



Community

Cave Creek mayor intends to retire at the end of 2026; 6



CAVE CREEK/CAREFREE INDEPENDENT

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Arts

Cave Creek Museum presents 'Celebrate the Route 66 Centennial with Roger Naylor'; 14

February 2026

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Your Nonpartisan Community Newspaper • YourValley.net

Cave Creek to begin purchase of 4,005 acres of open space

Council unanimously approves ad hoc committee report recommendations

By Jeff Wendt

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Residents of Cave Creek want the beautiful images of open space surrounding the town to be preserved.

The Cave Creek Town Council agreed with the residents of the town on Tuesday, Jan. 27, when it unanimously approved the report present by the 15-member Ad Hoc Committee on Open Space, and moved forward with plans to purchase 4,005 acres of open space currently owned by the Arizona State Land Trust.

The town will have to wait 4 to 6 weeks for a land appraisal to be done, so the council can decide what financing options to use to purchase the land.

The 4,005 acres was zoned as open space conservation and open space recreation in 2009 by the Arizona State Land Department, when the



Steve LaMar, the Ad Hoc Committee on Open Space chairman, left, and Development Services Director Luke Kautzman present the final report of the Ad Hoc Committee On Open Space during a special Town Council Meeting Jan. 27. (Independent Newsmedia/Jeff Wendt)

parcel was annexed and the rezoning of the land occurred.

The town has until Oct. 28, 2030, to purchase at least 160 acres of open space. In the 2025 fiscal year budget, the town set aside \$2.5 million to purchase state lands.

"The members of the ad hoc committee are extremely passionate and eager to start promoting, marketing, and fundraising," said Ad Hoc Com-

mittee Chairman Steve LaMar.

The committee broke down into three groups: communications and outreach, financing, and evaluation and prioritization.

The communications and outreach group developed a project logo as well as materials that can be used to explain the project and to promote

• See **Space** on page 16

Cave Creek approves 6% rate increase for water customers

By Jeff Wendt

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Cave Creek Town Council approved a 6% rate increase for the next three years to Cave Creek, Desert Hills and Cave Creek Wastewater water customers during a Jan. 6 meeting to little fanfare.

Town Finance Director Cherie White outlined in the presentation that the rate hike's goal is to minimize and eliminate general fund subsidies and cash loans to the utility funds, as well as maintain debt service coverage ratios to obtain debt financing for future capital improvement projects.

Two big changes to the rates were adding a new tier of 0 to 4,000 gallons used per month, and lowering the top tier from 50,000 gallons a month down to 40,000.

Cave Creek Water customers on the low-use end would see rates increase

• See **Rates** on page 9

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GOVERNMENT



Sherrri Boozikee speaks to the Carefree Town Council. (Submitted Photo/Town of Carefree)

Carefree Town Council provides update for new administrator

By Zev Black
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Town of Carefree held its monthly town council meeting Jan. 6 to provide an update on the search for a new town administrator and give Foothill Caring Corps a chance to speak directly to the council.

It was announced in November that Gary Neiss, the Town's current administrator, will be retiring effective the first week of March. The Town first began the hiring process by looking for candidates internally.

They are now shifting their focus to external options. For this, the Town has partnered with the Maricopa Association of Governments for assistance.

"The objective was to find someone to run this for us, short of the interview process, who is professional and doesn't have an interest in what's going on and doesn't come to it with a bias," Mayor John Crane said.

MAG has posted the opening on a variety of websites, including the Arizona League of Cities and Towns

website and the American Planning Association website.

Those interested in the position are asked to submit their resume directly to MAG, which will then review submittals before sending a list of qualified individuals to the Town Council.

"I'm really excited about how this is working," Crane said. "They're turning out to be great partners for us."

The application window closes Jan. 17 with preliminary interviews taking place Jan. 26-28. Final interviews are set to occur Feb. 9, meaning there will be around three weeks of overlap with Neiss before he officially retires.

Staff members from Foothills Caring Corps were in attendance to speak to the town council about the organization's mission and why they believe it's a good idea for Carefree to become a dementia friendly community.

Foothills Caring Corps helps those

• See **Council** on page 4

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BENEFIT



Event Co-Organizers Clint Miller, Lon Johnson and Les Hardie pose during the Orphans & Oddballs Car Show. (Submitted Photo/Gene Ullrich)

Car enthusiasts gather for Carefree's Orphans & Oddballs Car Show

Downtown Carefree turned into a celebration of automotive history Jan. 11 as hundreds of residents and visitors attended the inaugural Orphans & Oddballs Car Show. The event, held in the heart of town near the Carefree Sundial, is expected to become an annual tradition.

From classic 1960s muscle cars to a 100-year-old 1926 Dodge Brothers Sedan Deluxe, the show featured more than 80 vintage, unusual and quirky vehicles. Gleaming chrome, vibrant paint colors and rare designs offered something for seasoned collectors and casual admirers alike.

While the event provided an opportunity for local collectors to gather, compare notes and showcase their craftsmanship, it also served as a hands-on lesson in automotive

history for the broader community.

"Here in the Desert Foothills, we're fortunate to have an incredible network of collectors who are passionate about restoring and preserving these vehicles," event co-organizer and Carefree Town Councilmember Lon Johnson said. "It's rewarding for the owners to share the results of their hard work, and just as meaningful for the public to experience these rolling pieces of history up close."

Event organizers emphasized that gatherings like Orphans & Oddballs play an important role in preserving automotive heritage.

"When you see how few of these vehicles remain, it really underscores the importance of preservation," event co-organizer and Carefree Planning and Zoning

Commissioner Les Hardie said. "Thanks to these dedicated owners, future generations will still be able to see, hear, and appreciate these remarkable classic cars."

Organizers extended their thanks to the many volunteers and community partners who helped make the event a success, including Rural Metro Fire – Town of Carefree, Geno Orrico, Hampton Inn and Black Mountain Cafe & Lounge, as well as sponsors including Karsten's Ace Hardware, Hagerty Insurance, Adam's Polishes, T4L, Bertram Signs and The Print Shop.

Plans are already underway to make the Orphans & Oddballs Car Show an annual event. Details and a future date for next year's show will be announced in the coming months.

Council

• From page 3

living and aging in place by delivering meals, giving non-emergency medical rides and getting seniors active by driving them to various events in the area.

"Our neighbors are homebound," Executive Director Brent Downs said. "You don't see them unless we get them out and we bring them somewhere. We're a voice and an advocate for those folks."

According to Downs, services have increased in the past two years from 20,000 touchpoints to over 38,000. He anticipates that number rising to nearly 50,000 this year.

Sherri Boozikee, neighbor engagement specialist, said around 40% of all intakes she does have some sort of memory challenge. Last January, she started to see the need of the community in the area.

"It didn't take me long to figure out that there's not much help up here," she said. "The support is distant. It's down in Phoenix, Glendale, Sun City, Fountain Hills. What about the community members here in Carefree and Cave Creek with memory conditions?"

Boozikee asked for a letter from the Town saying they are behind Foothills Caring Corps' mission and that they do want to be recognized as a town that is dementia friendly.

Candidate packets for the Aug. 4 primary election are now available in the Carefree Town Hall, 8 E. Sundial Circle. There will be four seats open on the council, including mayoral chair and three council member spots.

To watch the full council meeting, go to youtube.com/watch?v=h-6b8Ao_22do.

Reporter Zev Black can be reached at zblack@iniva.org. Please submit comments at yourvalley.net/letters or email them to AZOpinions@iniva.org. We are committed to publishing a wide variety of reader opinions, as long as they meet our Civility Guidelines.



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COUNCIL

Cave Creek mayor intends to retire at the end of 2026

By Jeff Wendt
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

Cave Creek Mayor Robert Morris is not intending to run for mayor of the town in 2026 and will be supporting Vice Mayor Kathryn Royer as the next mayor, according to a letter Morris sent out on Jan. 19.

Morris will retire at the end of 2026 after serving four years on the town council and four years as mayor of Cave Creek.

Morris said the plan to retire has been a process.

"This has been in the plans for the last six months," Morris said. "This was not a spur of the moment decision."

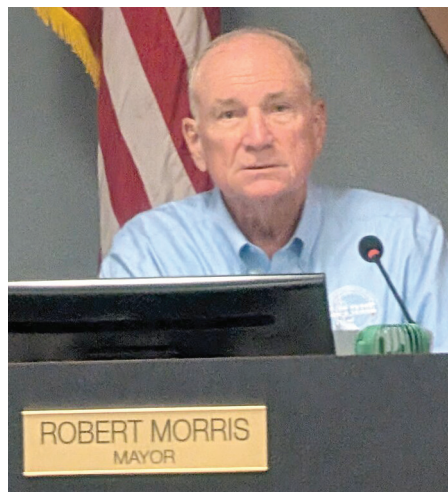
"I have enjoyed every minute in government, beginning on a town committee, four years of council service and another four years as mayor," Morris said in the letter.

Morris is supporting Royer, who was also elected to the council at the same time as Morris in 2018.

"She (Royer) clearly has the expertise, wisdom and experience to protect Cave Creek values and lead council effectively," Morris said in the message. "Her high level performance is apparent in every meeting."

"The upcoming water availability crisis (Arizona wide by the way) is postponed for Cave Creek due to her conceiving and championing water banking," Morris added. "I urge every voter in Cave Creek to vote for the proven leadership of Kathryn Royer!"

Morris said he is most proud of the establishment of the fire department in 2021, which Morris says now covers all areas of the



Cave Creek Mayor Robert Morris intends to retire as Cave Creek Mayor at the end of 2026, he announced in a letter to Cave Creek residents on Jan. 19. (Independent Newsmedia/Jeff Wendt)

town with world-class medical response and wildlife suppression.

"That would not have been done without the property tax that some proposed," Morris said. "I will be forever proud of the lives and houses this will save far into the future."

Morris is also championing an effort to purchase 4,005 acres of state trust land in and around the town that has laid dormant for the past 15 years.

"By the end of my term I expect to begin implementation of the Town's most ambitious acquisition, the 4,005-acre Arizona State Lands project that had lain dormant for 15 years," Morris said.

"We can afford big wins in public safety and conserving open space through the increased sales tax base and wise financial management," Morris added.

Morris isn't done with what he wants to accomplish in his last 11

months in office.

"Obviously resurrecting the proposal for the 4,005 acres of open space is very important to me," Morris said. "I also want to improve some of the internal management processes we have. Not as many people will understand that if they don't have a business background."

Councilmember Joe Freedman thanked Morris for what he has accomplished.

"I would personally like to thank Mayor Morris for his extremely productive service over the years to the town," Freedman said. "Best of luck to Mayor Morris in whatever he does."

Morris thanked many people who he has worked with over the past eight years.

"The cordial, mutually beneficial relations with other municipalities must be continued," Morris said. "I commend my friend John Crane, Carefree mayor, for our joint progress."

"And, working with other council members has paid off with a town staff that is second to none," Morris added. "Every director and the town manager, Grady Miller, have decades of high-level, successful resumes in government. I thank Grady and former Town Manager Carrie Dyrek for their successful work."

There was one more special person Morris had to thank.

"Finally, I thank my wife, Jana, for supporting and working beside me in four elections and enduring the ups and downs of public life," Morris concluded.

SCHOOLS

New vice president elected to Cave Creek Unified school board

By Maya McFall
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Cave Creek Unified School District governing board selected board member Dan Moore as vice president for the 2026 calendar year during its Jan. 13 organizational meeting.

Moore was appointed to the school board in 2024. He currently holds a seat on Dealer Funnel's board, a company that connects automotive dealerships with buyers using advanced artificial intelligence text messaging software. In addition, Moore is a TedX Speaker and author of "Do Moore, Get More: The Road to You," a self-help book that centers around self-awareness and living a more fulfilling life.

The board unanimously voted for Moore to replace Jackie Ulmer as vice president.

Janet Greer-Busbee will remain as governing board president, and board member Jeff Fortney will continue to represent the district as a delegate for the Arizona School Boards Association.



Dan Moore

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REAL ESTATE

New inventory starting to trickle in

By Janet Mohr
MOHR GROUP

As we meander through our first month of 2026, we are seeing a trickling of new inventory.

Do not be fooled by the number of actives/coming soon which will show our inventory over 24,000. If you only search Maricopa County, the inventory drops to just above

18,000. We lose 25% of the perceived inventory. As we dwindle down to specific areas and needs, we can see that we really do not have many homes to choose from.

The highest price per square foot this month for Carefree/Cave Creek was \$755.

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Closed	51	51,608,110	49,927,400	Low	274,900	274,900	0.74	750	86.47	82.69	0	0
				Avg	1,011,924	978,969	0.97	2,576	385.79	374.40	102	108
				Med	799,000	740,000	0.98	2,173	366.53	361.19	78	78
				High	3,100,000	3,100,000	1.09	6,349	755.36	755.36	437	437
Overall	51	51,608,110	49,927,400	Low	274,900	274,900	0.74	750	86.47	82.69	0	0
				Avg	1,011,924	978,969	0.97	2,576	385.79	374.40	102	108
				Med	799,000	740,000	0.98	2,173	366.53	361.19	78	78
				High	3,100,000	3,100,000	1.09	6,349	755.36	755.36	437	437

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Rates

• From page 1

between \$4 and \$7 per month, while the very high-use customers would see an approximate increase between \$120 to upwards of \$600 per month. About 1,250 customers fall into the first two tiers of Cave Creek's = system, while about 120 customers fall in the top two tiers of 30,000 gallons or more used per month.

"We have customers that actually are using 4 acre-feet of water a year?" councilmember Dusty Rhoades asked White.

"That's not even the highest," White replied.

"That's insane," Rhoades replied. "You know, maybe a disincentive is next time around we take a look at really charging them through the nose, like \$50,000 a month or so if they're going to use that much."

"That will definitely get them to cut the rate of usage," Rhoades added. "But that is an insane amount."

Those on the Desert Hills water system will see a smaller difference, and some Desert Hills customers could see a decrease in rates.

Customers in the lower tiers in Desert Hills would either see rates stay flat or could see their bill decrease by about \$7. Those on the highest tiers in Desert Hills would see their rates increase by about \$80 per month.

Approximately 1,150 customers fall in the lower two tiers in Desert Hills, while 92 customers reside in the top two tiers.

For Cave Creek Wastewater, customers pay flat fees that will increase approximately \$6 per month, and the meter size rates increase between \$3 and \$11 depending on the size of the meter. Wastewater customers also pay volume rates depending on the type of business, and those rates went up between 3 cents and 54 cents per 10,000 gallons, depending on the type of business.



Town of Cave Creek Finance Director Cherie White, right, and consultant Kevin Burnett from Willdan complete their presentation to the town council on increasing water rates by 6% on Jan. 6, 2026. (Independent Newsmedia/Jeff Wendt)

"I don't see any way around this," Vice Mayor Kathryn Royer said in making the motion to approve the increases. "I think that we had to reduce what we initially had proposed to ensure that our residents aren't completely overcharged for their water."

"It's a finite resource that costs a lot of money just to get here," Royer added. "So, we're paying for all of the infrastructure that's required to provide reliable service, and we're doing the best we can to monitor the costs and ensure that we still have water in the future."

"I am a water customer, so I am not putting anything on anybody else that I wouldn't do myself," Mayor Robert Morris said. "I especially want to note that the commercial water we pay runs the town, because the sales taxes are all we have for fire departments, roads and everything else."

"So there is a part of this that is really the driver towards the town being in even in existence," Morris added.

Councilmember Cynthia Driskell piggybacked off Rhoades' earlier comment about the top water users in her comments to approve the increase.

"I think there's room when we look at a future rate study to maybe do a deeper dive into some of the uses, and that's look at not just who's using the highest water, but what kind of parcels are they?" Driskell said. "What are the uses, and that can help guide some decisions about whether there's a need for hard cap limits on water distribution for customers or if rate increases is the correct way to control that."

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COMMENTARY

Carefree: The recurring stinknet threat

By John Crane
CAREFREE MAYOR

Who can forget the wonderful fall rains of 2025? The Sonoran Desert remembers. Simply look to new palo verde tree growth, revived prickly pear cacti, and the lush bursage that blankets our desert floor. The stage is set for a wonderful desert wildflower season.

But with the good comes some bad. In 2026, invasive weeds, such as stinknet, buffelgrass, and fountain grass, will once again pose a significant threat to the Sonoran Desert. Stinknet, also known as globe chamomile, is our fastest moving, and most threatening invasive weed species. Even after several years of severe drought, stinknet seeds remain dormant for up to four or five years, poised to sprout.

Stinknet is identified by carrot-like leaves, pungent odor, and bright yellow, spherical flowers. It is so noxious, none of our native animals eat it. It can grow up to 2 feet tall. It invades the natural Sonoran Desert, neighborhoods, vacant lots, and any disturbed areas. Originating in South Africa, it is now well established in the Sonoran Desert. Stinknet is already signaling its 2026 arrival with dense, bright green foliage and its distinct, strong acrid smell. Bright yellow flowers will begin to appear in February.

Most damning of all, stinknet fuels desert wildfires, allowing wildfires to occur more frequently and much larger. It is highly flammable when dry. Our Sonoran Desert does not tolerate wildfires well.

Saguaro, staghorn, and barrel cacti have extremely high, wildfire, mortality rates. Wildfires quickly consume desert trees. Adding insult to injury, invasive weeds grow aggressively in burned areas, while the return of native Sonoran Desert vegetation takes years.

Since the elimination of stinknet is unlikely, for the health and wellbeing of, not only our Sonoran Desert, but ourselves, we need to manage this widespread invasion.



John Crane

Now is the time to proactively apply a pre-emergent to prevent stinknet seeds from germinating. Consult your landscaper or the garden section of your local hardware store to identify the best solution that will not damage exiting plants.

Once stinknet emerges from the soil, it must be manually removed before flowering. Eliminating the tinderbox of stinknet fire fuel from around your home will significantly reduce the wildfire risk to life and property. From experience, we know that this risk can consume entire neighborhoods and mountainsides.

In Carefree, if you have doubts, the Carefree Fire Department will gladly inspect your home, advise how to make it fire safe, and share their expertise. For those outside of Carefree, your local fire agency will do the same.

For the sake of your life, property, peace of mind, and the Sonoran Desert, now is the time to reign in this recurring threat.

ART THOUGHTS

Art is not a frill!

By Judy Bruce
SPECIAL TO INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

After teaching junior high art for 35 years, I know for sure that art is much more than a frill! The medical community, educators, memory care workers, businesses, grief counselors, local communities, those of us pushing back against the exploding use of technology, and of course, artists are raising their voices in promoting, viewing, studying, and purchasing art.

Art Heals! In 2021, university researchers interested in clinical applications of art therapy as a medical intervention found over 500 studies showing art reduced depression, anxiety, and stress for a wide swath of people, from cancer patients to children to folks with dementia and even those suffering from stress and anxiety.

Why? How? Art provides both a connection and commentary, something we all need now more than ever! Kit Koughs, M.A., Program director for Mayo Clinic Center for the Humanities in Medicine, states that art is about being human, how we express things, and process things. Incorporating art into the healing process can take many forms, such as viewing art, owning art, and studying ceramics, painting, drawing, art history, glasswork, and other forms. The Sonoran Arts League Studio offers a whole range of exciting, possibly life-changing, classes.

Educators speak out to promote solid arts education! Dave Bachman, an English teacher who says he doesn't know acrylics from crayons, wrote in an article in a local newspaper "The arts are not only as important as math and science, but even more so — Why? The power of the formula $E = MC^2$ equals MC squared dims in the breathless sweeping brush strokes of Cezanne, Monet, and Van Gogh. Art

is more than an outlet; it is an inlet to what makes us human!" This is so true!

Art makes us better humans because it allows us to have compassion for things we cannot see, faith in what we believe but can't see, and a means to connect with others. Debbi Burdick, a former Cave Creek Unified School District Superintendent, stated, "We have all heard the compelling research about the arts in improving students' academic performances — students of the arts outperform higher than students without the arts education in academic tests. More importantly, the arts students develop the skills we all know are necessary for the 21st-century workforce: critical thinking, teamwork, effective communication, and, again, problem-solving! The arts provide a more comprehensive and insightful education because students are able to explore emotional, intuitive, and irrational aspects of life that science doesn't explain."

Business leaders know that a highly creative employee will have stronger problem-solving skills, heightened aesthetics, more empathetic reactions to others, and, as AI and computing take over, the above skills will be even more desirable. The smart leaders know that art can be a "fun" form of medication, which can lead to reduced stress in the workforce and ultimately a stronger bottom line! Camile Preston, PhD., agrees that art enables us to find our own voice and have courage.

How to stay human in a world overrun by technology is a question we must ask. Spending a few hours a week creating is so much more rewarding and life-affirming than being on social media. Try it... it's transforming! Workers who want to stay employed with the new AI will therefore need to level up by learning how to use AI and how to do things AI can't.

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Peptides 101:

What They Are and What They Do in the Aging Body

So, everyone's either talking about peptides or taking peptides today. It seems like a new health fad, but these small molecules are making a big impact for those looking to include anti-aging into their health regimens. Not all the peptides out there are for anti-aging, but many of the benefits from them include properties that help patients feel great and have the energy to exercise, get things done, and improve their performance. The problem arises when I hear people are buying them online, getting them from a friend's prescription, or from "the guy in the gym". This is why I'm writing this article today, to explain what peptides are, what they do, and why you should understand why getting them from a trusted source is absolutely necessary. I will also explain how they are so important for us as we age.

What are peptides?

Peptides are short chains of amino acids that play a role in how the body communicates, repairs itself, and adapts over time. While they are present throughout life, their activity and availability change as we age, influencing processes such as tissue repair, immune function, metabolism, and hormone signaling. Understanding what peptides are, and what they do in the aging body, helps us to understand why certain functions slow down with age and how science is working to support healthier aging.

So what do peptides really have to do with a healthy aging process?

Some of the main concerns we have as we age, are tissue repair and wound healing, collagen and

connective tissue integrity, immune function, and muscle growth, mainly for independence, strength, and balance. These issues are all supported and enhanced healthily by specifically prescribed peptides. In a later article, I will review some specific peptides that are best suited for these issues and more.

Why is it so important to know the source of the peptides?

First of all, if you are injecting anything into your body, you should always know the source, and what is in it. The pharmacies that dispense peptides must have a specific license for different types of peptides. Many of the "pharmacies" out there do not.

Here are a few important things to know regarding the pharmacy that is dispensing the peptides, even on-line sources.

State Pharmacy License

Any pharmacy, whether it compounds medications or not—must be licensed by the state board of pharmacy in the state where it operates. There are other licenses that allow pharmacies to compound and sell specific types of peptides only.

Many of these peptides online are research grade, not medical grade. Research grade peptides are mainly used for animal studies. This does not count as being dispensed under a pharmacy license and does not make the product legal, nor safe for human use.

There are still many other regulations and laws that pharmacies compounding and selling peptides must abide to, but there are more than I will add in this article.



Why is a medical history necessary before starting peptide therapy?

Especially as we age, it is absolutely necessary to have a medical history taken and, in some cases, a physical exam as well.

Peptides can influence hormone signaling, immune activity, inflammation, and cell growth. A medical history helps us to determine whether these are serious concerns or whether you have these conditions:

- Prior or current cancer
- Autoimmune or inflammatory conditions
- Cardiovascular disease
- Kidney or liver impairment

These factors can make certain peptides inappropriate or require very close monitoring. A history will also guide the prescriber as to the exact dosing that is best for you. Skipping this step increases the risk of potential side effects and other consequences.

Bottom line:

Peptides are biologically active compounds, not supplements. They must be used safely, selectively, and responsibly, particularly in older adults where the margin for error is smaller. Peptides can be wonderful

additions to your health regimen, just be sure and have trained, medical guidance throughout the process. At Accurate Care Medical Wellness Center, we have a team of physicians and other medical practitioners who are trained in peptide therapy and keep up on the most recent research. We are happy to be your source to turn to for safe, healthy peptide treatments, so you will get the best results, as we use the highest quality peptides possible for your treatment plan.

If you or anyone you know is interested in peptide therapy done the right way, please call my office. I offer a complimentary consultation to see if you qualify for treatments that keep you in the game of life without stressful downtime. My readers receive special discounts on treatment plans as well.

DrLeisa@CaringPainRelief.com or call my office.

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Accurate Care Medical Wellness Center
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COMMENTARY

Cruising The Seed to the Wagon Wheel

By Jim White
and Don Senneville

Alas! Back to "Coffee Row."

We decided to cruise the 2-mile drive that connects our two towns, from the Wagon Wheel on the west to the Seed Cafe on the east. We feel it is our duty as coffee aficionados to see if anything has changed in light of the new year.

The Wagon Wheel's parking lot is nearly full. Local Jonny's appears to have its usual share of morning caffeinators, but just across the road there seems to be a new "bean" in town. We follow the signs: Crying Coyote, Lazy Lizard, Salon Chella, Guns and Ammo, Beans and Bullets, and finally the Bull and Brew Cafe. After enjoying excellent coffees and outrageous cinnamon rolls at Bull and Brew, we couldn't help but be curious as to the location and deeper meaning of "Beans and Bullets," words that appear on a sign out by the street.

This is a new combination of coffee concepts for us, so we had to track it down. The "Sanctuary Tactical" was closed, but within its confines must in fact be beans and bullets. Please remove your magazine before entering, says the door. Jim left his "Economist" and "True West" mags in the car. We will return another day.



The signs that lead to Beans and Bullets and the Bull and Brew Cafe in Cave Creek. (Courtesy of Jim White)

Continuing our trek, we note the busy Big Earl's, Janey's and the Grotto thriving, a whiff of roasting beans from ROC2, the Village Coffee Shop and Creperie alive and well, and of course the popular Carefree Coffee Roastery at the 4-way stop.

We cruise Carefree. Black Mountain Coffee Shop looks full, and Grind and Gear (Beans and Bikes?) is pulsating with amped bikers. So we check the sun time at the Sundial and head to the Seed Cafe and Market at Cirvana.



Omm... enjoying a date ball and a Matcha Latte on an incredible patio in silence, we ponder the diversity of experiences found on our own Coffee Row.

Now in our fourth year of covering the nooks and crannies of our local establishments, we continue to be amazed at what exists within Coffee Row of Cave Creek and Carefree.

For example, brunch and golf seem to add a new twist to morning coffee, so we followed the rumor that the TeeBox Indoor Golf Club

in Stagecoach Village, across the way from the Sonoran Arts League Studio, has an espresso machine that Don heard looks like the grill of a 1956 Buick! Who could resist that, while surrounded by private virtual golf rooms, a full workout gym, enormous TVs, an excellent little restaurant, and the big bar where the German espresso machine/Buick grill in all its splendor produced a most excellent espresso. Truly on par. Scratch, so to speak.

Having never played golf in our lives, we still felt at home. Like a hole in one or a birdie. Like cruising in that Buick (which, on examination, looked more like a Fiat). Besides, who has 40 beer taps all in a row? We learned which one pours Guinness. Stay tuned. Don ordered a Golfers Grind, which is drip coffee with steamed house-made oat milk. Spelled "mylk" — the new-ish way to refer to plant-based milk-like products. Their oat mylk is produced by the chef through a process of mylking oats that have been cooked down so they can be mylked.

Finally, the question of milking an oat is answered.

If you have coffee questions or tips, write to Jim and Don at The CUP, c/o jwendt@iniusa.org or AZNews@iniusa.org.

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

Memberships



Your Local Team



Natasha Beal
Marketing & Brand
Strategy Manager
nbeal@iniusa.org



Steve Chernek
News Page Designer
schernek@iniusa.org



Maya McFall
Journalist
mmcfall@iniusa.org



Zev Black
Journalist
zblack@iniusa.org



Mona Lisa Navarrette
Graphic Designer
mnavarrette@iniusa.org



Jeff Wendt
Journalist
jwendt@iniusa.org



Erica Odello
Graphic Designer
eodello@iniusa.org

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In 30 Minutes I Had a Plan for My Shoulder Pain that Didn't Require Surgery or Pills

**By Shoulder Pain Expert,
Dr. Matthew Hernandez**

ETHOS INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

"I was losing sleep. I couldn't get comfortable at night and would wake up constantly. That was the most frustrating part. Everything I was told to do was not helping... the pain was only getting worse."

Tim, 46, came to us after exhausting every option outside of surgery. A competitive volleyball player, energetic entrepreneur, and father to two boys, Tim took pride in his active lifestyle and was determined to find a solution for his shoulder pain.

Ice packs and heat compresses were no longer helpful, and relying on pain-pills was not an option he wanted

to take. He committed to physical therapy for several weeks with little impact, tried dry needling and cortisone injections without success, and was ultimately told by multiple doctors to stop all activity that aggravated his arm. Tim had done everything his insurance allowed but was still stuck at square one.

WHAT THE OTHER DOCTORS MISSED...

Tim had fallen into what we call "The Gap" — where insurance-based care cycles with no end in sight, surgery isn't an option, and waiting for the pain to get worse seems like the only choice. Most providers only look for what they know how to treat. But our comprehensive 'Deep Dive' approach and expertise allowed us to bridge that gap for Tim.

Using a detailed pain profile, 32-point shoulder inspection, MSK ultrasound scan, and diagnostic injection, we were able to confirm Tim's SC Joint injury and quickly develop a targeted treatment plan to heal the damaged tissue.

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In just 4 weeks, the pain improved significantly, allowing Tim to regain his range of motion, sleep soundly at night, and return to the sport he loves:

"My body is performing better than before, and I have resumed playing volleyball — something I didn't think I would ever be able to do again! If you're tired of the 'just hope for the best' from many in the medical field, and want a complete set of options,

Ethos Integrative Medicine is the place to go."

YOUR NEXT STEP: THE DEEP DIVE FOR A PAIN-FREE SHOULDER

You're one step away from a pain-free shoulder, too! Imagine being able to comfortably sleep in your side again, play catch with your kid, or put on a t-shirt without pain...

Call 480-573-6171 to schedule your Deep Dive with our specialists at Ethos Integrative Medicine and scan the QR code to access our free report, "Shoulder SOS: The Expert Guide to Decoding Your Pain."



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- 2. 32-Point Shoulder Inspection:** We thoroughly inspect the movements causing pain, taking us one step closer to eliminating your discomfort.
- 3. Precision Shoulder Scan:** Our advanced in-office MSK ultrasound scan provides a detailed, real-time view of your shoulder's structures.
- 4. Ethos Pain Map:** A diagnostic injection to confirm the source of pain.
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INDEPENDENT NEWS MEDIA

THE MOTHER ROAD

Cave Creek Museum presents 'Celebrate the Route 66 Centennial with Roger Naylor'

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

The Cave Creek Museum will host an event titled "Celebrate the Route 66 Centennial with Roger Naylor."

The event will take place 2-4 p.m. Feb. 7 at the Holland Center, 34250 N. 60th St. in Scottsdale.

Route 66 turns 100 years old in 2026, and Naylor, an author and travel writer, will discuss the Mother Road's history and cultural significance.

Arizona is the state that saved Route 66, and Naylor will tell that story.

"Learn about the astounding scenery, small-town getaways, and

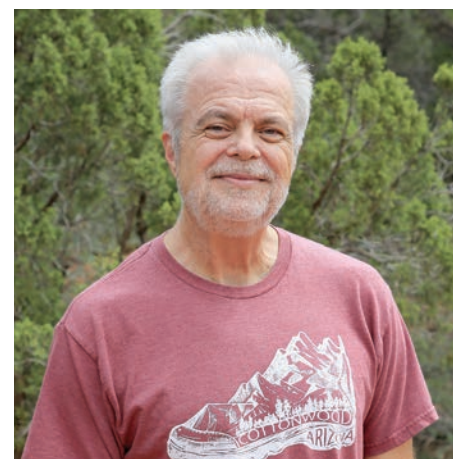
mom-and-pop eateries that still are found along the Arizona portion of the Mother Road," Naylor said in a release. "If the Grand Canyon is the heart of Arizona, then Route 66 is the main artery."

Naylor's work has appeared in USA Today, The Guardian, Country Magazine, Arizona Highways and more. Naylor's books include "Arizona National Parks and Monuments," "Awesome Arizona: 200 Amazing Facts about the Grand Canyon State," "Arizona's Scenic Roads and Hikes," "Arizona Kicks on Route 66" and "Crazy for the Heat: Arizona Tales of Ghosts, Gumshoes and Bigfoot," among oth-

ers. Naylor's books will be available for sale at the event.

For reservations, visit cavecreekmuseum.org as there is a limit and this event will sell out quickly. The cost of admission is \$10.

The 55-year-old Cave Creek Museum's mission is to preserve the artifacts of the prehistory, history, culture and legacy of the Cave Creek Mining District and the Cave Creek/Carefree foothills area through education, research, and interpretive exhibits. The Cave Creek Museum is located at 6140 East Skyline Drive in Cave Creek. The museum is open from October to May. Call 480-488-2764 for more information.



Roger Naylor, author and travel writer, will present "Celebrate the Route 66 Centennial with Roger Naylor" 2-4 p.m. Feb. 7 at the Holland Center in Scottsdale. (Courtesy of Fran Booth)

EXPLORE

Cave Creek Museum launches 'Local Landmark Passport' program

INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA



Buck Columna, Museum Operations Manager at the Cave Creek Museum, holds up Local Landmark Passports for the program. (Courtesy of Jen Miles/Tech 4 Life)

The Cave Creek Museum is inviting locals and visitors to explore the town's history with the launch of the Local Landmark Passport program.

The program, a self-guided exploration, has 23 historic landmark locations. Passports are available at the Cave Creek Museum or at the Cave Creek Tourism Bureau.

The Local Landmark Passport is a celebration of Cave Creek's past and present—inviting everyone to discover, learn, and enjoy everything this historic town has to offer.

As travelers visit each landmark, they will uncover the stories of these treasured locations and learn how

each landmark plays a role in the community today.

Stops include a variety of restaurants, shops, the library, museum and the park.

Completed passports can be returned to the museum or the tourism bureau to receive a bag with souvenir items from the town.

The Local Landmark Passport initiative is led by Marcia D'Alessandro, Chair of the Local Landmarks Committee, whose vision brings together history, community engagement, and exploration in a way that appeals to all ages.

For more information, visit cavecreekmuseum.com/local-landmarks.

PRESERVATION



Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area is 2,154 acres of preserved land that was dedicated on Jan. 9, 2001. On Friday, Jan. 9, 2026, Spur Cross celebrated its 25th anniversary. (Independent Newsmedia/Jeff Wendt)

Spur Cross celebrates 25th anniversary with speakers, plaque dedication

By Jeff Wendt
INDEPENDENT NEWSMEDIA

In the northern part of the Town of Cave Creek sits 2,154 acres of land that was originally slated for a home development, a hotel and a golf course.

But a group of town residents, along with then-mayor Vince Francia, put up a fight against the landholders to keep the property preserved the way it was.

A meeting with Francia and then-Arizona Gov. Jane Hull put into motion the Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area.

On Jan. 9, 2001, Francia, Hull and then-Maricopa County Supervisor Jan Brewer executed documents that created the Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area.

On Friday, Jan. 9, 2026, Francia, along with current Cave Creek Mayor Robert Morris and others from the state and county, celebrated the 25th anniversary of Spur Cross with speeches and the dedication of a commemorative plaque.

"This park was an amazing amalgamation and dedication of the original committee and the town, state, federal and county," Morris said. "It really was a lot of people who got to-

gether to preserve all these acres and what you see behind us."

For Francia, it was a frantic rush to keep Spur Cross from turning into a development.

"I was given a 72-hour notice," Francia said. "It was either make this happen or they (Great American Insurance Holders) were going to move on their plans."

Francia rushed into action.

"I notified my contacts at the governor's office," Francia remembered. "The governor called the meeting. There was a small group of people. Myself, the town manager, representatives from the state and county, and the governor."

"We started talking. And I said to the governor I would not recommend Great American owning the property," Francia added. "And a silence fell over the room. And I thought I just lost Spur Cross. And all of a sudden the governor said 'The mayor is right.' And then she said we will get a meeting together."

That meeting is what turned Spur Cross into what it is today: a limited-use public recreation and conservation area.

Today, it hosts almost 49,000 visitors annually.

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Space

• From page 1

what needs to be done to complete the project.

“The outreach and communications people really did a wonderful job,” LaMar said. “They created all of these communication suggestions. They created lanyards for everybody. I think the badges and the overall look is very professional, and if you see it, it really kind of fits Cave Creek very well.”

As for financing of the project, the committee believed the goal was to get between \$10.6 million and \$13.6 million to purchase the remaining land.

“I’m telling you, this land will sell itself,” LaMar said “We’re not here to put any pressure on you. You’ve given us all the wonderful support, and we are happy that you have appointed us.

“I will quote Carol Perry, who was at our last meeting, who’s been

around this town a long time and has been involved a lot and as a local artist,” LaMar added. “She said, ‘This being on this committee and working with you all to get this done is my proudest moment being a citizen of Cave Creek.’”

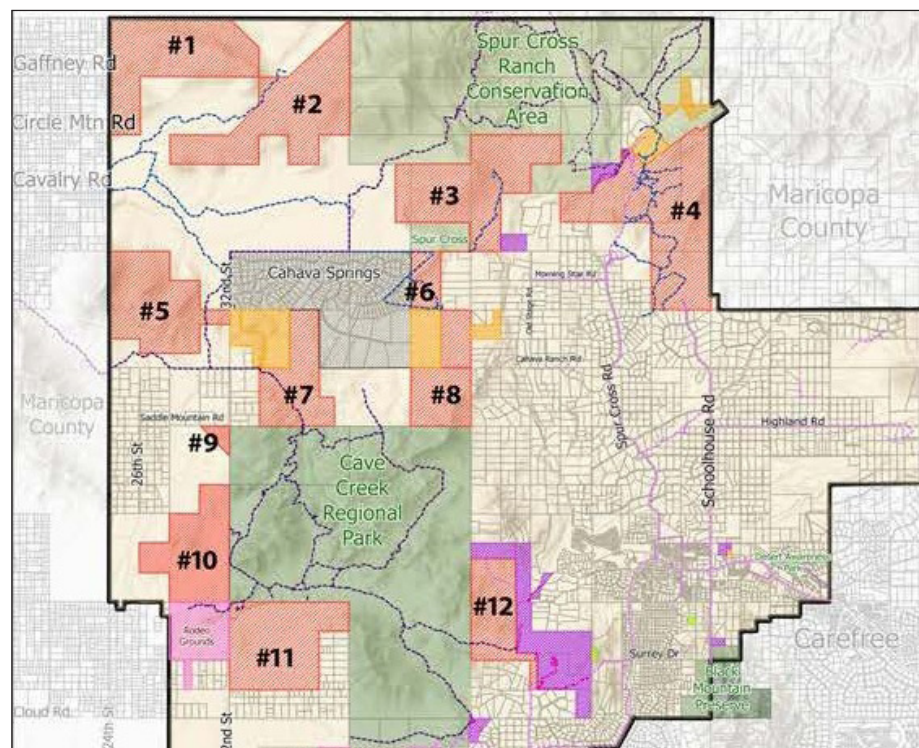
As for the evaluation and prioritization committee, the committee developed a chart of what they thought were most important parcels to go after first if money became an issue.

“If we really analyze this correctly in forming the strategic plan, just examining really closely the interest on each parcel,” LaMar said. “Now we have prioritized these, and that’s why we have a graph.”

LaMar said the committee did its best to evaluate each parcel and believe all have value to the town.

“This was the best we could do to evaluate them and it was fairly difficult because in actuality,” LaMar concluded, “and I think I speak for

• See **Council** on page 17



This map provided by the Ad Hoc Committee on Open Space, shows the parcels of land, numbered 1 through 12, that the town of Cave Creek plans to purchase to add to its town footprint. (Courtesy of the Ad Hoc Committee on Open Space)

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Sun City • May 4, 2026 • Sundial Rec Center
Fountain Hills • July 7, 2026 • Fountain Hills Community Center
Surprise • August 18, 2026 • The Colonnade
Sun City • September 23, 2026 • Sundial Recreation Center
Sun City West • October 28, 2026 • SCW Foundation Center
Mesa • November 13, 2026 • Mesa Marketplace Swap Meet

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Council

• From page 16

the whole group there isn't a parcel that wouldn't if that doesn't need to be preserved and would be a great asset to this town and the people of this town."

Vice Mayor Kathryn Royer made the motion to approve the report, to dissolve the committee, direct staff to request a valuation on the parcels, to prepare a memorandum of understanding with the Desert Foothills Land Trust to help secure financial donations for the purchases, and to direct staff to proceed with the State Land Department to initiate an auction to purchase high priority parcels with the accrued town funding.

"There's no doubt that the mayor and I and the rest of this town council support this project in its entirety," Royer said. "I think that you (the committee) have done an outstanding job in helping us make these rec-



The logo the Ad Hoc Committee on Open Space created to promote the purchase of 4,005 acres of open space within the Town of Cave Creek. (Courtesy of the Ad Hoc Committee on Open Space)

ommendations to get the job done.

"I would like to see action take place as quickly as possible," Royer added.

"Therefore, we created the last addition to the motions. We want to use the funding that we have in place to purchase the property and

then hopefully that will jump start others to also give."

Councilmember Cynthia Driskell piggy-backed off of Royer in support of the measure.

"This preservation of the Sonoran Desert is really our historic roots, and it's the quality of our life here, and it gives us that unique opportunity to truly enjoy our outdoors in so many fun ways," Driskell said. "I know I've enjoyed it. So many here on council have and residents and members of the task force likewise enjoy every part of our community."

"So, this is a unique opportunity for us to move forward with due diligence along the way because I'm sure we'll hit some ruts as we go along the trail to making these purchases," Driskell added, "but it's a great opportunity and we look forward to supporting it."

Councilmember Tom Augherton wanted to ensure the plan was to acquire all the land by the end of the calendar year.

"The State Land Department this

month may not be the State Land Department next January," Augherton said. "So it's great that \$2.5 million is going to acquire some land sooner than later, and the council's not meeting this summer. If something is not done before summer analysis and come back to the council and offer it for consideration, we may just lose the ultimate window to do the full purchase."

Mayor Robert Morris thanked the committee for its work.

"I want to thank the committee members. This is some of the best work I've seen done," Morris said. "It was done with a massive number of people on the committee, but it really is good and the enthusiasm is overwhelming. The enthusiasm is something that you don't see often in the dry work that we do here. And the next step is to keep that enthusiasm going and get the rest of the community enthusiastic about doing this and to pass that on."

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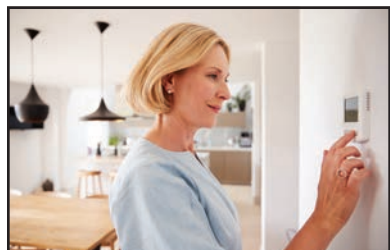
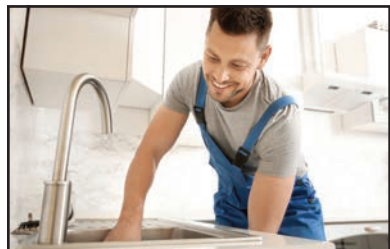
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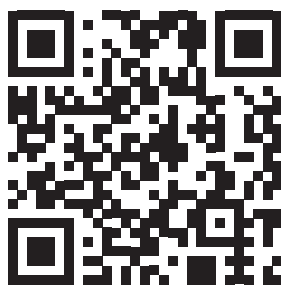
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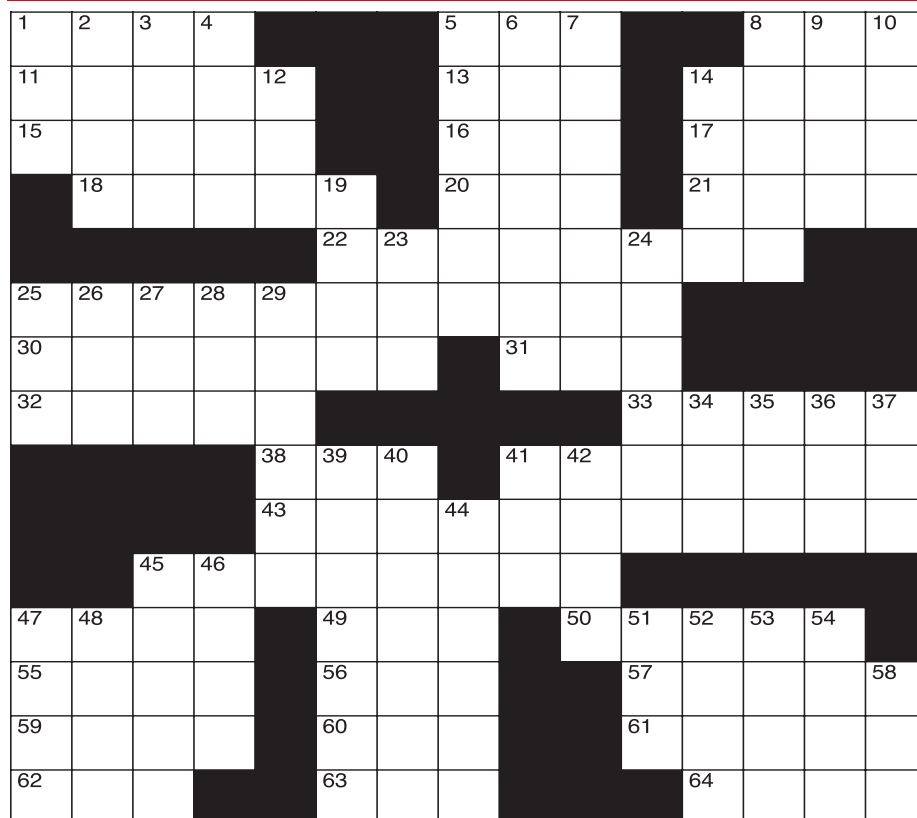
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CLUES ACROSS

1. Breezed through
5. Consumer protection agency
8. Criminal syndicate
11. Moves back from
13. Satisfaction
14. Feel concern or interest
15. Monetary units
16. Congressman (abbr.)
17. Israeli city
18. Restaurants
20. 2,000 lbs.
21. Grandmother
22. North, South and Central
25. In an early way
30. Foes
31. Social networking platform
32. Early term for basketball player
33. Another name for sesame plant
38. Disallow
41. Provide greater detail
43. Inaccessible
45. Evoke emotions
47. Ancient kingdom near Dead Sea
49. Celtic punk rockers

CLUES DOWN

50. A fencing sword
55. Actor Idris
56. Affirmative (slang)
57. Afflicted in mind or body
59. One point north of north east
60. Born of
61. Social media hand gesture
62. Hong Kong food stall ___ pai dong
63. Opposite of beginning
64. Email function
1. Sign language
2. Fashionable
3. Borough in Helsinki
4. Inability to hear
5. More quickly
6. An idea accepted as a demonstrable truth
7. Shrewdly
8. Rooney and Kate are two
9. Mediterranean port
10. Benedictine monk
12. Midway between south and southeast
14. Town in Galilee
19. Satisfy
23. Mice genus

24. Brass instrument
25. Chest muscle (slang)
26. Transmits genetic information from DNA
27. Records electric currents generated by the brain
28. Woman (French)
29. Short route aircraft
34. Pitching statistic
35. Pointed end of a pen
36. Popular sports league
37. Body part
39. Inoffensive
40. Yellowish cotton cloth
41. Feline
42. Does not tell the truth
44. Seduced
45. Spiritual leader
46. Abba ___, Israeli politician
47. Repair
48. Olive genus
51. Swiss river
52. Prejudice
53. C. European river
54. Keep under control
58. Father

SUDOKU BY METRO CREATIVE SERVICES

1	8							3
		3	6		7			8
	5					7		
7		1			2	3		
			1		9		2	
			4		3		9	
	3				8		6	
5		4	9					

Level: Advanced

FUN BY THE NUMBERS

Like puzzles? Then you'll love sudoku. This mind-bending puzzle will have you hooked from the moment you square off, so sharpen your pencil and put your sudoku savvy to the test!

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

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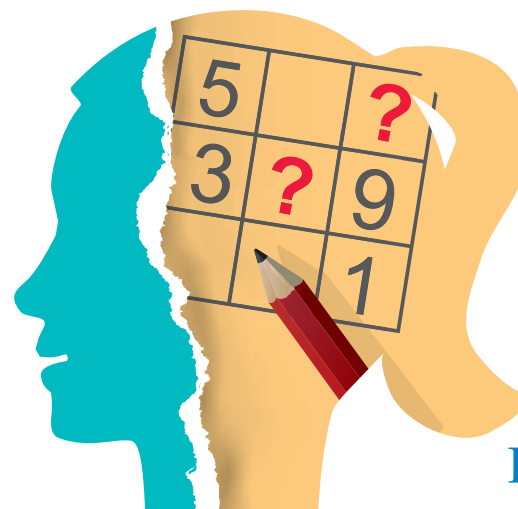
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\$5⁰⁰ for color and each additional photo
 25¢ extra per additional word

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NOTICE
 Independent Newspapers will not knowingly accept any advertisement that is illegal or considered fraudulent. In all cases of questionable value, such as promises of guaranteed income from work-at-home programs - if it sounds too good to be true, chances are that it is. If you have questions or doubts about any ad on these pages, we advise that before responding or sending money ahead of time, you check with the Better Business Bureau at 877-291-6222 for previous complaints.

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58 vendor spots, food trucks and live music.
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Residential Repair Specialist
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Handyman

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Improvement

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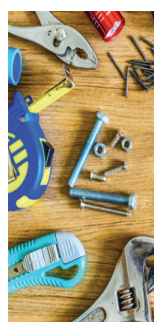
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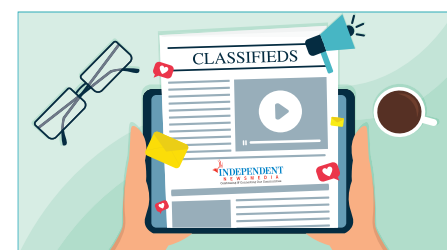
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PUZZLE ANSWERS from page 18 & 19

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S	H	I	E	S	A	H	A		C	A	R
L	I	R	A	S	S	E	N		A	R	A
C	A	F	E	S	T	O	N		N	A	N
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1	8	7	2	9	4	6	5	3
4	2	3	6	5	7	9	1	8
6	5	9	8	3	1	7	4	2
7	9	1	5	6	2	3	8	4
3	4	8	1	7	9	5	2	6
2	6	5	4	8	3	1	9	7
9	3	2	7	1	8	4	6	5
5	7	4	9	2	6	8	3	1
8	1	6	3	4	5	2	7	9

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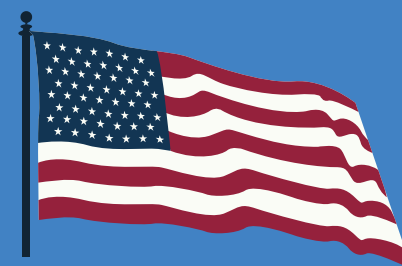
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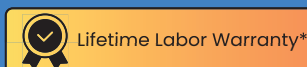
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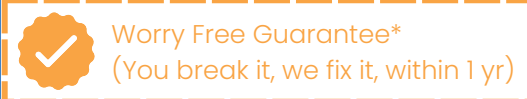


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