

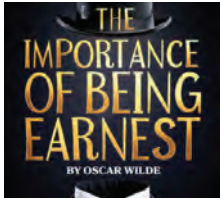


Teachers
Foundation gives grants to local teachers; **12**



INDEPENDENT

Shows
Stage shows around this winter; **18**



Town raising wastewater fees for new construction

By Janet Perez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Starting this month, Queen Creek will be raising wastewater capacity fees for new business and residential construction.

Following a public hearing during a recent meeting, the Queen Creek Town Council voted 6-0 to raise the fee effective Jan. 5. Mayor Julia Wheatley was still on leave. No members of the public spoke on the increase during the hearing.

Wastewater capacity fees are one-time charges for new construction intended to offset the cost of infrastructure improvements related to growth. The fee is not paid by existing residents and businesses.

“It’s paid by new development under the mantra of growth pays for growth. It’s not paid by current residents and businesses, and it’s paid at the time a building permit is issued by future residents and

• See **Fees** on page 22

Developers seek to beautify downtown Queen Creek

By Janet Perez
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Alex Matheson is a longtime Queen Creek resident, a dentist and a member of the planning and zoning commission. Now he’s ready to make a mark on the downtown landscape.

Matheson will soon break ground on The Matheson building at the southeast corner of Ellsworth Loop and Ocotillo roads. The completed development will bring 20,000 square feet of medical office space to the Downtown Core.

“We’ve completely grown out of the space

• See **Development** on page 8

Alex Matheson holds architectural renderings on the site where his new medical office building will rise in downtown Queen Creek. (Courtesy Alex Matheson)



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A San Tan Valley man was sentenced to 20 years in a fatal drunk-driving collision in Queen Creek. (PCSO)

Man sentenced in drunk-driving death

A 34-year-old San Tan Valley man has been sentenced in the 2024 drunk-driving death of a young girl in Queen Creek.

Jason A. Sanchez was sentenced to 20 years after being convicted of second-degree murder and one count of aggravated assault.

tinyurl.com/mr3ye8zy

Lamb announces bid

Former Pinal County Sheriff Mark Lamb has announced he is running to replace U.S. Rep. Andy Biggs in Congress.

Lamb declared his candidacy for Congressional District 5 during a November rally in Queen Creek.

tinyurl.com/47abau8cs

Town adds new positions

The Queen Parks and Recreation department is adding a new deputy director for recreation and a deputy director for parks. The parks job will be filled by reclassifying an existing position.

tinyurl.com/mvjknw9

COMMUNITY

Wheatley thanks council, community following leave

By Janet Perez

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

After a more than three-month leave of absence, Queen Creek Mayor Julia Wheatley presided over her first town council meeting since August with an emotional message.

"I'm so thrilled to be here and I've been so excited to come back and just from the bottom of my heart I just appreciate the support and the patience with our residents, our council, notably Vice Mayor (Leah) Martineau," Wheatley said at the top of the Dec. 17 council meeting as she visibly held back some tears. "It is so good to be back, and we were in good, good, good hands while I was gone."

Wheatley officially returned to town hall on Dec. 15. On Aug. 28, Wheatley announced that she was taking a leave of absence until late fall to focus on her family.

"What an incredible opportunity



Mayor Julia Wheatley returned from leave in December. (Town of Queen Creek)

(the leave) provided me to be able to just spend time with my family, reconnect with them. They've only ever known me their entire life as a council member or a mayor," Wheatley said. "It was once in a lifetime for me and my family, and it means so

much."

Wheatley has served on the Queen Creek Town Council since 2010 and as mayor since 2023. During her absence, Wheatley did not accept her mayoral stipend.

Martineau helmed council meetings and took on some mayoral duties, along with help from councilors, during Wheatley's leave.

"This council, our vice mayor, stepped up so much to support me and support my family, and it means the world and I am forever indebted and grateful," Wheatley added.

The Dec. 17 council meeting was the last of 2025. The first meeting of 2026 will take place on Wednesday, Jan. 21.

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DEVELOPMENT

Queen Creek council approved plans for medical offices

By Janet Perez

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The town is annexing about 5 acres of land that will be the site of four medical and general office buildings at the southwest corner of San Tan Boulevard and Ellsworth Road.

The Queen Creek Town Council approved a request by Frank West Capital LLC to annex the Maricopa County land at a recent meeting.

The developer also asked that the site be rezoned from rural to light com-

mercial and requested site-plan approval. Those requests were approved on a 5-0 vote by the council.

The annexation was part of the council's consent agenda, while the rezoning and site plan requests were on the public hearing agenda.

Frank West Capital plans to build four single-story buildings amounting to 30,644 square feet of general office and medical office space. The four buildings will consist of 60% medical offices and 40% general offices.

The site is bordered by San Tan Boulevard on the north and Ellsworth Road on the east. To the west and south of the site are residential homes and more vacant land along Ellsworth Road, according to the project narrative.

"This is in an interesting area. You've got rural residential to the west, but you've also got the Jordy commercial property to the east and Ellsworth Road, which is the big major road that

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DEVELOPMENT



The Vestar development includes large retailers such as Hobby Lobby, Ashley and Costco. (Vestar)

Vestar: Queen Creek Crossing now 100% leased

Shopping center owner and manager Vestar has announced the completion of Queen Creek Crossing, a 31-acre retail development that broke ground in 2022.

Anchored by Costco, Queen Creek Crossing spans more than 400,000 square feet of retail and dining space and is now 100% leased, Vestar stated in a press release.

"This center brings together a vibrant mix of retail, service and dining options that serve residents' daily needs, and we're proud to deliver a project that also contributes to the town's long-term economic growth and community vitality," Jeffrey Axtehl, executive vice president of development at Vestar, stated in the release.

Located at Ellsworth Road and East Fulton Parkway, Queen Creek Crossing sits within a five-mile radius of more than 150,000 residents.

In addition to Costco, other tenants include Ashley Furniture, Hobby Lobby, BJ's Restaurant and Brewhouse, Ono Hawaiian BBQ, Smoothie King, Sleep Number, Fleet Feet, Well Groomed Pets, Desert Financial Credit Union, Natural Pediatrics, Gallery Nails and Snip-Its.

The Habit Burger Grill is set to open in December, and U.S. Bank is projected to open in late 2026.

Queen Creek Crossing joins Vestar's other developments in the town, including Queen Creek Marketplace and Vineyard Towne Center.

ENERGY

Chamber leader advocates for energy policy

The Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce recently joined chambers from across the country in Washington, D.C., as part of a national advocacy trip organized by Chambers for Innovation and Clean Energy.

The visit brought together chamber executives from across the nation to engage with federal officials on policy discussions related to permit reform, infrastructure investment and long-term energy reliability, according to a chamber press release.

"We can't afford delays due to permitting red tape or because of political ideology. Choosing one type of production over another is not possible as we already face shortages of crucial parts and infrastructure limitations. Everything that exists now, we will need twice as much of," stated Chris Clark,

president and CEO of the Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce, in the release.

Over the next 10 years, according to the release, the nation's utilities will need to double their electrical output to keep up with growth, requiring production on a scale not seen before, and will take massive increases in every form of generation.

"Our goal is to ensure the voices of local businesses are heard at the national level," Clark stated in the release. "Reliable and affordable energy is essential to sustaining economic growth, supporting innovation and improving quality of life for our residents. By engaging directly with policymakers, we're helping shape solutions that ensure reliable and affordable electricity while maintaining economic opportunity."



Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Chris Clark was part of a group of national chamber leaders advocating for a clean energy policy (Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce)



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BUSINESS MOVES



INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

COMPLETED

1 Queen Creek Crossing Ellsworth Road and East Fulton Parkway

Shopping center owner and manager Vestar has announced the completion of Queen Creek Crossing, a 31-acre retail development that broke ground in 2022. Anchored by Costco, Queen Creek Crossing spans more than 400,000 square feet of retail and dining space and is now 100% leased.

COMING SOON

2 Habit Burger & Grill Queen Creek Crossing 9980 S. Ellsworth Road

Habit Burger & Grill is set to open soon at Queen Creek Crossing. The chain has locations throughout

the Valley. The eatery was founded in Santa Barbara, California in 1969. It is known for its chargrilled burgers, chicken and tuna all cooked-to-order over an open flame, according to the company's website. The location is currently hiring employees.

LIQUOR LICENSE

3 QuikTrip

The Queen Creek Town Council approved recommending a liquor license for a QuikTrip at Signal Butte and Germann roads to the Arizona Department of Liquor Licenses and Control. The business is seeking a Series 10 beer and wine store license. The convenience store is under construction with completion set for April 2028.

Habit

BURGER & GRILL

HABIT BIRGER GRILL

CONFERENCES

4 Elevate For Tomorrow ASU Polytechnic Campus 7001 E. Williams Field Road, Mesa

The Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce is hosting its annual Elevate for Tomorrow workforce development conference. The event is set for Friday, Jan. 9 at the ASU Polytechnic Campus, 7001 E. Williams Field Road in Mesa. Businesses can connect with more than 800 local high school juniors to expand awareness about their fields, skills and experience. Register at zurl.co/12gp4..

5 2026 East Valley Breakfast with the Governor Delta by Marriott Phoenix-Mesa 200 North Centennial Way, Mesa

The East Valley Chambers of Commerce Alliance and PHX East Valley Partnership will be hosting Gov. Katie Hobbs' annual State of the State Address starting at 8 a.m., Tuesday, Jan. 13 at the Delta by Marriott Phoenix-Mesa, 200 N. Centennial Way in Mesa. The address will be followed by an audience Q&A. Register at zurl.co/fxLd4.

6 Tri-City Economic Update The Avion Center 1733 E Northrop Blvd., Chandler

The Queen Creek, Chandler and Gilbert chambers of commerce will be hosting their Tri-City Economic Update starting at 7:30 a.m., Wednesday, Jan. 21 at the Avion Center, 1733 E. Northrop Blvd. in Chandler. Attendees will hear a regional economic update from Chris Mackay of the Greater Phoenix Economic Council. Register at zurl.co/ms7mp.

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Development

• From page 1

that we are at. We're right next door, actually, to that space (where The Matheson will be built). We're in the Queen Creek Office Park. It's just a few little medical offices and to the east of (The Matheson) parcel," Matheson said. "We need a lot more space, and that's kind of what prompted it in the beginning."

On Aug. 6, the Queen Creek Town Council gave its approvals for the site plan for The Matheson and rezoning the land from general commercial to Downtown Core. Matheson recused himself when the issue went before his commission for approval.

Downtown Core is exploding

The Matheson is part of the wave of commercial development taking place in Queen Creek's Downtown Core that will bring retail, restaurants, office space and even a multi-family home development.

Development in the area has jumped from 4,000 square feet in 2024 to 230,000 square feet today.

Downtown Development Manager Jennifer Lindley unveiled the stats during a recent Queen Creek Town Council meeting where she also presented an update on all projects planned, under construction and already opened in the area.

"This (Town Center Plan) has guided our vision for walkability, de-



The Matheson took design inspiration from the \$120 million mixed-use project, The Switchyard, now under construction in downtown. (Rendering courtesy of Creation)



The Matheson will be two stories and supply 20,000 square feet of medical office space to the Downtown Core. (Rendering courtesy of town of Queen Creek)

sign, quality and the mix of uses in our downtown. The town has invested in this area over the years, leading up to what we're seeing today," Lindley told the council. "From the Downtown Core zoning overlay district to the strategic property acquisition to the design and construction of our new connector roadways, the vision and plan has helped set the stage for the private investment that we're seeing in this area."

The increased development has

translated into about \$200 million in private investment in the Downtown Core.

"This is a clear sign of confidence from our development and business community," Lindley said. "Economic development is a marathon, not a sprint. It isn't always about those quick wins. It's a long-term strategy in order to create the sustainable development investment that we want. The planning, investments, vision and patience is beginning to take

shape in Queen Creek."

The following projects are currently in the works for downtown:

• Homewood Suites — Expected to open in early 2027, the Homewood Suites is on East Maya Road. When completed, the four-story hotel will have 124 rooms. It will be the town's second hotel.

• QC Accounting — The business at 22237 S. Ellsworth Road was a recipient of the town's former façade-improvement program. It has since acquired property to the north of its location, and it has expanded to 5,000 square feet of office space. The expansion is expected to open soon.

• The Sacred Pint — Now open, The Sacred Pint is on the site of what was once the town's first Circle K, which went through several iterations over the years. The 2,587-square-foot taproom is at 22020 S. Ellsworth Road.

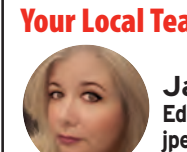
• The Perch Development — The 62,093 square feet of commercial development includes a brewery and additional retail/restaurant space. The Perch portion of the development, on Munoz Street between Ellsworth and Ellsworth Loop roads, is scheduled to open in late 2026.

• Circle K — Long seen as an eyesore in the downtown area, the old Circle K building has been torn down and is being replaced with a more modern design at 21895 S. Ellsworth Road. The new store will be about

• See **Downtown** on page 31

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Your smartphone buzzes with an alert: Your budgeting app has spotted an unusual spending pattern and suggests transferring \$50 from your savings account to your checking account. Later that day, a robo-advisor automatically rebalances your investment portfolio. Welcome to the age of artificial intelligence (AI) in personal finance, where technology is reshaping how we manage money.

What AI can do for your wallet. From tracking every latte to forecasting next month's bills, AI-powered tools are making financial management more accessible than ever. Some apps categorize transactions automatically, while other platforms offer conversational financial advice through text messages. These tools can monitor your credit score, suggest budget adjustments and even negotiate lower bills on services like cable and internet.

The investing landscape has transformed as well. Robo-advisors use algorithms to build diversified portfolios, automatically rebalance holdings and apply strategies to minimize tax bills. Educational tools powered by AI can explain complex concepts through interactive

games and simple question-and-answer formats, making financial literacy more accessible.

Where AI falls short. Here's what the algorithms can't do: understand what truly matters to you.

AI doesn't know whether you value sustainable investing over maximum returns. It can't weigh the emotional complexity of saving for a child's education versus retiring early. When sudden illness strikes or a job change upends your plans, AI lacks the context and empathy to guide you through those human moments.

Technology can crunch numbers brilliantly, but it can't offer wisdom. It can't replace human judgment, experience or ethical reasoning. Robo-advisors' predetermined algorithms may not suit investors with complex financial needs like estate planning or comprehensive tax planning.

The human touch still matters. This is where human financial advisors remain indispensable. They provide what technology can't:

- **Long-term perspective:** Help you maintain focus when markets get volatile and emotions run high

- **Goal coordination:** Balance competing priorities, help partners merge their financial visions and remind you of goals you've tucked away and didn't know still mattered
- **Accountability:** Keep you on track with your financial strategy through life's inevitable changes
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Research validates it: Those who regularly work with a financial advisor and have a financial strategy are more likely to feel optimistic about their financial future than those who manage finances on their own, according to 2025 research from Edward Jones and Morning Consult.

Find the right balance. The future likely lies in a hybrid approach: combining data-driven AI insights with the human wisdom of a financial advisor who understands your values, priorities and life's inevitable curveballs. Think of AI as a powerful calculator and your financial advisor as the mathematician who knows which equations to use.

As these technologies evolve, the key is treating AI as a tool, not a guide.

Stay curious about what technology can do for your finances. Stay critical of its limitations. And remember: What matters most in your financial life is something only you can define.



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Queen Creek needs protected bikeways

From 2,500 residents in 1990 to nearly 90,000 today, we know that Queen Creek is no longer a small country town. Yet, we still want country comfort alongside city convenience, but don't build our infrastructure for convenient and safe mobility.

With most of our workforce commuting out of town, \$200 million invested over the past decade and congestion remaining the top resident complaint, it is clear that we cannot pave our way out of traffic troubles.

Queen Creek's general plan promises a "multimodal transportation system," but in reality, cars are the only practical mode.

Sure, road projects include bike lanes that are just a strip of white paint next to cars speeding by at 50 mph. Paint is not protection. It does not stop a distracted driver. It does not keep bikers safe from potential harm. Thus, it does not extend the freedom of mobility to those who can't drive.



Nate Hunt (Submitted photo/Lola Hunt)

Ask yourself: Would you feel safe with your child biking on these lanes? If the answer is no, then our transportation system is wholly insufficient.

As long as our "network" consists of scary shoulders on high-speed arterials, residents will continue to drive, even for short trips, further clogging our roads. The solution? Prioritizing physically separated, practically protected cycling infrastructure when selecting and designing transportation projects, and

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planning for functional mobility, not just recreational riding.

We must pivot away from eternally adding lanes and instead work to separate cyclists with curbs or bollards, fostering a bikeable environment. We have the space, we have the budget; we just need the political momentum.

If we want a truly livable town, our bikeways must be suitable for all residents on any number of wheels. We have the policy on paper; it's time to put it into practice on our pavement.

Nate Hunt
Queen Creek

Nate Hunt is a lifelong Queen Creek resident pursuing a degree in sustainability and urban planning at Arizona State University. Please send your comments about this article to AzOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.

SPEAK UP

Proposed funeral home in Queen Creek

"Should look less industrial, with stained glass windows in the front side of the building. Make it nice for families." - Jennifer Sos via Next Door

"When I first moved here, I thought it strange there was only one funeral home around. There need to be more. Do it!" - Renee Walker via Next Door

"Great business to add to our city. Beautiful building for that corner." - Victoria Young via Next Door

Pinall County land annexed

"Too many people already.... new developments

should pay for increased demand." - D and C Davison via Next Door

"Time to slow down all building until the infrastructure catches up with massive population growth." - Elaine Giles via Next Door

"We also need for our elected officials to stop dragging the anchor on building up our needed infrastructure and start hitting up large corporations for their fair share of the needed funding. Time for some pay for play here in such a vibrant business potential. We have a lot to offer in highly qualified workers, transportation infrastructure and favorable living opportunities. Time for Arizonans to get off bended knee and start demanding a better cut of the pie. Let's get some!" - Everett Allen via Next Door

"Should have done STV, then QC would be a

huge city." - Barbara Rhoades via Next Door

"More traffic." - Jeff Friedel via Next Door

"When I moved here 12 years ago, I was moving to a quiet rural area. That is no longer true. There is too much of everything!! The noise levels at all hours of the day and night are deafening, vehicles racing up the road with no regard for hour of the day. I used to enjoy sitting outdoors, I don't at all anymore." - Elaine Laventure via Next Door

"Need to stop Queen Creek from annexing Pinal County land as it takes away potential Pinal County tax base." - Allen Eckert via Next Door

"We have enough wrecks without more commercial building. No no no." - Norm Whisman via Next Door

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EDUCATION

Queen Creek teachers awarded grants from Fiesta Sports Foundation



During the Fiesta Sports Foundation Wishes for Teachers Draft Day, 540 educators, including 14 from Queen Creek, were each surprised with \$2,500 classroom grants. (Jon Mouer/Fiesta Sports Foundation)

A foundation has granted the wishes of 540 educators in Arizona this year, including 14 teachers at Queen Creek schools.

In its 10th year, the Palo Verde Fiesta Sports Foundation Wishes for Teachers recently awarded \$2,500 grants that went to educators at 404 different schools, covering 142 school districts and 31 new cities for a total of \$1.5 million.

"Behind every unique classroom wish is an Arizona teacher with a vision to create a more meaningful learning experience for their students. Helping honor, support and celebrate our Arizona educators in every corner of the state has been the core of Wishes for Teachers for 10 years," Fiesta Sports Foundation Executive Director and CEO Erik Moses stated in a press release. "It takes a collective effort to provide resources

that these teachers wouldn't otherwise have."

The Queen Creek teachers and their classroom wishes are:

- Kelly Anderson, a third through eighth-grade gifted education teacher at EDUPRIZE Schools-San Tan Valley Campus, will integrate new technology such as a MacBook, 3D printer and robotics materials to foster creativity.

- Stacy Benton, first-grade general education teacher at EDUPRIZE Schools-San Tan Valley Campus, will add a digital whiteboard to make lessons more interactive and engaging.

- Hollie Bush, a sixth-grade math and science teacher at EDUPRIZE Schools-San Tan Valley Campus, will upgrade the sound system for school theater productions to improve performance.

• See **Grants** on page 13

Grants

• From page 12

mance quality.

• Victor Castruita, a seventh through eighth-grade Spanish and English language learner teacher at J.O. Combs Middle School, will provide flexible seating and classroom supplies that support bilingual learning and student comfort.

• Kristen Culley, a ninth through 12th-grade digital photography, journalism and film teacher at Queen Creek High School, will upgrade photography and journalism programs with a professional-grade camera and lens.

• Christy Cunico, a seventh through eighth-grade counseling teacher at Casteel Junior High School, will design a mindfulness room with soft seating, lighting, art, books and sensory tools for emotional regulation.

• Angie Fort, a fifth-grade English language arts and social studies teach-

er at EDUPRIZE Schools-San Tan Valley Campus, will replace outdated furniture with flexible seating that encourages movement and collaboration.

• Lila Guzman, a seventh through eighth-grade family and consumer science teacher at J.O. Combs Middle School, will purchase kitchen ranges, surge protectors and stove parts for culinary and sewing classes.

• Brittani Hinson, a K through sixth-grade special education teacher at Auxier Elementary School, will furnish a new special-education classroom with flexible seating, a sensory area and task boxes.

• Christina Madril, a K through sixth-grade visual arts teacher at Cortina Elementary School, will expand art education resources and materials for students across all grade levels.

• Kelly McGregor, a kindergarten general education teacher at Benjamin Franklin Charter School-Power Campus, will provide manipulatives such as puzzles and math games that promote

collaboration and creative play.

• Mackenzie Mills, a K through sixth-grade music teacher at American Leadership Academy-San Tan Valley, will expand the music program with new instruments and hands-on materials for all grade levels.

• Andre Mossman, a seventh through 12th-grade art teacher at American Leadership Academy-Ironwood, will launch an animation program with light tables and cameras to connect students with industry professionals.

• Kristina Tandler, a K through sixth-grade social emotional learning teacher at Ranch Elementary School, will add sensory tools, flexible seating and snacks to support student comfort, focus and engagement.

With the support of Palo Verde, the Fiesta Sports Foundation has donated more than \$9.7 million to Arizona classrooms over the last decade through the program, benefiting more than 3,100 teachers and more than 1 million students, the release continued.

“We’re grateful for the dedication and creativity Arizona teachers bring to their classrooms every day. These grants aim to remove barriers, provide resources students need to thrive and help educators turn their visions into reality,” stated Jennifer Spina, vice president of the Palo Verde Generating Station, in the release.

The teachers are informed about their awards during the Fiesta Sports Foundation Wishes for Teachers Draft Day, which took place earlier this month. On draft day, celebrities, community partners and volunteers make surprise phone calls and notifications to the recipients, who are selected in a random drawing.

In addition to the \$2,500 classroom grants, recipients are invited to attend the 2025 Rate Bowl on Dec. 26, where they will be honored on the field in a halftime presentation. They will also be invited to march in the Vrbo Fiesta Bowl Parade on Jan. 3.



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COUNTY/STATE

Mesa Gateway Airport welcomes first flight to Virgin Galactic SpaceShip

By Dan McCarthy
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

A recent landing at Mesa Gateway Airport marked a major step in Virgin Galactic's plans for space-ship transport flights.

"This was the first time bringing our launch vehicle to our SpaceShip Factory in Mesa," Aleanna Crane, vice president of communications for Virgin Galactic, said.

Virgin Galactic, an aerospace and space travel company, signed a long-term lease in 2022 for a new final assembly manufacturing facility in Mesa for its next-generation Delta class spaceships.

The facility is capable of producing up to six spaceships per year and will bring hundreds "of highly skilled aerospace engineering and manufacturing jobs to the area," according to Virgin Atlantic.

Crane said VMS Eve is the method Virgin Galactic will use to transport new spaceships to launch facilities at Spaceport America in New Mexico.

"So, with our first ship expected to be finished next year, it was time to begin familiarizing our pilots and operations teams with Mesa Gateway Airport and operating from our facility here," Crane said.

The company has been receiving major parts and subassemblies from suppliers which are being integrated into the build of its spaceship at the new Mesa facility, she said.

"Our spaceship final assembly factory is key to accelerating the

production of our Delta fleet, enabling a rapid increase in flight capacity that will drive our revenue growth," Virgin Galactic CEO Michael Colglazier said in a 2022 release.

"We're thrilled to expand into the greater Phoenix area which is home to outstanding aerospace talent – and we look forward to growing our team and fleet at our new facility."

An important step occurred Nov. 17 when Virgin Galactic launch vehicle Eve landed at Mesa Gateway Airport in Mesa.

Virgin Galactic motherships will ferry completed spaceships to Spaceport America for flight tests and commercial operation.

Spaceships will not land in Mesa, though.

"Not in the way you're probably thinking. While you will see Eve more often between now and when our new SpaceShip is complete, our spaceships themselves won't be landing here in Mesa," Crane said.

"Part of the beauty of our space-flight system is that after re-entering the atmosphere, we return our astronauts to the same runway from where they took off. And that's at Spaceport America."

What people in the Valley will be able to see, she said, is "the spaceship taking off from Mesa Gateway, carried under the giant wing of our beautiful launch vehicle, Eve, on its way to New Mexico."

Airport

• From page 15

“And that is exactly what it looks like at the beginning of every space-flight we make from Spaceport.”

Crane said the company will coordinate with the airport when making flights to Mesa.

“It really is a sight, watching a rocket-powered spaceship, held securely between the twin fuselages of Eve, lift off for the first time. And then, not too long after that, she’ll return to pick up our second spaceship.”

Virgin Galactic Launch Vehicle Eve lands at Mesa Gateway Airport in Mesa on Nov. 17. (Virgin Galactic)



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Trailblazer

Karen McLendon

Entrepreneurship runs in Karen McLendon's family.

Her mother owned two hair salons, and after marrying her husband, Haskell, in 1964, the couple eventually opened two pet grooming salons in Tempe and Chandler.

In 1988, the couple made their move to Queen Creek and less than 10 years later in 1996, they opened the town's first state-licensed assisted living care home. But it wasn't easy.

"They met four different times to talk business with the town and were told three times (that) Queen Creek will never have a need for senior care," stated Yvonne Dudley, one of the McLendons' two daughters, in her Queen Creek Hometown Hero nomination of her mother. "Karen said, 'I know there isn't much out here right now, but can't you see in five or 10 years it's really going to be a busy place here in Queen Creek?'"

On the fourth try, the couple got the OK to open A Caring Manor and later founded a second location.

Haskell passed away 22 years ago, leaving Karen to operate the business by herself. She has since handed over operations to her daughters.

"Providing comfort to people in their final years has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my life," Karen said.

Name: Karen McLendon

Age: 82

Business Name: A Caring Manor Assisted Living

What I like most about living here: When I moved here almost 40 years ago, Queen Creek really was a very small rural town, and that's why I loved it. Today, it has grown so much that it no longer feels small to me, but it has become a very nice place to live with friendly people and a strong sense of community.

What I do: I'm retired after opening and managing two assisted living homes, A Caring Manner in Rancho Jardines, and another in Montelena. Both are still managed by my two daughters. Caring for others has always been close to my heart. Providing comfort to people in their final years has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my life.

Professional background highlights: I spent many years as a small-business owner in the pet industry. I was trained to groom dogs at 16 and eventually bought Lois and Jane's grooming shop in Tempe. Later, we expanded to Chandler, and we renamed our business Pet Concerns, and owned it for 20 years before transitioning to elder care. In 1996, my husband and I opened Queen Creek's very first licensed residential care home for seniors, A Caring Manor, located at 18642 E. Cloud Road. Fourteen years later, I opened a second home located at 20338 E. Via Del Oro, and today, each of my daughters, Yvonne and Alisha, manage a home.

What I like most about what I do: Knowing that we've created places where people feel at home, where care feels personal, and local employees can make a real difference in someone's life, that's what community is all about,

What does being nominated for this category mean to you? That I can be recognized for the years of service that I put forth into the community.

What do you think you bring to the local community that makes it better? There are many new large facilities coming into Queen Creek that can be less personal. I have provided a small individual care homes that supply vital support for seniors, open more job opportunities for local community members, and create a tender social bond with residents and family.

What would you tell people about why it's important to make a difference in Queen Creek? It's important to make a difference and preserve its family-friendly vibe

Changes I'd like to see in this area: A few more finer dine-in restaurants, and possibly wider streets for roads such as Rittenhouse and Ocotillo. How about an art school and a dance studio?

Favorite community cause & why: Our EMTs and fire department are there when it matters most providing life-saving help and reassurance to everyone in need.

My family: My family means the world to me. They are my left and my right hand.

My interests and hobbies: Crafts diamond paintings, gift baskets, floral arrangements, also reading and decorating my home.



The trait(s) I admire in others: I have always admired people with patience, and people who can sing beautifully.

People who inspired me (and how): My mother inspired me always. She was capable of doing anything she set her mind to. She owned two hair salons at the same time, and my father with his wonderful vocabulary and suave fashion sense, showed me how individuality can shine.

My guiding philosophy: Learn as much as you can about what you love.

My advice to today's youth: Designate time each day to turn off your devices, pray always, and stay close to your Heavenly Father. Those quiet moments will guide you through life better than anything else.

The Queen Creek Independent is pleased to announce Karen McLendon as the January 2026 Hometown Hero bestowed in the category of Trailblazer. The Queen Creek Independent along with East Valley Institute of Technology and the Queen Creek Olive Mill salute Mrs. McLendon as this month's Queen Creek Hometown Heroes Awards recipient.



*Congratulations
Mrs. McLendon
from*



NOMINATE YOUR QUEEN CREEK HOMETOWN HERO

Hometown Heroes Awards is a celebration of individuals for their local achievements and distinguished contributions for the community of Queen Creek.

ALWAYS SEEKING NOMINATIONS!

Email your nominee's name and contact info to **aznews@iniusa.org** or Call **623-972-6101**

Subject Line: Queen Creek Hometown Heroes Awards

February issue: Deadline is Friday, January 9th

If you know of a deserving person who lives and/or works in Queen Creek, call or email us today!

Nominations Needed For:

Veteran: Former military person who continues to serve within the community

Emergency Responder: Person who steps forward during an emergency

Entrepreneur: An individual who launches an idea into a new business and serves the community

Lifetime Achievement: Long standing community member who has consistently stepped forward and exemplified a passion for giving back to the Queen Creek community within any category

Leader of Tomorrow (17 or younger): Youth who shows leadership and involvement within the community

Congratulations 2025-2026 Queen Creek Hometown Heroes Awards Winners

Trailblazer: Karen McLendon, Founder, A Caring Manor Assisted Living

Educator: Jarrod Posner, Teacher and Coach, Benjamin Franklin Charter School - Crismon Campus

Volunteer: Julie Hartman, Volunteer, Town of Queen Creek, Queen Creek Chamber, Central Christian Church

Healthcare: Amy Webster, Founder, Hope Heart Heal Medical Nonprofit

Spiritual Leader: Curt McReynolds, Campus Pastor, CCV Queen Creek

Mentor/Coach: Jake Allen, Teacher/Coach, Crismon High School and Co-Founder, MAW Wrestling Academy

Community Cheerleader: Patty Campbell, Governing Board Member- Queen Creek Unified School District

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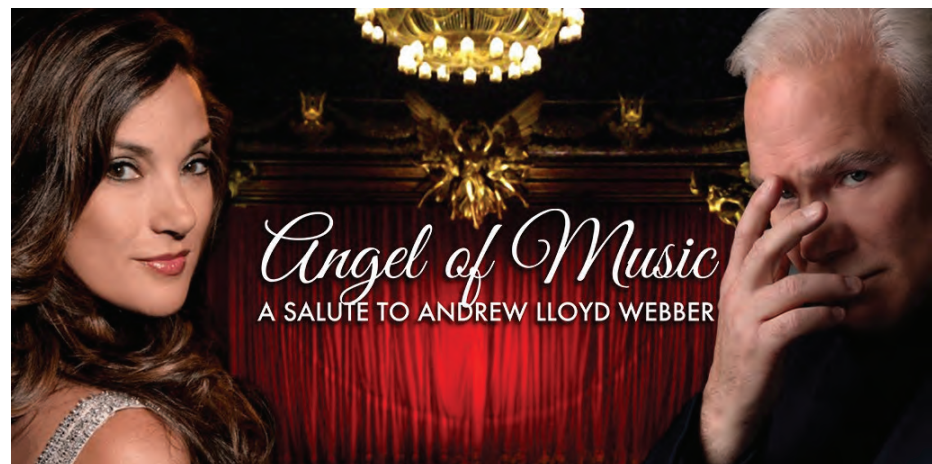
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THINGS TO DO

On with the show



"Angel of Music" (Gold Canyon Arts Council)

**New stage shows are
coming to area this winter**

By Janet Perez

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

For lovers of stage musicals and concerts, the new year is bringing an exciting slate of shows for rock, jazz, country and Broadway standards.

Residents of Queen Creek have access to performing arts centers in town as well as surrounding areas.

From Jan. 22-24, the Queen Creek Performing Arts Center, 22149 E. Ocotillo Road, will present the "The Importance of Being Earnest" by Oscar Wilde. This enduring comedy satirizes London society's rigid social norms and hypocrisy. The play revolves around two young men who both lead double lives to escape their social obligations and enjoy a freer and more frivolous lifestyle. Tickets are \$17.50 for adults and \$15.50 for children and seniors.

The Chandler Performing Arts Center, 250 N. Arizona Ave., is hosting the Lunar New Year Gala: Rhythm of China 2026 at 6 p.m., Jan. 17. Presented by Green Apple

Art Academy, this year's gala brings together dancers, young artists and professional instructors to present a showcase themed to China's celebrations of the new lunar year. Tickets are \$22, with VIP tickets going for \$37.

Tribute bands are always popular and the Higley Center for the Performing Arts, 4132 E. Pecos Road in Gilbert, will be featuring Hotel California - "A Salute to the Eagles" starting at 7 p.m., Feb. 16. The tribute is billed as the "only show to have ever received 'Official Authorization' to perform the Eagles catalog of music.

The Gold Canyon Arts Council is wrapping up its season over the coming months. In "Angel of Music," Broadway veterans Franc D'ambrosio and Glory Crampton celebrate the music of Andrew Lloyd Webber and his musicals featuring songs from his most-acclaimed shows. The program starts at 7 p.m., Jan. 9 at the Gold Canyon United Methodist Church, 6640 S. Kings Ranch Road in Gold Canyon. Ticket prices range from \$5 for students to \$35 for non-council members.

• See **Shows** on page 19

Shows

• From page 18

There are more shows coming to the southeast Valley over the winter months.

Queen Creek Performing Arts Center

Hooray For Hollywood

2 p.m.

Jan. 17

Hollywood's greatest musical hits featuring cinema classics such as "A Star is Born," "Frozen," "Flashdance," "Dirty Dancing," "The Wizard of Oz" and more.

BYU Living Legends

Jan. 30

Celebrating the native cultural heritage of North and South America and the South Pacific, Living Legends presents a vibrant spectacle of energy, music, costume and dance.

Fleetwood Mac: Go Your Own

Way

2 p.m.

Feb. 7

A tribute to one of the most popular groups of the 1970's. Fleetwood Mac: Go Your Own Way features the best of their most famous hits.

Johnny and Dolly: Together At Last!

2 p.m.

Feb. 14

Celebrate two legends of country music in one concert in this brand-new production starring two of the most sought-after tribute artists in America. Scott Moreau is Johnny Cash and Karen Hester is Dolly Parton.

Diva Legends: Songs From the Greatest Female Singers of All Time

2 p.m.

Feb. 21

Celebrate the hit music of female vocal icons such as Celine Dion, Barbra Streisand, Cher, Aretha Franklin,

Donna Summer, Whitney Houston and more.

Legally Blonde: The Musical

Feb. 26-28

Sorority President Elle Woods is anxiously awaiting a marriage proposal when her boyfriend, Warner, breaks up instead. Elle devises a plan to follow Warner to Harvard and prove that she is more than just a pretty face.

The Chandler Performing Arts Center

Sixtiesmania - A Journey Through The Sixties

3 p.m.

Jan. 11

The nostalgic adventure spans the thrills of the Beatles' British Invasion to the legendary anthems that defined Woodstock. Sixtiesmania recreates the iconic sounds of beloved artists, including The Rolling Stones, Creedence Clearwater Revival, The Doors, The Monkees, The Beach Boys, The

Kinks, Cream and many more.

Kirk Whalum: Songs of Change

7:30 p.m.

Jan. 15

With a dynamic blend of jazz, gospel and R&B, Kirk Whalum delivers a program featuring "Love Is the Answer," "Keep On Pushing," "Let It Be" and "What's Goin' On."

CSO Pops: Jordan Bluth Sings Sinatra & Bennett

3 p.m.

Jan. 25

Local crooner Jordan Bluth brings back favorite Frank Sinatra and Tony Bennett songs — some of the great jazz music from the mid-20th century. The Chandler Symphony provides the backup,

Ailey II

7:30 p.m.

Feb. 6

Ailey II is a modern dance company founded by the incomparable dancer Alvin Ailey that provides a

• See **Shows** on page 20

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Shows

• From page 19

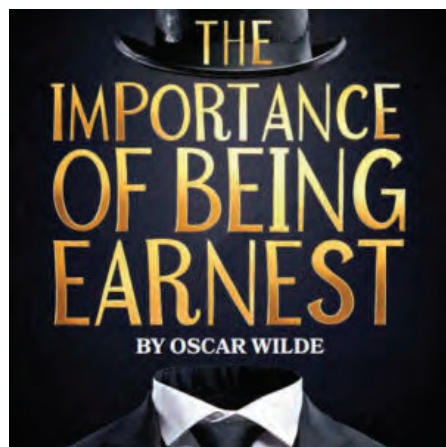
platform for diverse artists to share the joy and beauty of dance with audiences worldwide.

Less is More an Evening with Joss Stone
7:30 p.m.
Feb. 7

She blends heartfelt vocals with a tight, rhythmic band, bringing songs such as “Tell Me ‘Bout It,” “You Had Me” and “Right to Be Wrong” to life. Her shows balance energy with smooth delivery, offering a modern take on soul that honors tradition while showcasing her style.

Sons of Serendip
7:30 p.m.
Feb. 14

Billboard-charting, classical-cross-over quartet Sons of Serendip won the hearts of fans and judges alike as finalists on “America’s Got Talent.”



“The Importance of Being Earnest” (Queen Creek Performing Arts Center)

Experience their arrangements of songs such as “Somewhere Only We Know” and “Hallelujah” in a romantic evening of music.

Showtime Series-Walkin’ the Line: A Tribute to Johnny Cash
3 p.m.

Feb. 14

Relive the amazing songs of John-

ny Cash in this tribute to the Man in Black. Hear all of Cash’s biggest hits, such as “Folsom Prison Blues,” “Ring of Fire,” “Boy Named Sue” and “Walk the Line.”

Higley Center for the Performing Arts

Fleetwood Mask
7:30 p.m.
Jan. 10

Fleetwood Mask is the only tribute band in the Americas endorsed by Fleetwood Mac-founding member Mick Fleetwood.

Frankie Avalon
7 p.m.
Jan. 19

With a career that spans more than five decades in music, television and motion pictures, Frankie Avalon has certainly made the transition from teen idol to legendary star.

Toast-The Ultimate Bread Experience
7 p.m.

Feb. 2

Toast is tribute band to the ’70s hit band, Bread. Toast presents a “feel-good” show that includes all of Bread’s top hits.

Gold Canyon Arts Council

The Face Vocal Band
7 p.m.
Feb. 20

This a cappella all-vocal rock band comes from Boulder, Colorado. They use only voices, including a vocal drummer, to perform popular songs without instruments or special effects. They first appeared nationally in 2009 as one of eight original groups on NBC’s premiere season of “The Sing-Off.”

Please send your comments about this article to AsOpinions@iniusa.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines. Janet Perez can be reached at jperez@iniusa.org.



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JAN. 10 & 24

Queen Creek Family Market

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JAN. 17

Citrus Clinic

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Queen Creek Library, Zane Grey Room
21802 S. Ellsworth Road

JAN. 21

Family Art Hangout

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6:30-7:15 p.m.
Queen Creek Library
21802 South Ellsworth Road



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A new wastewater capacity fee will be paid by new residential and business construction. As much as 70% of the town's projected growth during the next 10 years will come from new single-family homes. (Special to Independent Newsmedia/Arianna Graine)

Fees

- From page 1

businesses to pay their fair share of the infrastructure that either exists that they're tapping into or that we will be building as a result of the demand that they're putting on the system," Queen Creek Deputy Town Manager and CFO Scott McCarty told the council.

The wastewater capacity fees will increase from \$2,901 to \$6,144 for new structures.

Wastewater capacity fees were last updated in 2019. The reason for the proposed increase is the expansion of the existing wastewater treatment plant.

The Greenfield Wastewater Treatment Plant in Gilbert is a community partnership among Mesa, Gilbert and Queen Creek.

"The proposed 10-year infrastructure improvement plan ... identified a total of \$138.2 million of infrastructure needs. Of this amount, \$101.4 million is for growth and \$36.8 million for non-

growth," according to a staff report.

The wastewater capacity fees will pay \$73.2 million in growth-related infrastructure over the next 10 years. The proposed revenue would be added to the \$28.2 million cash balance currently in the capacity fee fund, covering the \$101.4 million of growth-related wastewater project costs, the staff report stated.

The non-growth portion will be paid through wastewater revenue from monthly billings.

"On the last fee update prior to this one, (the wastewater capacity fee) actually came down. The reason it came down was because at that particular time we weren't adding capacity to the treatment plant," McCarty said. "And that's conversely the reason that the fees are going up. This time it's mainly the addition of (2 million gallons per day) of capacity to the plant to meet the growth over the next 10 years from mainly homes and multifamily units."

• See **Wastewater** on page 23



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 NEWS MEDIA

Wastewater

• From page 22

In calculating the increase, staff found that 70% of the growth projected over the next 10 years is expected to come from single-family homes, 17% from multifamily complexes, 5% from commercial businesses and about 8% from industrial companies, McCarty said.

“When we set the fee, we were trying to have that corollary of the reason we’re building the fee and who should be paying the fee,” McCarty said. “We’ve got 70% of the people are coming from single-family homes. They should be paying roughly about 70% of the cost of the new infrastructure that they’re tapping into.”

Expansion of the Greenfield plant, which is scheduled to conclude in March 2031, will support future growth over the next eight

The town’s wastewater is treated at the Greenfield Wastewater Treatment Plant located in Gilbert, a community partnership among Mesa, Gilbert and Queen Creek. Increasing the wastewater capacity fees will allow for expansion of the plant to take on Queen Creek growth. (Courtesy town of Gilbert)



years. To handle all the growth over the next 10 years, another wastewater treatment facility will need to be built, likely on the east side of town.

In introducing the proposal during the council’s Oct. 1 meeting, McCarty said a typical equiv-

alent residential unit sends 168 gallons per day in water flow to the treatment plant.

With the number of equivalent residential units expected to grow by 14,600 in 10 years, the total number of daily wastewater gallons sent for treatment will reach 2.5

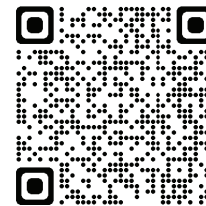
million.

“We don’t have 2.5 million gallons of treatment capacity costs in this plan. We have 2 million, which basically is the expansion to the Greenfield plant,” McCarty said during the Oct. 1 meeting. “When we reset the fee in the next two or three years, we’ll pick up that expansion beyond Greenfield in the next fee update.”

The new fees will be effective Jan. 5, 2026. A delay in implementing the new fees would have cost the town up to \$7.7 million in revenue.

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DEVELOPMENT

Council approves funeral home project

By Janet Perez

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Queen Creek Town Council has given the go-ahead to plans to build a funeral home on 2.72 acres on the northwest corner of Ocotillo and Hawes roads.

SCI Shared Resources, which does business at SCI Funeral Services, requested that a 0.14-acre parcel currently in Maricopa County be annexed, and the entire 2.72 acres site be rezoned from rural to light commercial to build a single-story, 7,630-square-foot funeral home and associated parking.

The project site is surrounded by an existing residential community to the west, the Queen Creek Wash to the north, Ocotillo Road and residential estate lots to the south, and Hawes Road



The proposed funeral home will be built by SCI Shared Resources, which does business at SCI Funeral Services on the northwest corner of Ocotillo and Hawes roads. (Town of Queen Creek)

and the Queen Creek Wash to the east.

At a recent meeting, the council unanimously voted to annex the parcel as part of the consent agenda and gave rezoning and site plan approvals for the overall project after a public hearing.

One member of the public, Jake Ellsworth,

spoke in opposition to the project. He said the proposed business is too close to the intersection and would add to already existing traffic congestion. He claimed that neighbors did not have an opportunity to speak out on the project.

"If there is an option to buy more

time, I can promise you I can get you guys 200 different people calling in and opposing to this because there's a lot of opposition," Ellsworth said. "Everybody's just kind of confused on when these meetings are, or they moved, or

• See **Funeral Home** on page 25



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Funeral Home

• From page 25

hey, is this a final hearing,” he asked. “The first time a bunch of neighbors showed up is kind of just the company putting on their own little thing.”

Sean Lake of the law firm of Pew and Lake, which represents SCI, countered that they had mailed notices to all area residents about a public meeting held in June, which was attended by six people.

The public also had an opportunity to speak out during the Nov. 12 planning commission meeting when the site plan and rezoning were recommended for approval. No member of the public spoke at the commission meeting.

“There were a number of questions regarding the funeral home operations. One of the biggest was with regard to any crematory operations occurring here. This will not have that at this location,” senior town planner Les Johnson told the council. “There were really no

(other) concerns identified by those in attendance.”

The town received one email in opposition about two months ago from a resident living about a mile west of the site, Johnson said.

Focusing on the issue of road congestion, Council Member Travis Padilla asked what additional traffic the funeral home could bring.

“Traffic for this type of an operation is typically off-peak-hour type traffic,” Lake said. “People coming during the day to services, smaller gathering type services. This is not going to be a location where you’re going to have a monster funeral that I think this community has seen. And those are typically held at religious buildings like a stake center, where you would have those big, huge facilities that would cause a lot of traffic problems. They just don’t have the spacing or capacity to have that type of a funeral.”

Lake said the funeral home has a capacity to hold 100 people.

Padilla also pointed to the long-time interest the community has had in the site and fears of what could go in there.

“One of the sentiments that I get from local residents nearby this corner is that they will be excited to have that piece of property improved,” Padilla said. “That’s something that they have wanted to see for some time, and we appreciate anything that would be done there.”

Council Member Robin Benning said the funeral home was “certainly a lot better than some of the other applications that we’ve seen for this parcel, and for that reason I’m generally supportive of this.”

“While I might have hoped for a different business, it doesn’t really matter because we are a property-rights state, and at the end of the day, what I really don’t believe is that anybody would have purchased that property to build a single-family residence that close to one of the busier intersections,” Benning said.

In her first council meeting since returning from a leave of absence, Mayor Julia Wheatley said a low-intensity project such as the funeral home was likely one of the best options for the location.

“There are many other things that could go on this corner — drive-thrus, gas stations, car washes — all of these high-intensity uses. I do see this as a low-intensity use,” Wheatley said. “Where the alternative is leaving it residential, it just doesn’t make sense on that parcel. It’s one of the reasons it sat like that for so many years. So, I do understand the reasoning behind the rezoning, and I think given its use, it makes sense.”

Branded as Dignity Memorial, SCI has several funeral homes in the Valley, but this will be its first location in Queen Creek.

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NEIGHBORS

Local girl receives state gift for National Adoption Month



As part of National Adoption Month, 12-year-old Queen Creek girl Zoey McClellan was surprised by Arizona State Treasurer Kimberly Yee with a \$529 contribution to open an AZ529 Education Savings Plan. (Office of the Arizona State Treasurer)

A 12-year-old Queen Creek girl has found her forever family and received a financial leg up toward her future education.

In celebration of National Adoption Month in November, Arizona Treasurer Kimberly Yee recently surprised a local adoptive family by contributing \$529 to open an AZ529 Education Savings Plan for Zoey McClellan, according to a press release.

This gift was made in partnership with Hope & A Future, a nonprofit organization that has been supporting children in Arizona's foster care system since 2004.

Zoey's parents have four adopted children, as well as four foster children under their care.

"We are so grateful for this incredible gift and for recognizing National Adoption Month in such a meaningful way," Zoey's mother, Jenn McClellan, stated in the release. "This contribution doesn't just support Zoey's future, it gives her the chance to dream beyond high school, to imagine college or any path she chooses. It brings hope, stability and the belief that there's something more ahead. For kids like Zoey, that kind of encouragement means everything."

Zoey dreams of becoming a veterinarian.

Yee was joined by former Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer and AZ529 Advisory Committee Member Charlie Shields, himself an adoptive parent, who doubled the contribution for Zoey.

"National Adoption Month is a wonderful time to celebrate the families who open their hearts and homes to precious children in need, giving them a forever home," Yee stated in the release. "Families like Zoey's have already taken significant steps toward building a brighter future for their children with a pathway to accomplish their dreams."

"By investing in this child's future through the

AZ529 Education Savings Plan, we are recognizing all of the remarkable adoptive families in our state, while also sharing the important message that every child should have endless opportunities for their future education."

There are currently more than 10,000 children in Arizona's foster care system, and each year, more than 800 of them age out without permanent families or needed support.

"It's a meaningful investment in Zoey's future and a powerful reminder of what community support can achieve," stated Michael Brewer, president and CEO of Hope & A Future, in the release. "With over 10,000 children currently in Arizona's foster care system, and only 3% of those who age out ever graduating from college, we must continue finding ways to uplift these youth. Every effort counts, and today's gesture shows how we can all play a role in helping children like Zoey thrive."

The AZ529 Education Savings Plan offers a tax-free approach to setting money aside for college, community college, vocational training, trade school and other educational avenues for high school graduates. Arizona residents can receive a dollar-for-dollar state tax deduction for contributions made to an AZ529 account each year, up to \$2,000 per beneficiary or \$4,000 per beneficiary, depending on filing status., the release stated.

Funds earned over time will remain tax-free when used for covered educational expenses. Additionally, AZ529 Plan beneficiaries can now roll over unused funds into a Roth IRA, up to a \$35,000 lifetime limit free of income tax or tax penalties.

Friends and family members may also add to a child's AZ529 Plan at any time and earn the same tax benefits for themselves.

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Offices

• From page 2

funnels a lot of traffic,” Sean Lake, an attorney from the law firm of Pew & Lake who represented the developer, told the council. “I think the property owner has done a good job of working with staff to design something that really fits in between those uses and does provide a good buffer.”

The nearest residential property lines are about 90 feet from the proposed development to the west and 118 feet to the south.

“To the west and to the south, there’s a 30-foot and 40-foot landscape buffer that provides a double row of trees,” Sarah Clark, a principal planner with the town, told the council. “That’ll provide a year-round screening to those adjacent property owners. Additionally, there’s a 6-foot solid wall along that western and southern property line.”

Frank West Capital submitted an annexation application in August 2024 for the proposed site, along with the site plan and request to rezone the land. The town council held its first public hearing on the annexation request on Aug. 6.

“The proposed medical and general office complex



Frank West Capital LLC is proposing four medical and general office buildings at the southwest corner of San Tan Boulevard and Ellsworth Road. (Rendering/town of Queen Creek)

offers a much-needed use that will support the existing and future residential development in the area,” according to the project narrative. “The site is along an arterial road and has been designed to complement the community.”

The project will not have 24-hour businesses or uses that require conditional-use permits, as well as

no drive-thrus. In addition, the buildings will not exceed 30 feet in height and illuminated signs will not face residential areas, the narrative stated. Parking lot lights will be dimmed by 50% starting at 10 p.m.

The Queen Creek Planning Commission unanimously voted Nov. 12 to recommend approval of the rezoning and site plan.

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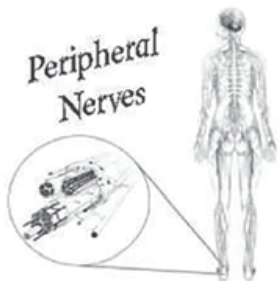
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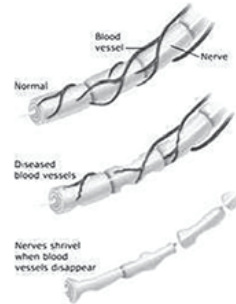
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Mesa, AZ — The most common method your doctor will recommend to treat your chronic pain and/or neuropathy is with prescription drugs that may temporarily reduce your symptoms. These drugs have names such as Gabapentin, Lyrica, Cymbalta, and Neurontin,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

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



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

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Downtown

• From page 8

5,200 square feet.

• The Switchyard — Located on about 8 acres of formerly town-owned land, the first phase of The Switchyard will include a mix of restaurant, retail and office space totaling just under 48,000 square feet. Phase two will include luxury multi-family housing. The first phase is set to open during third-quarter 2026. Postino, Shake Shack and Snooze have announced locations in phase one. The Switchyard is at Ellsworth Loop and Ocotillo roads.

• Rusty Buckle Saloon — The 8,930-square-foot bar and restaurant is in the permitting process and set to open in mid-2026 at 21838 S. Ellsworth Road.

• Magma Plaza — The old Magma Engineering at 20955 E. Ocotillo Road will be torn down to make room



This longtime building at 21838 S. Ellsworth Road in downtown Queen Creek will be transformed into a new bar and restaurant called the Rusty Buckle Saloon. (Town of Queen Creek)

for an 8,500-square-foot commercial development. The project is still going through the permitting process.

"I know locals that were born and raised here and so I'm sure it's a little bittersweet sometimes to see some of those old spots change, but we really do appreciate it and we appreciate the investment from these companies and businesses that are willing to come into Queen Creek and just make it a beautiful and wonderful place to continue to raise our families and to live," Vice Mayor Leah Martineau said during the August council meeting.

Projects also are under development at 22036 S. Ellsworth Road — the former Grand Canyon Title building — and 22225 S. Ellsworth Road.

"We're not able to announce (the projects) right now," Lindley said, adding the town is working with the new property owners.

The Matheson

His need for more office space provided Matheson with an opportunity to contribute to the Downtown Core's transformation.

"We're longtime Queen Creek residents. I grew up here and we have a

vested interest in the beautification of downtown and making it look nice," Matheson said. "We have a partner that we're working with, and we decided we wanted to do a nice project here in downtown."

In approving the site plan and rezoning, council members praised the building's design, which will blend mid-century modern with the desert landscape.

The project will provide pedestrian connectivity through sidewalks along Ellsworth Loop and Ocotillo roads. It will be adjacent to Ocotillo Road with the main entrance on the building's south side facing its parking lot.

The second floor will include an outdoor deck on the north and south sides, with the southwest corner deck covered. The covered deck will also provide shade to the area below on the first floor.

Along with providing landscaping, the developer will build three decorative screen walls along Ellsworth Loop Road that will have art patterns depicting "fauna native to Queen Creek," a staff report stated.

"We want to do a really nice project to just complement all the other cool things that have gone in and will go in," Matheson said.

Matheson and his architects have taken inspiration from the design for The Switchyard.

"There have been so many changes to the downtown and the town council has a vision of what they would like to see," Matheson said.

"I think it was really good to be able to work together with town staff and town council to make something that fits into their vision, as well as something that's going to be just really nice for the town."

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