoffrey Fitzwater-Castle and Robert Sanor; and sitting from left, are Amber Hudson and Lena Bigelow. (Independent Newsmedia, Richard H. Dyer)

to the local ecosystem because that way we're not using chemicals as well," he said. "There are areas of the mountain that we know are not safe for participants to go to so those areas we will treat with chemicals. We try to minimize that as much as possible and do things like this."

The all-volunteer effort started several years ago with a grant from the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management, Anuta said.

"In it we identify specific areas that have a higher fire potential because of the invasive plants and so those are the areas that we really target hard for

fire mitigation and also for vegetation health. So these invasives can choke out a lot of the native vegetation so we try to remove them to create that natural Sonoran desert, which has the gaps that we are all used to and it definitely helps with the fire mitigation," he said.

Micah Hudson, who pulled buffelgrass to gather National Junior Honor Society community service hours, volunteered on Dec. 6 with his mother, Amber. They both live in Gold Canyon, and 14-year-old Micah attends Legacy Traditional Schools in east Mesa.

It was the first time they volunteered to pull buffelgrass.

Micah said he has hiked on Silly Mountain in the past.

"Hiking and there was a campfire here once," he said.

East Mesa resident Jan Favorite,

• See **Buffelgrass** on page 6

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**More information at
LostDutchmanDays.org**

FROM THE COVER

Buffelgrass

• From page 4

also a volunteer, saw in the city of Apache Junction's e-newsletter that volunteers were needed to pull buffelgrass, which she had never done before, she said.

Mesa resident Jill Bigelow's two daughters, 13-year-old Ruby and 15-year-old Lena, volunteered pulling buffelgrass.

"I think it's important to always take care of your community," Jill Bigelow said. "October was rough — it was like 95 degrees outside."

Volunteer numbers have been increasing in the past year, Anuta said.

"So last year when we did it we did get smaller groups, usually like between three and eight people. But October/November we had 15 each time. So this year has been a little bit more momentum," Anuta said. "We

do get a lot of people who come from the surrounding areas, especially like the east Mesa border. Gold Canyon has a pretty large investment in coming out here as well just because their community borders the east side of Silly Mountain. So definitely do get people that reside outside of Apache Junction."

Parks and Recreation Director Liz Langenbach was at Silly Mountain the morning of Dec. 6 identifying areas where stinknet, another invasive plant, has taken root.

Having the monthly manual pulls of buffelgrass by volunteers helps community members better recognize the invasive plant and greatly helps the city, Langenbach said.

"It can be on their own property or other areas that they are hiking," she said. "There's just no way that we would be able to attack this all without volunteers. So the more that we can get folks engaged, the bet-



Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Coordinator Elliott Anuta, right, speaks to volunteers. (Independent Newsmedia, Richard H. Dyer)

ter we are going to be able to impact the work we're doing here on Silly Mountain."

Volunteers were used a couple years ago to pull stinknet from the mountain, Langenbach said.

"We're unhappy seeing it popping up here. It wasn't here last year," she said. "It smells terrible, it has a terri-

ble oil and then it will also become an invasive if we let it stay."

For information on the volunteer effort to remove invasive plants, go to <https://www.apachejunctionaz.gov/1168/Invasive-Species>.

Richard H. Dyer can be reached at rdyer@iniusa.org, or on X at [@rhdier](https://twitter.com/rhdier). To voice your opinion on this story, connect with us at AzOpinions@iniusa.org.



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BUSINESS LICENSES

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

There were 71 business licenses issued in November 2025 in the city of Apache Junction.

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

- Nicole Binkley dba Jean Anne Gluten Free Micro Bakery; Mesa; Nikki Binkley; Perishable Prepared Food Manufacturing (311991).

- Ameris Bank dba Balboa Capital; Atlanta, Georgia; Heather Parker; Commercial Banking (522110).

- California Witch; Apache Junction; Dolly Phillips; All Other Personal Services (812990).

- Bug N Dots dba Bug N Dots Custom Gift Shop; Apache Junction; Denise Durard; Gift, Novelty, And Souvenir Retailers (459420).

- Sewn In Sunshine; San Tan Valley; Jayden Bagge; Sewing, Needlework, And Piece Goods Retailers (459130).

- Advanced Clinical Technology; Wixom, Michigan; Angie Hawkins; Medical, Dental, And Hospital Equipment And Supplies Merchant Wholesalers (423450).

- The Altman Shoppe; Queen Creek; Eric Altman; All Other Miscellaneous Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing (332999).

- Central Arizona Regional Economic Development Foundation; Glendale; Patti King; Business Associations (813910).

- Titan Pools LLC; Queen Creek; Matt Farley; All Other Specialty Trade Contractors (238990).

- Jon Ryan dba Jon Ryan Jewelry Design; Apache Junction; Jon Ryan; Jewelry And Silverware Manufacturing (339910), Electronic Shopping

• See **Business** on page 12

Meet Your Business: York an attorney at Gold Canyon Law PLLC

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Attorney Samantha S. York grew up in Globe. She moved to Gold Canyon with her husband about eight years ago to be closer to work and to escape the bustle of city life.

She volunteers with several community organizations to support children in foster care. York coordinates and collects donations, and delivers gifts during Christmas and again at the start of the school year. She says, “It’s one of the most meaningful parts of my life outside of the office — being able to brighten a child’s day and remind them that their community cares deeply about them.”

Name: Samantha S. York

Age: I’m old enough to have earned every one of my gray hairs and grateful for the wisdom that came with them.

Occupation: Attorney

Hometown: I was born and raised in Globe.

Family: I grew up in a loving home where some of my best memories were made fishing, camping, and enjoying the outdoors. Today, I’m happily married to the love of my life. We share a blended family of three adult sons and an adult daughter, and we are proud grandparents to a lively grandson who keeps us young. Much of our lives were spent cheering on our kids at sporting events, choir concerts, school competitions, and everything in between. Now that they’re grown, we’re slowing down just a little, except which it comes to football games for our grandson. We love traveling and enjoying life together.

What brought you to Gold Canyon? My husband and I moved to Gold Canyon about eight years ago to be closer to work and to escape the bustle of city life. We immediately fell in love with the beauty of the area and enjoy hiking, bike riding and taking long walks through the community.

Business: Gold Canyon Law PLLC, formerly The Law Office of Samantha Sue Elledge PLLC, is proud to serve the Gold Canyon community by helping individuals and families plan for the future with confidence, understand-



Samantha S. York

ing and care. We are committed to offering accessible, compassionate legal services to those navigating some of life’s most important decisions.

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How can people contact you? (Email, phone, website, etc.):

- Phone: 480-807-1654

- Fax: 480-983-6711

- Email: SamanthaYork@GCLawAZ.com

How long have you worked at the Law Office of Samantha S. Elledge and what services do you offer? I am an Arizona attorney with over a decade of experience serving families, children and individuals in complex and sensitive legal matters. Since being admitted to the State Bar of Arizona in 2015, I’ve built my

career on a foundation of advocacy, integrity, and compassion.

Although my firm has been established in Gold Canyon for eight years, much of my early practice involved contract work with Pinal and Gila counties, where I represented children and families in juvenile, guardianship/conservatorship and family law matters. Drawing on years of experience in guardianships, conservatorships, family law, probate and juvenile law, the firm is now fully transitioning to private practice. We are expanding our services to include estate planning, wills, trusts and elder law – ensuring that clients have comprehensive support through every stage of life.

What I am promoting: The Gold Canyon Law team is eager to provide personalized, client-centered services to the community. My practice focuses on protecting what matters most: your family, your future and your peace of mind.

What drew you to your community? Gold Canyon has a unique charm; the stunning views, the peaceful atmosphere and the sense of neighborliness all drew us here. Living and working here gives me the opportunity to build meaningful connections with the people I serve.

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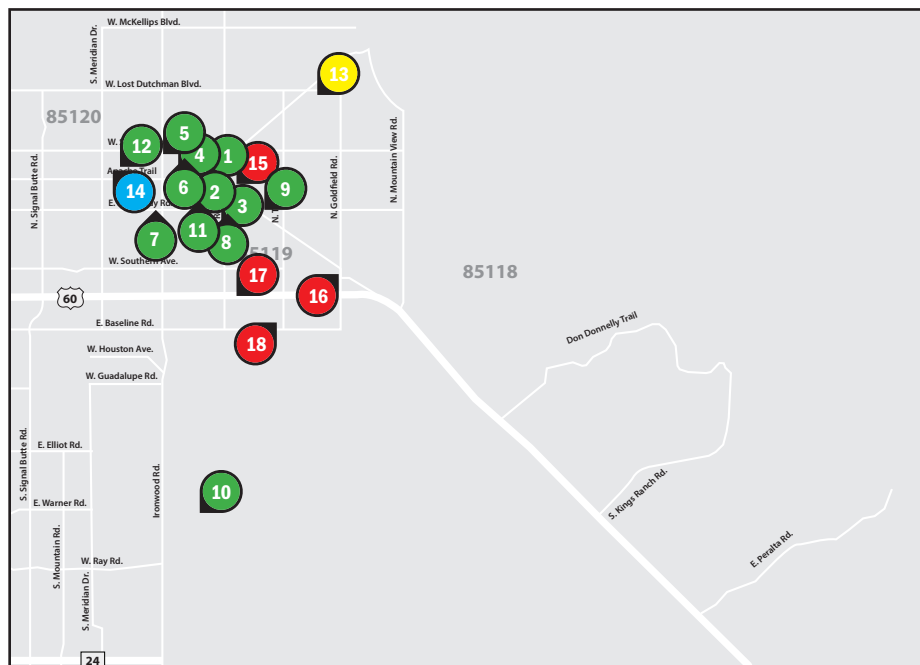
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BUSINESS MOVES



Compiled by **Richard H. Dyer**
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

IN THE NEWS

Eleven area businesses and organizations participated in the 2025 Jingle in the Junction decorating contest. Votes could be cast Nov. 29-Dec. 17 for the business that lights up the Apache Junction community with the most holiday spirit in 2025. Participating businesses and organizations were:

- 1 • **Apache Junction Area Chamber of Commerce**, 567 W. Apache Trail
- 2 • **Avista Apache Junction**, 675 W. Broadway Ave.
- 3 • **Dashing Groomer**, 1075 S. Idaho Road No. 214
- 4 • **Handlebar Pub and Grill**, 650 W. Apache Trail
- 5 • **Horizon Heath and Wellness, Earth Heart Park Garden Club**, 625 N. Plaza Drive
- 6 • **Maggies Lounge**, 100 N. Plaza

Drive

- 7 • **Mozzie Fox Salon**, 850 S. Ironwood Drive Suite No. 106
- 8 • **Sunny Dea Sweet Treats**, 1075 S. Idaho Road No. 103
- 9 • **Toast Gio's**, 1422 E. Broadway Ave.
- 10 • **Twistd Treatz** food truck
- 11 • **VFW Post 7968 and Auxiliary**, 250 S. Phelps Drive

The winner was to be announced Dec. 19.

- 12 The 10th Annual Trolls Teddy Bear Run was held Dec. 6 at **Superstition Harley-Davidson**, 2910 W. Apache Trail in Apache Junction. "We're talking teddy bears, roaring engines, community love, and a whole lot of heart — all benefiting our local family advocacy center, police, and first responders who support kids and families when life gets real," it states in a release.



LIQUOR LICENSES



JINGLE IN THE JUNCTION

LIQUOR LICENSES

13 A new series 6 bar liquor license is being sought for **Hitching Post Saloon** in Apache Junction. The Apache Junction City Council on Dec. 2 voted unanimously to recommend that the Arizona Department of Liquor Licenses and Control approve the license for the business at 2341 N. Apache Trail. Mehmood Mohiuddin is the agent and owner. A series 6 bar liquor license allows a bar retailer to sell and serve spirituous liquors to be consumed in the original container on the premises, it states on the Arizona Department of Liquor Licenses and Control website.

NOW OPEN

14 **Jersey Mike's Subs**, known for its sliced/fresh grilled subs, opened Dec. 3 at 2540 W. Apache Trail in Apache Junction. Rich MacLachlan is the franchise owner. The restaurant's hours are 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., seven days a week. Contact this location directly at 480-327-6799. Jersey Mike's is looking for individuals interested in career opportunities. Candidates are invited to apply at <https://www.jerseymikes.com/careers>.



JERSEY MIKE'S SUBS



SUPERSTITION HARLEY-DAVIDSON

COMING SOON

Plans on the city of Apache Junction's Geographic Information System map at apachejunctionaz.gov/472/Maps-GIS include:

- 15 • **Apache Trails Retail**, east of the northeast corner of North Apache Trail and Old West Highway in Apache Junction, is in the zoning review process. The development includes three drive-thru restaurant buildings..
- 16 • A site plan and zoning has been approved for a development on the southwest corner of East 28th Street and South Goldfield Road in Apache Junction with an **AM PM** convenience store, car wash building and eight gas pumps under a canopy.
- 17 • A site plan and zoning has been approved for a 42-foot-tall **Sundt Construction Inc.** fabrication facility east of the southeast corner of U.S. Highway 60 Superstition Freeway and South Royal Palm Road.
- 18 • A site plan and zoning has been approved for a **Phoenix Metro Towing** facility on East Baseline west of Tomahawk Road.



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Saturday, January 10

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Friday, February 6

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Saturday, January 31

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Friday, February 20



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Business

• From page 8

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A business license is a license issued to a person conducting business activity within the city of Apache Junction or any person or business having a privilege tax or use tax license listing Apache Junction per city code. The fee for a business license is \$50. An application must be approved along with the fee paid before a business may lawfully engage in business in the city of Apache Junction. For questions regarding business licenses, call 480-474-5050 or email the business license coordinator at businesslicense@apachejunctionaz.gov. Applications are at apachejunctionaz.gov/997/Business-License. (Metro Connection)

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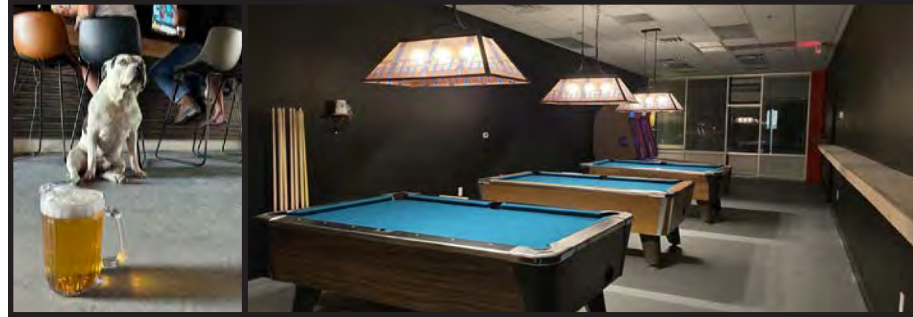
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FROM THE COVER



The Apache Junction water district supplies well water (groundwater) pumped from the Eastern Salt River Sub-Basin Aquifer, which flows southwesterly under Apache Junction and its surrounding areas. The groundwater is treated for arsenic removal where necessary, disinfected with chlorine, pumped into storage tanks and blended with Colorado River (surface) water. (Independent Newsmedia, Ariana Gralney)

Water

• From page 1

gas station that the water line ended. We've never connected those two locations," he said. "Also on Goldfield, we had Goldview subdivision come in that's just north of U.S. 60, and we already had development with Dolce Vita and a couple other parks on the south side that brought those water mains just up to those locations and we haven't been able to tie those in. So we want to do this to loop our system."

Design plans for the previously approved \$1.4 million project should be available by the end of January with the construction starting in February or March, he said.

Board member Bryan Soller asked if the work will cause traffic problems.

"Are we going to be able to do this without snarling up traffic on Idaho?"

he asked.

The water district would work with the Arizona Department of Transportation on its right of way and what can be done, Loggins said.

"We'll probably take one lane out underneath Idaho. So may delay the project just because the snowbirds are in town to probably April-ish so we have a little less traffic at that location or make sure that we don't adversely affect our hazardous waste day because I know we use Idaho on that too," he said. "We're going to work with (ADOT) to open-cut this and then put casing in first and then we go ahead and push water lines in there so if it does create a leak on that water line it flows out the ends of the casing and doesn't affect the freeway either."

Connecting the water lines on the

• See **Water** on page 15

FROM THE COVER

Water

• From page 14

north and south of the freeway is important, Board member Darryl Cross said.

“(I)t’s extremely important to have multiple directions of flow. It really substantially helps the service that we provide our customers,” he said. “I’ve seen a lot of issues where dead-end mains really create a lot of havoc for businesses to the point where they have to install a fire pump. By having it interconnected like that where it grids throughout the entire area just makes a huge difference. So thank you for doing this.”

Water district

The Apache Junction water district supplies well water (groundwater) pumped from the Eastern Salt

River Sub-Basin Aquifer, which flows southwesterly under Apache Junction and its surrounding areas. The groundwater is treated for arsenic removal where necessary, disinfected with chlorine, pumped into storage tanks and blended with Colorado River (surface) water.

The surface water is transported through the Central Arizona Project canal system and filtered and purified at the Superstition Area Water Plant before being introduced into the distribution system.

The water district can also receive treated CAP water from the city of Mesa through an interconnect for a backup supply of water, if needed.

Richard H. Dyer can be reached at rdyer@iniusa.org, or on X @rhdyer. Please submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters or email them to AZOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines, <https://www.yourvalley.net/civility-checklist/>.



Some ride attendees at the 10th Annual Trolls Teddy Bear Run in Apache Junction. (Brina Brown)

Giving

• From page 2

Chicanos Por La Causa, Child Crisis Arizona, Bloom365, Pinal County Family Advocacy Center, ACASI, Southern Arizona Victim Emergency Services, Sojourner Center, Somali American United Council of Arizona, La Frontera Arizona, and the Hopi Domestic Violence Center.

Every bear collected represents

more than a toy — it’s a reminder to a child that they are seen, supported and not alone.

To every rider, donor, volunteer, sponsor and partner who helped make this milestone year unforgettable: thank you for carrying this tradition forward and proving once again that when the riding community rolls together, real impact follows.

Here’s to 10 years of heart — and many more miles to come.

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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/ 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.

Fire board thanks voters for approving bond election

On behalf of the entire Superstition Fire and Medical District, we extend our deepest gratitude to our community for your incredible support in our recent bond election. Your engagement and encouragement mark a meaningful step forward in shaping the future of our organization and enhancing the services we provide to the residents we are honored to serve.

We also want to acknowledge and respect those who held differing views throughout this process. Your voices matter, and we remain steadfast in our commitment to listening, learning, and serving with transparency and accountability. It is through open dialogue and shared purpose that we grow stronger together.

This community continues to inspire us with its resilience, unity, and dedication to public safety. We are

LETTERS TO THE NEWSROOM

excited for what lies ahead and look forward to continuing this journey with you.

With sincere appreciation,
Board Chairman Kathleen Chamberlain
Board Clerk Connie Van Driel
Board Director Jeff Cross
Board Director Jason Moeller
Board Director Shawn Kurian
The SFMD Board of Directors

Retiree to retirees: Don't clog the grocery aisles

When I was working, I vowed that when I retired I would never go in a grocery store after 5 p.m. on weekdays or at any time on the weekend. It was frustrating to stand in line behind all those retired people (mostly seniors) who were able to grocery shop during the day when the working class cannot.

Now that I am retired, I have kept my word and you will not find me buying groceries on the weekend or

Please send your comments to
AzOpinions@iniusa.org.

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after 5 on weekdays. As we know, the Phoenix-area population increases enormously during the winter months. Wouldn't it be nice to show a bit of courtesy to the working class by going to the grocery store when they can't.

Please, seniors and retired folks, shop during the day, stay home after 5 and do something fun on the weekends. There is so much to explore and do in our area, get out and play; don't spend weekend time clogging the aisles in the grocery store. Be thoughtful, be kind.

VJ Winters
Apache Junction

SPEAK UP

Here are some comments about stories happening in your area:

APACHE JUNCTION ACHIEVES DARK-SKY DESIGNATION FOR LIGHTING AT 2 PARKS

"Now to get the sports complex on Ellsworth to have the same rule. At night that place is the brightest place in the skyline I can see from my front porch." — **Josh Cullipher** via Facebook comment

AJUSD FORECASTS \$12K-A-YEAR SAVINGS CHANGING SOLID WASTE SERVICES

"The savings is good for AJ. Too bad residents are not allowed to shop around, to find a cheaper rate as well." — **Paul Miles** via Facebook comment

"Paul Miles, I agree with you. My garbage is covered in my HOA, which I pay \$905 a quarter. We all

have opinions." — **Dawn M Buergler** via Facebook comment

SRP HERDS FISH TO BEGIN MONTHLONG CANAL REPAIR PROJECT

"But if me and my friends did that it's illegal. Hahaha." — **George Alderton** via Nextdoor comment

"George only if you take them out of the canal." — **Phillip G.** via Nextdoor comment

• See **Speak Up** on page 30

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JAN. 23**Police Foundation fundraiser**

An Apache Junction Police Foundation golf tournament will raise money to send department members and members of Officer Gabriel Facio's family to Washington, D.C., for National Police Week 2026, where his name will be unveiled on the memorial wall and honored during the candlelight vigil. Facio, 46, a three-year veteran on the force, died June 8 from injuries suffered while answering a June 2 radio call about a driver waving a gun in what was described as a threatening manner. He is the first Apache Junction police officer to be killed in the line of duty. The tournament is at Apache Creek Golf Club, 3401 S. Ironwood Drive in Apache Junction, with check-in at 7 a.m. and a shotgun start at 8 a.m. Cost is \$150 per player, \$600 per team of four. Register at <https://tinyurl.com/4chkht29>.

JAN. 24**Gold Canyon Arts Festival**

Juried Gold Canyon Arts Council show features 95 artists in a wide variety of genres and styles.

Live musical performances.

No admission fee and free parking. Please, no dogs or skateboards.

9 a.m.-4 p.m. on the grounds of the Gold Canyon United Methodist Church, 6640 S. Kings Ranch Road.

Go to <https://www.goldcanyonarts.org/copy-of-gold-canyon-arts-festival>.

JAN. 31**Wine-tasting fundraiser**

Enjoy an evening of fine wine, great company and prizes — all in support of Soroptimist International of the East Valley's mission to empower women and girls.

Event features Wine For Humanity, a nonprofit dedicated to providing high-quality wines while supporting charitable causes. Guests will have the opportunity to sample a selection of new wines debuting this year, making it a fresh experience for newcomers and returning attendees alike. Alongside the tasting, the fundraiser will include a 50/50 raffle and door prizes, offering fun ways to get involved while helping raise funds for SIEV's programs, scholarships, and community service efforts. 4-7 p.m. at 6021 S. Kings Ranch Road in Gold Canyon.

Tickets available at <https://givebutter.com/LfvMUJ>

THINGS TO DO

Apache Junction Senior Expo Jan. 7 at Central Arizona College

Apache Junction Senior Expo Jan. 7 at Central Arizona College

Seniors and families from Apache Junction, Gold Canyon and neighboring communities are invited to attend the Apache Junction Senior Expo hosted by Independent Newsmedia 9 a.m.-noon Wednesday, Jan. 7, at Central Arizona College, 805 S. Idaho Road in Apache Junction.

There will be a variety of businesses with information on health care and wellness, home improvement, financial services, insurance, retirement living and more.

Vendors are being sought for the event.

"If your business can provide a healthier, happier and wealthier lifestyle for seniors, join us," a release states.

Reserve your sponsorship today by calling 623-972-6101 or emailing AZads@iniusa.org.



Arizona Lecture Series Jan. 5-March 30 in Apache Junction

Those attending the Arizona Lecture Series at the Performing Arts Center at Apache Junction High School in 2026 will be introduced to the rich culture and history of Arizona.

The first lecture is on Monday, Jan. 5. Doors open at 6 p.m. with each lecture starting at 7 p.m. at the PAC, 2525 S. Ironwood Drive.

Season tickets are available for \$100. Purchase tickets at <https://ajpac.ludus.com> through Jan. 12. Each lecture ticket will be sold one

week in advance online starting Jan. 1 at \$10.00 per ticket. If you have any questions, call Joel Hernandez-Payan at 480-982-1110 ext.2250.

"We look forward to seeing you here for another fun-filled season. Whether you come for one evening or the entire series, we guarantee you will leave with a greater appreciation for Arizona and other fascinating historical insights," it states in a release.

There will be no lectures on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Presidents Day or on Monday, March 16.

The lineup for 2026 Arizona Lecture Series Jan. 5-March 30 is:

- Jan. 5 — Wyatt Earp, "A Life on the Frontier"
- Jan. 12 — Jay Mark, "Only in Arizona"
- Jan. 20 — Christine Reid, "Haunted AZ" (Tuesday lecture)
- Jan. 26 — Kevin Schindler, "Bright of the Grand Canyon"
- Feb. 2 — Laura Tohe, "Navajo Code Talkers Talking Code with a

• See **Lecture** on page 30



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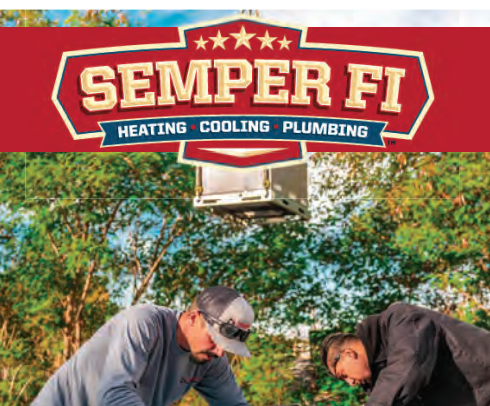
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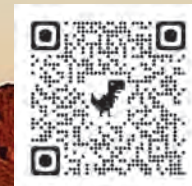
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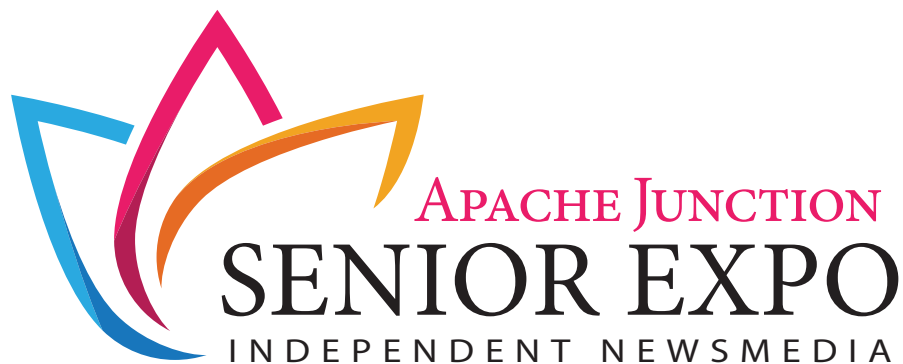
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 **APACHE JUNCTION/GOLD CANYON**
INDEPENDENT



Some volunteers are needed to monitor dumpsters at the neighborhood cleanups to collect bulky items and debris. They are to guide neighbors on what can and cannot be placed inside, ensure dumpsters are used safely and efficiently, and to maintain order so everyone has fair access. (Dave Waldron)

Volunteers needed for Community Action Day events Jan. 17

By Richard H. Dyer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

An Apache Junction nonprofit organization is seeking volunteers for its annual neighborhood cleanup and Community Action Day in January.

The event will be held Saturday, Jan. 17, at five to six locations, said Thomas Kelly, Apache Junction Community Development Corp.'s vice chairman.

"We are currently looking at three — possibly four — neighborhood locations, a street cleanup on Baseline between Ironwood and Tomahawk, and a rock-painting event at Flatiron Park. These are all tentative at this present time," he said. "Each location will have different number of volunteers. Generally the street cleanup would be anywhere from 15 to 20-plus people. The neighborhood cleanups will vary."

Volunteers can register at <https://apachejunctioncdc.com/index.php/events-for-the-neighborhood-street-cleanup-and-rock-painting-events>.

Some volunteers are needed to

monitor dumpsters at the neighborhood cleanups to collect bulky items and debris. They are to guide neighbors on what can and cannot be placed inside, ensure dumpsters are used safely and efficiently, and to maintain order so everyone has fair access, it states on the website.

Those interested in cleaning Baseline are to meet at 7:30 a.m. just east of Ironwood to get bags and other materials needed for the street cleanup. Volunteers need to bring their own gloves, it states on the website.

Picnic tables will become art stations where children and adults will paint small smooth rocks at Flatiron Park, 100 N. Apache Trail. Check the website for the time closer to the day.

The group used to hold its annual Make a Difference Day cleanup in October but temperatures were too warm at the last event held in 2024, Chair Gail Evans said.

"This year we decided to delay

• See **Volunteers** on page 28

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The group used to hold its annual Make a Difference Day cleanup in October but temperatures were too warm at the last event held in 2024. (Dave Waldron)

APACHE JUNCTION COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORP.

Originally established in 2002 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, the community development corporation went through a revamp in 2017 with a more defined purpose. This purpose was to support and improve the long-term health and quality of life of individuals and the community by:

- Combating community deterioration through redevelopment.
- Acting as a resource for economic development by disseminating information to help facilitate and support business growth in the community.
- Creating a neighborhood beautification program to help those less-fortunate maintain their yards.

Through community outreach and partnerships, the AJCDC hopes to create a business-friendly atmosphere thereby making it easier for business to thrive.

The first Make a Difference Day event was held in 2019. On Oct. 26, 2019, more than 130 volunteers gathered to help in several beautification projects throughout the city. The event was such a benefit to the community that it was determined the AJCDC should continue its efforts to make this day of service a staple each year.

The demand stemming from Make a Difference Day gave rise to the community revitalization project so the needs of city residents could be better met year-round. The AJCDC joined forces with the city of Apache Junction and Just Serve. This partnership allowed residents to get help they needed any time of the year instead of having to wait until October.

Source: <https://apachejunctioncdc.com>

Volunteers

• From page 27

MADD until January, due to the heat last year," she said.

The Apache Junction Communi-

ty Development Corp. has a board of directors made up of Chair Evans, Vice-Chair Kelly, Treasurer Lee Cooper, Secretary Barbara Kelly, Directors Johnny Austin, Robin Barker

• See **Volunteers** on page 32

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Speak Up

• From page 16

“Phillip, I don’t know how fish and game would feel about me doing this at the Salt River.” — **George Alderton** via Nextdoor comment

“Do you think they love that job?” — **Bonnie Levine** via Nextdoor comment

“I think they love doing it.” — **Joyce Arthur** via Nextdoor comment

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“If they need a ladder truck I say give em one. Their job is difficult and dangerous. Whatever makes it easier.” — **Doug J.** via Nextdoor comment

“Absolutely a community necessity for public safety. Support this effort without reserve.” — **Everett Allen** via Nextdoor comment

“Since I live in a second story residence, I am thrilled we have a functioning ladder truck.” — **Jay Led** via Nextdoor comment

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“Water?” — **Pamela Eisnor** via Nextdoor comment

Lecture

• From page 18

Secret Weapon”

• Feb. 9 — Rodo Sofranac, “Take A Hike! Explore, Enhance, and Experience Your Understanding of Arizona”

• Feb. 17 — Marshall Shore, “Arizona’s Cosmic Connections” (Tuesday lecture)

• Feb. 23 — Barbara Jaquay, “Father Kino — Journey to Discovery”

• March 2 — Christine Reid, “Earthquakes in Arizona”

• March 9 — Oscar Mancinas, “Authoring Home — Refugio Savala, Mario Suárez, & Arizona’s Indigenous and Chicano Literary History”

• March 23 — Pamela Stewart, “Arizona Pioneer, Rebel, and Fearless Advocate for Women’s Sports: Ina Gittings”

• March 30 — Yolanda Hart Stevens, “Indigenous Signs and Symbols: Pee-Posh/Kwatsan”

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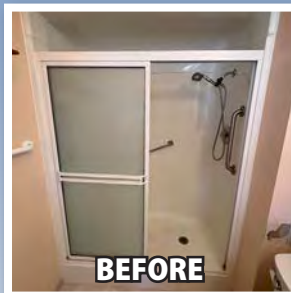
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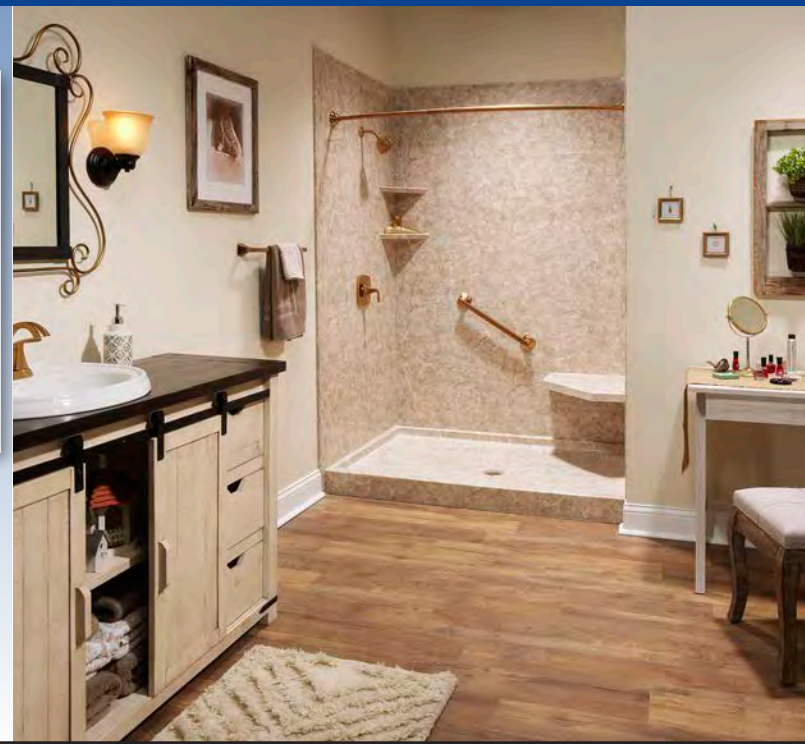
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Volunteers

• From page 28

and Bob Verstege, and Ex Officio —
City Councilmember Peter Heck.

The 501(c)(3) nonprofit orga-
nization collaborates with the city
along with some participating busi-
nesses and corporations, Thomas
Kelly said.

According to its website, an em-
ployee of the city of Apache Junc-
tion — Shawn Brown, code compli-
ance manager — is the contact for
the annual Make a Difference Day,
now known as Community Action
Day.

"The city of Apache Junction
supports the Community Develop-
ment Corp. because it helps the city
achieve important community goals
that go beyond what standard city
departments handle," Brown said.

"It is important to have the annu-
al Make a Difference Day because

the AJCDC collaboration focuses on
neighborhood revitalization, beauti-
fication and support for vulnerable
residents — such as seniors, disabled
individuals and low-income home-
owners — by providing cleanup and
maintenance services that reduce
blight and improve overall quality of
life," he said.

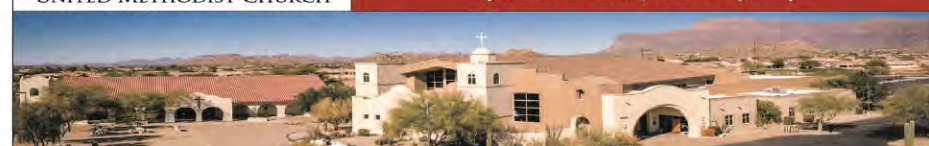
The AJCDC's volunteer-driven
model also allows the city to lever-
age community engagement and
partnerships to enhance econom-
ic development and make Apache
Junction more attractive to residents
and businesses, Brown said.

"By supporting the CDC Make
a Difference Day and the CDC, the
city gains cleaner neighborhoods,
increased civic pride and a stronger,
more sustainable community," he
said.

*Richard H. Dyer can be reached at rdyer@iniusa.
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on this story, connect with us at A opinions@
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Approximately 60 participants joined the event both in person and online. (Maylynna Randel)

Apache Junction Democrats host 2026 candidates night

The Apache Junction Democrats hosted a well-attended Democratic Party candidates night on Friday, Nov. 21, marking the public's first opportunity of the 2026 election season to meet Democratic candidates in person in Apache Junction.

Approximately 60 participants joined the event both in person and online, it states in a release.

The forum was held at the Apache Junction Multi-Generational Center, whose staff provided outstanding support throughout the evening. AJDems volunteers also played key roles in ensuring the smooth operation of the event, it states.

Volunteers included Stephen and Peggy Harshman, Heather Gerson, Lisa Sanor, Geoffry Landcaster-Castle, Shirley Ooley, Lori Matlock, Maylynna Randel, Diane Block and Cheryl Killian.

Special recognition goes to Lisa Sanor for managing Zoom operations, Heather Gerson for conducting online interviews, Peggy Harshman for manning the registration table, Maylynna Randel for event photography and Shirley Ooley for staffing the T-shirt table, it states in the release.

To encourage engagement with the candidates, attendees participated in "candidate bingo," with those who completed all squares receiving a "De-

mocracy in Action" AJDems t-shirt. This was very popular game, it states in the release.

Twelve Democratic candidates participated in the event, representing statewide, legislative and congressional races. Candidates included:

- ♦ Dr. Terry Ruiz, candidate for Arizona superintendent of public instruction
- ♦ Brian Matlock, candidate for state mine inspector
- ♦ Nick Mansour, candidate for state treasurer
- ♦ Johnathon Hill, candidate for the Arizona Corporation Commission
- ♦ Mike Montiel, candidate for LD7 Senate
- ♦ Sam Martin, candidate for LD7 Legislature
- ♦ Blake Bracht, Elizabeth Lee, Dr. Gary Johnson, Brian Hualde, Chris James and Justin Poff, candidates for U.S. House in Arizona's 5th Congressional District

The Apache Junction Democrats is a registered 527 political action committee in the state of Arizona, Pinal County and Maricopa County. The event was authorized and paid for by The Apache Junction Democrats, not authorized or paid for by any candidate or candidate committee.

More information can be found at AJDems.com.

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EDUCATION



The change was sought after AJUSD's previous waste hauler increased its costs, Board President Dena Kimble said. (Independent Newsmedia, Arianna Grainey)

AJUSD forecasts \$12K-a-year savings changing solid waste services

By Richard H. Dyer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Apache Junction Unified School District has changed its contractor for solid waste and recycling services and is to save as much as \$12,000 a year.

The AJUSD governing board voted unanimously recently to approve a three-year service agreement with Green and Blue Waste Solutions LLC, also known as Waste Connections of Arizona.

Republic Services had provided the work but was not under contract by the district, according to a discussion in the minutes of the board's Oct. 14 work session.

The change was sought after AJUSD's previous waste hauler increased its costs, Board President

Dena Kimble said before the vote.

"Charges from the current waste-service provider increased by approximately 70% from the previous year. Because the district did not have a signed contract in place, bids were solicited from multiple vendors. After careful evaluation, Green and Blue Waste Solutions was selected as the most cost-effective option," she said.

The change is expected to save the district \$10,000 to \$12,000 annually, she said.

"We should take the deal," AJUSD Superintendent Robert Pappalardo said before the vote.

Total costs per month include a \$150 fee for a Green and Blue Waste Solutions consult and account man-

• See **Savings** on page 39



Apache Junction • January 7, 2026 • Central Arizona College

Surprise • January 27, 2026 • The Colonnade

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

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SUNDAY, JANUARY 18 THE SPOUSE WHISPERER STAND UP COMEDY	THURSDAY, JANUARY 22 CARTEL LIVE! A TRIBUTE TO THE BEATLES	SATURDAY, JANUARY 24 PIANO MEN: GENERATIONS THE MUSIC OF TWO LEGENDS: BILLY JOEL & ELTON JOHN	SUNDAY, JANUARY 25 ABBAFAB A TRIBUTE TO ABBA
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FRIDAY, MARCH 27 A LENNON LEGACY A TRIBUTE TO THE MUSIC OF JOHN LENNON	SATURDAY, MARCH 28 FAIRCHILD BLUES BROTHERS A TRIBUTE TO THE BLUES BROTHERS	SUNDAY, MARCH 29 HONKY TONK MAN A TRIBUTE TO JERRY LEE	SATURDAY, APRIL 4 ENCORE SHOW! ONE OF THESE NIGHTS A TRIBUTE TO THE EAGLES

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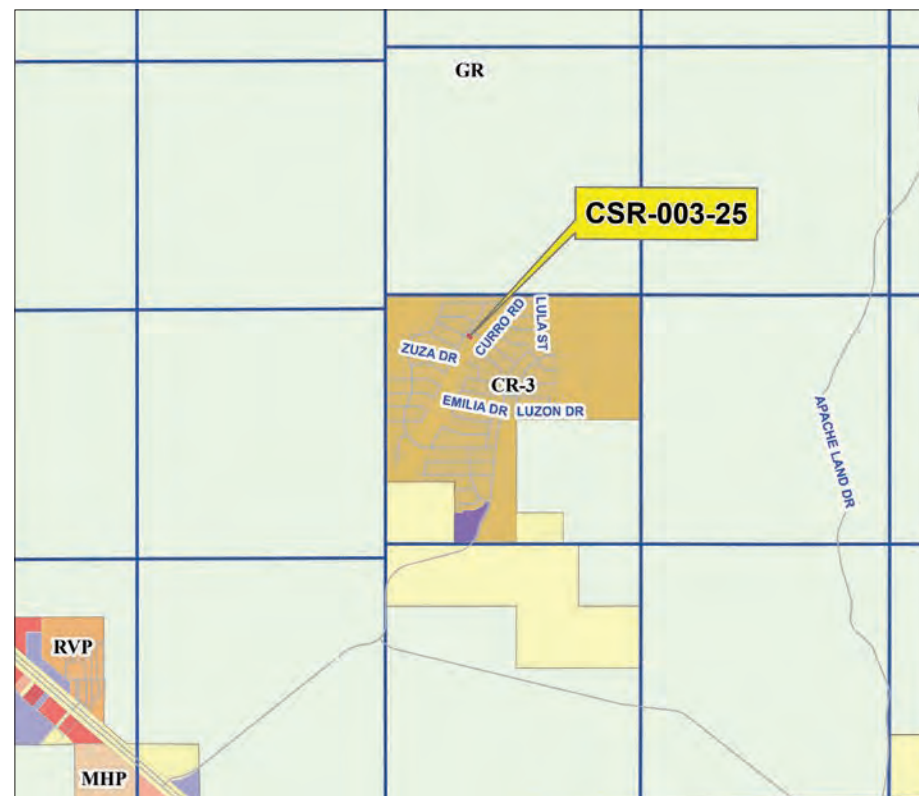


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DEVELOPMENT

60-foot-tall flagpole OK'd at KB Home development in Gold Canyon



The applicant is seeking the sign package to increase visibility, improve effectiveness of business signs and provide the sales office with a taller flagpole than the sign code currently permits. (Pinal County)

By Richard H. Dyer
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A 60-foot-high flagpole is to be installed at a temporary sales office at a model homes complex within the Entrada Del Oro community in Gold Canyon.

The Pinal County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously recently to approve the flagpole within a comprehensive sign package at the 0.17-acre site at 48741 N. San Vincent

Lane in Gold Canyon. No one spoke at a public hearing on the item.

RenRen Cicero of American Flag and Pole Co. is the agent. KB Home Phoenix is the owner.

The county's sign review committee recommended approval of the case.

The applicant is seeking the sign package to increase visibility, improve effectiveness of business signs

• See **Development** on page 39

Development

• From page 38

and provide the sales office with a taller flagpole than the sign code currently permits, Senior Planner Patrick Zaia-Roberts stated in a memo to the sign review committee.

“The maximum building height in the zoning district is 30 feet; therefore, a comprehensive sign review process is required for the proposed 60-foot American flagpole at the Entrada Del Oro model homes complex,” it states. “If this request is approved, the applicant may request permits to construct a 10-inch outer diameter to 4-inch tapered white flagpole of aluminum round pipe on a 24-inch diameter base, as indicated in the sign elevation details. The flag area will be 12 feet by 18 feet — 216 square feet.”

It is to match and maintain consistency with other flagpoles by other builders in the same development, Amy Zinger, vice president of studio and marketing for KB Home Phoenix, wrote in a letter to Pinal County’s planning and zoning division.



The Pinal County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously Dec. 3 to approve the flagpole within a comprehensive sign package at the 0.17-acre site at 48741 N. San Vincent Lane in Gold Canyon. (Pinal County)

Richard H. Dyer can be reached at rdyer@iniusa.org, or on X @rhdyer. To voice your opinion on this story, connect with us at [AzOpinions@iniusa.org](https://www.yourvalley.net/civility-checklist/).

Savings

• From page 36

ager fee and \$6,112.43 for commercial frontload service, it states in a proposal overview document.

Separate customer service agreement documents from Waste Connections of Arizona show the cost and frequency of pickups at AJUSD locations such as the cafeteria, concession stand, gym, transportation and maintenance yard at Apache Junction High School; the elementary schools; The Early Learning Center; and the junior high school.

AJUSD has three elementary schools; a K-5 school designed to

provide students with a traditional, liberal arts education; a junior high school; and a high school. The district boundaries run from Meridian Road on the west to the town of Queen Valley on the east and from the Goldfield Mountains to the north, south into the San Tan Corridor. Communities served include Apache Junction, Gold Canyon, Peralta Trail, Queen Valley and unincorporated Pinal County land in-between.

Richard H. Dyer can be reached at rdyer@iniusa.org, or on X @rhdyer. Please submit comments at [yourvalley.net/letters](https://www.yourvalley.net/letters) or email them to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines, <https://www.yourvalley.net/civility-checklist/>.

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